

Local

— SPOTLIGHT ON MENTAL HEALTH —

The Autism Spectrum

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As described by the Mayo Clinic, “Autism Spectrum Disorder is a serious neurodevelopmental disorder that impairs a child’s ability to communicate and interact with others. It also includes restricted repetitive behaviors, interests and activities.

“These issues cause significant impairment in social, occupational and other areas of functioning.”

As any parent of a child with autism will tell you, “If you have met one child with autism, you have met one child with autism.”

Autism presents in as many different ways as there are people who are affected by it. Societal understanding of people with autism has improved dramatically with the efforts of assorted groups such as Autism Speaks and the National Autism Committee to increase understanding of the disorder.

However, mere knowledge that there is a disorder and a general understanding that people with autism act in ways that differ from society’s standards does not prepare the general public to deal with those who have autism.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is now defined by the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) as a single disorder that includes disorders that were previously considered separate—autism, Asperger’s syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified.

The term “spectrum” in autism spectrum disorder refers to the wide range of symptoms and severity.

On one end of the spectrum are people who might have some milder social disabilities, some less intense behaviors, an ability to interact with others in more socially appropriate ways than others who are further toward the other end of the spectrum.

Some people with ASD are exceptionally intelligent. Many have specialized interests or skills which far outreach those of average people.

There are lists of famous people who had, or are suspected of having, a diagnosis on the autism spectrum.

At the other end of the spectrum are people who are completely non-verbal, unable to communicate without the help of assistive devices.

Some are combative.

Some are unable to live without full-time assistance, and need round the clock staff available to meet their needs.

Some families have more than one child with autism, and each child may be totally different in their needs and skills.

The stresses on the families of children with autism are immense, however many children they have.

Siblings must learn to live with their sibling’s behaviors, and the reactions of schoolmates and neighborhood kids.

Parents must spend extra time helping their child

with special needs, and obtaining the best therapies and interventions is time consuming and can be frustrating.

The entire family is involved in obtaining the help needed, and this can put severe stress on the children who don’t have special needs.

For all this, often children who have siblings with special needs are able to be accepting and loving towards their brother or sister, and can be great resources throughout their lives.

Unlike children who don’t undergo these stressors, the hardships can build strong character and teach hard lessons that others may never learn.

Parents who include their children in their routine trips into the community must prepare themselves for the reactions of others.

Most parents have experienced difficult situations with their children in public, but parents with kids on the spectrum must steel themselves for any and everything.

Just seeing a toy or desired item can be enough to send a child with autism into a state of increased autistic behaviors, including the inability to move on without the item.

Tantrums may occur, along with screaming, hitting and out of control running.

These behaviors are not the same as a two year old who is having a temper tantrum.

The reactions of others can make the situation more difficult for both parent and child.

Judgemental statements and disapproving looks are of little use when a parent is trying to help their child regain a state of self control.

The best response for a bystander is to remain quiet and, once the parent is able to hear them, ask if there is anything they can do to help.

Autism is better understood now than in previous years, but the actual cause is still unknown. Many theories exist, the majority of which have been dismissed or disproved.

There is a large contingent who believe that autism is caused by the combination vaccines that are administered typically within the child’s second or third year of life.

Others dismiss this as unscientific, and claim there is a genetic component.

Still others have thought that actions of the parent have lead to the diagnosis, or that an unidentified environmental element is the cause.

Whatever is finally determined to cause autism, the increase in diagnoses has been tremendous in the past few decades.

In the year 2000, the reported incidence of autism spectrum disorder was 1 in 150. Recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provide this information:

“About 1 in 68 children has been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) according to estimates from CDC’s Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network.



Stock Photo.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Starting last month and ending in April, *The Baker County Press* is running a six-part series on the subject of mental health, two articles per month leading up to May. Written in installments by various reporters, the series will address both well-known and lesser known mental illnesses, their symptoms, how they affect individuals and families, and methods for treatment.

ASD is reported to occur in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. ASD is about 4.5 times more common among boys (1 in 42) than among girls (1 in 189).”

Important to remember is that, while the numbers appear to be increasing dramatically (leading many to assume there is an environmental component), there is also a far more educated medical community who is now able to identify cases of autism which may have been previously undiagnosed.

This is not to say that the increase in identified cases is merely due to the better understanding within the medical field; until the actual causes of autism spectrum disorder are identified there is no way to know why so many more kids are receiving the diagnosis.

The effects of autism spectrum disorder reach beyond the immediate family.

Early Intervention programs are available to assist parents in teaching their kids with autism and preparing them for the school years.

Schools offer a variety of special education programmes tailored to meet the needs of their students who have autism.

Advocacy groups are available to help parent and teachers work together to develop the best programme for each child. Work programs exist in most regions to offer safe and protected job opportunities to some of those with special challenges.

Some community partners work with special programmes to hire employees who have autism and are capable of fulfilling their work requirements.

However, there are still many adults who have autism spectrum disorder who fall through the cracks.

Behaviors of someone who has autism may look suspicious, or even threatening if there is a situation in which they feel scared or uncomfortable.

Law enforcement is trained to recognize the signs of a person who has autism, but in the event of an escalating and dangerous situation there is a possibility that the responding officers may not be able to take the time to identify the special needs.

The same is true in the event of fire, or any dangerous situation in which a person with autism may find themselves.

