

TOMORROW'S VOICES

SPECIAL FEATURE

Tomorrow's Voices needs your help!

By Kyle Hunter

Keeping Tomorrow's Voices up and running is a constant battle. And even more so in these difficult economic times.

"We are always looking for funds," said Thea Furbert, the Chairwoman of the Board of Directors at the autism charity which is based at the old Sunshine League in Hamilton.

"It costs \$25,000 a month to keep Tomorrow's Voices going because everything is one on one. You can't have a therapist taking care of five children. It is all tailor made for that individual child."

Mr Furbert is the mother of Cire who was diagnosed with autism in 2000. She quickly realised an organisation that would bring about awareness in autism was needed in Bermuda and to that end she, along with Tricia Simons (Crow), founded another autism charity in February 2001.

Then in 2006 with the help of her sister Erica Smith and Mrs Simons, Ms Furbert co-founded Tomorrow's Voices — the Bermuda Autism Early Intervention Centre.

Her dream of parents having quality, direct hands-on therapy for their autistic children became a reality with the opening of Tomorrow's Voices in October 2007.

Explaining how tough it is to try and raise funds to keep Tomorrow's Voices going, Ms Furbert said: "It is a



Kuhn Bean seen with senior behaviour therapists Natasha Pedro-Petty and Emma Martin at Tomorrow's Voices.

Photo by Mark Tatem

challenge every year. We are constantly out there trying to get funds. We pay out \$25,000 a month and that is a lot. But these children need such high intensity therapy that we can't do five to one like a

typical school. It has to be one on one and we have eight children although we do consulting as well.

"Getting the money is harder and harder these days. Those donors we have had

previously go lower and lower (with their donations) each year due to the economy but it doesn't change the fact that we still have children coming in. While all our board members are volunteers, the staff

are full time." The major donor is the Lancashire Foundation which has provided funding as well as support from their staff to assist in the longevity of Tomorrow's Voices.

There are many ways

someone can help Tomorrow's Voices.

One way is becoming a member.

Tomorrow's Voices has developed an Annual Membership Programme and the \$25 membership fee will see you receive a quarterly electronic newsletter featuring Tomorrow's Voices and other educational and disability happenings in Bermuda and around the world.

In the workplace you can get your company to have a Denim Day in honour of Tomorrow's Voices. With each staff member donating \$5 to wear denim on a casual Friday, you may raise enough funds for Tomorrow's Voices to purchase a new trampoline or other items needed for the centre. And for those companies that have donor matching programmes your donated dollars will go further in helping the charity purchase much needed supplies.

A birthday donation is also appreciated.

In lieu of receiving gifts have your friends and family donate those funds to Tomorrow's Voices.

When Christmas approaches, instead of your company just having an end of year party, encourage them to add in a raffle or auction of gifts with the money going to the charity.

It is not just money that Tomorrow's Voices is looking for.

Volunteering with your time will also be appreciated.

Ms Furbert said that volunteers are the key to any

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Join Tomorrow's Voices Bermuda Autism Early Intervention Centre as we celebrate Autism Awareness Month this APRIL 2014.

AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

"Royal Gazette Special Feature" – Featuring our services, staff and accomplishments in the field of Autism and our ramp up to celebrate Autism Awareness Month throughout April. Royal Gazette Newspaper | March 27th, 2014

11 APRIL "Open House" at Tomorrow's Voices Autism Centre – Visit the Centre and meet our Staff. Find out what we do and why we do it! See how the therapies we use (ABA and Verbal Behavior) are changing lives for those touched by autism and developmental disabilities in our community. 10AM - 12 NOON & 1 - 4PM

12 APRIL "Saturday Social Skills Group Gives Back to the Community" – Come join in as our clients and their typically developing peers show their thanks by giving back to the community. This giving day will involve delivering their specially made Easter baskets to the elderly. Drop off your child and enjoy a half-day of respite. Volunteer your time and see how you can benefit our children with special abilities and change their lives! 9AM - 1PM | \$35

16 APRIL "Tomorrow's Voices Training Institute Workshop" – "Autism Globally - How Does Bermuda Measure Up?". During this workshop we will compare and discuss our services versus others provided in other parts of the world. Participants will receive Professional Development Certificates. Email: info@tomorrowvoices.bm to Register. 6 - 8PM | \$25

17 APRIL "Autism Rocks Socks" Charity Fundraiser – Have fun while showing support for our Charity. Companies and Schools are invited to participate in our unique fundraiser by wearing crazy, fun socks on this day and donating \$5 to Tomorrow's Voices. Email: info@tomorrowvoices.bm and Register to participate.

25 APRIL "Autism Tags It!" Tomorrow's Voices Tag Day – Help support our first Tag Day to raise essential funds for our centre. Volunteers will be stationed outside businesses in the City of Hamilton to distribute ribbons to passersby and help to raise funds toward our unique Autism Charity.