The change from routine can be completely disorienting to someone who has ASD, and their normal coping skills may not be able to adjust to keep them safe.

There is the likelihood that they may “freeze” and be unable to move themselves to safety, or that they may run towards danger rather than away.

In their panic, they may also endanger first responders who are trying to help them.

There are many organizations available to help families and children who are affected by ASD.

The National Autism Association has toolkits and information available from their website for families, individuals, schoolteachers and communities.

They have a large body of research available to read free online.

Closer to home are the state organizations, such as the Autism Society of Oregon and Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities, along with many more.

Local branches of larger organizations also are available to provide information and assistance to families.

The Autism Society of Oregon has local support groups and can help access aid to families with kids on the spectrum.

Finally, some words from the mother of four adopted children who each have autism:

“To hear a little boy who, when he was first brought to us, sat in a corner and screamed while he tore the skin off his face, be able to tell me he loves me; who reminds me, 26 years later, when our adoption anniversary is coming up—that is worth it all.

“To see my beautiful daughter laughing with her siblings, snuggling with me, telling me how much she loves me (and trains!), that is worth every one of my fears.

“These kids are different, yes. Less? Oh, no. They offer us the opportunity to see our world from their perspective and, if we look with them, we can see their rainbows.”

Fender-bender becomes meth arrest

On March 16, 2017 at about 6:32 a.m. Officer Coleton Smith responded to the Baker Truck Corral for the report of a vehicle having hit a pole.

Officer Smith was able to identify the driver of the 1993 Nissan Altima as 26 year-old Jace Prowell of Baker City.

During Officer Smith’s investigation he saw drug paraphernalia in plain sight, which led to a further investigation. Ultimately Officer Smith located and seized a small amount of Methamphetamine and other drug paraphernalia.

Prowell was transported to the Baker County Jail and charged with Possession of a Controlled Substance Methamphetamine.

A subsequent search warrant of the vehicle is pending.

Assault reported up Elk Creek

On March 15, 2017 at 6:10 p.m., Baker County Consolidated Dispatch received a 911 call of a female being assaulted by a male subject off of Elk Creek Road near Hwy. 7.

The reporting person told dispatch the female appeared to be unconscious and was lying in a ditch next to Elk Creek Road.

The reporting party left the area because the male suspect came at them with a rock. A detailed description of the male suspect was given. The reporting party wanted to remain anonymous.

Oregon State Troopers, Baker City Fire Department and Baker County Sheriff’s Office Deputies responded to the area in an attempt to locate the injured female and the male suspect. The female involved in the assault was not located in the Elk Creek area but was found by Deputies in Baker City; she did not require medical attention and gave a statement about the altercation.

The male suspect was identified as James Robert Blich (46) of Baker City; he was taken into custody by a Sheriff’s Deputy for an unrelated charge at Main and Valley in Baker City. He was arrested on a Detainer that had been issued by the Baker County Parole and Probation Office and was lodged in the Baker County Jail.

The assault incident is still under investigation.

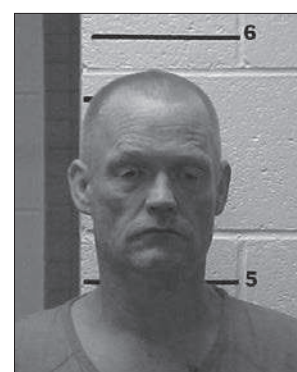


Photo Courtesy of the Baker County Sheriff’s Office. James Blich.

Shed fire causes damage

On March 15 at 7:43 p.m. Baker City Fire Department (BCFD) responded to a reported structure fire in a home located at 2135 Auburn St.

Upon arriving BCFD personnel found a small fire in a shed to the rear of the garage. Firefighters were met by the occupant Joel Davis who said he found the fire after a circuit breaker tripped. When he went outside to investigate he found the fire. Mr. Davis used a garden hose to extinguish most of the fire.

Firefighters pulled away portions of the shed to search for any hidden fire. Occupant Megan Pelcha was also home at the time of the fire. The home is owned by Trish Brinton.

Units Assigned: BCFD Engine 2431 and Command 2472; Assisting Agencies: None; Personnel Assigned: 3 Civilian Injuries: None; Civilian Deaths: None; Fire Personnel Injured: None; Fire Personnel Deaths: None; Time on scene: 45 minutes; Estimated Property Value: \$55,000 Estimated Property Lost: \$2,000; Estimated Contents Value: \$3,000; Estimated Contents Lost: \$2,000; Estimated Total Property and Contents Value Saved: \$54,000

MP306 arrest

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Oregon State Police and the Baker County Sheriff’s Department began a search of the area for the driver, who was presumed to be on foot. Thermal scanning was utilized in the dark from the freeway, around Hwy. 30 below, and with a focus on the area including the road leading to the City dump, Sutton Creek and the highway to the City Limits.

Residents of that area were advised to lock their homes and vehicles as a precautionary measure.

The driver was not located that night.

The next morning, however, residents reported seeing a solitary man who appeared cold and wet walking, possibly hitchhiking, and called Dispatch.

Arrested was the driver in the accident, James William Wallace of Bellevue, Washington, on an outstanding warrant. Wallace was also taken to St. Alphonsus Medical Center—Baker City for treatment of a lower leg injury sustained during the accident.

Strangely, the stolen truck and trailer towed from the accident caught fire in the tow yard the next day.