26 APRIL "Get Puzzled Car Rally Scavenger Hunt" Fundraiser – Join the DATs as they host the best Car Rally Scavenger Hunt "EVER" to raise funds for our Centre. Get your team together to seek out clues, learn about Autism, and have a great night of fun! 6:30PM | Starts from City Hall Car Park | \$15 per person. To enter your team or for further information email: dayaftertomorrow.tv@gmail.com

30 APRIL "Autism Awareness Month Ends On East Broadway" – Join us on East Broadway as we display our Autism Signs and Puzzle Pieces and remind the community that it may be the end of Autism Awareness Month but it's not the end of Autism. 8AM | East Broadway

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE ABOVE EVENTS Visit www.tomorrowvoices.bm Email info@tomorrowvoices.bm Call (441) 297-4342 | Fax (441) 297-2342 www.tomorrowvoices.bm

EVENTS

For some autistic children there is no 'off button'

By Kyle Hunter

He looks like any other seven-year-old. But while your average seven-year-old may dash out into the street chasing a football, Kuhn Bean can easily just run out in front of a car . . . for absolutely no reason at all.

In a word it is "frightening". "He doesn't recognise danger at all," said Emma Martin, a senior verbal behaviour therapist at Tomorrow's Voices where Kuhn goes during the day.

"His behaviour is challenging. He will bolt right into the middle of the road for no reason," she said while watching Kuhn play in the secure area outside of Tomorrow's Voices off King Street in Hamilton.

Kuhn attends Tomorrow's Voices three to four days a week and has been at the autism centre for about three years.

"When he first came to us he was non vocal," said fellow senior verbal behaviour therapist Natasha Pedro-Petty adding that he has improved a lot since first arriving at Tomorrow's Voices. "Now he is an emerging speaker," she said.

Kuhn had child seizures after he born and then had brain surgery. "It was life or death," said Ms Pedro-Petty adding, "some parents learn that their children are autistic early on and others start to see it when they begin to miss those milestones that parents look for."

She said: "Kuhn never cried and that is when his mum realised something was wrong. When he was in pain he didn't cry. His pain tolerance is so high. He fell off a balcony once and so you have to be constantly watching him."

While Ms Pedro-Petty was speaking, Kuhn was playing on the slide they have outside of Tomorrow's Voices and both therapists were keeping a close eye on him while he played. The gates to the small playground are tied up securely so he can't get out. "He would if he could and just bolt," said Ms Martin adding, "his mum and dad never got a break. He is full on. There is no off button with him."

Kuhn's sister is 12-years-old and Ms



Kuhn Bean and senior behaviour therapist Natasha Pedro-Petty.

Photo by Mark Tatem

Martin said: "Something has also been taken away from her childhood as she has to help out. It is tough for her. His aunt takes care of him sometimes and I think he is well known in the community. When we go out with him people in his community know him."

Even a visit to the Botanical Gardens can be challenging. "He likes to pull up the plants so we have to stop that. You have to be on him the whole time. There is no break."

"Once we went to feed the fish and he would have just jumped in (if they had not been with him)."

When he is walking with therapists they have to be on either side of him to stop him just running into traffic for no reason.

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Autism in the community: Think before you judge

By Kyle Hunter

When you are at the grocery store and see a child suddenly go into a wild tantrum, stop for a second and think about it. You may initially believe the child is just undisciplined and badly behaved. But it could be that the child is autistic.

Senior verbal behaviour therapist at Tomorrow's Voices, Natasha Pedro-Petty, said the public must try and have some understanding for what a parent of an autistic child has to deal with.

"First off I would recommend that the public recognise that the child has a disability. But with autism it can be more difficult to see that than perhaps with a child who has Down's syndrome which is physically obvious. You can actually see that but with autism the child will look like a typical child . . . but with behaviour problems.

"They can be very vocal and their behaviour can be inappropriate. Just because a child doesn't look different to other children doesn't mean that child isn't different."

And when that child does start "acting up" the public should realise that he is not just "a naughty child".

Ms Pedro-Petty said: "We have had parents that when their child is having problems in a store, someone standing behind them says 'you need to discipline that child. He needs a smack'. That is embarrassing for the parent. We try and give parents credit for taking their autistic children out into public but then they can get a backlash from the community. Sometimes when they have caught the bus with their child people just move away. Then again there are some other people out there who are amazing.

"I really want the public to take just a second and realise



Photo by Mark Tatem

Cire Furbert-Lambert works out at the Athletic Club watched by Sherina Dickinson (junior verbal behaviour therapist) and Julie Mielzynski (verbal behaviour therapist).

that maybe there is something not quite right with that child. Often we will be out with a child doing something and the child will have a tantrum and we have to try to ignore it.

"We have had people come up and take pictures of him having a tantrum and try and take videos of problem behaviours."

Then there are others who will come up to Ms Pedro-Petty and fellow senior verbal behaviour therapist Emma Martin and ask questions.

"Some people come up and ask what is going on. It is awareness that is needed. Ask questions without being judgemental. Don't be afraid to ask questions before you assume he is just a naughty child. Try and be compassionate."

Ms Pedro-Petty who has a Master's degree in Special and Inclusive Education, said that she knew a woman with an autistic child in England who handed out cards to the public when her child had

a tantrum. "She had cards printed up and when her child engaged in a problem behaviour she would just hand out the cards to those around her explaining that her child had autism and she was doing the best she could.

"People do not realise how intense it can be. It is human nature to say 'what is going on' and it is human nature to judge. But take a second and think about it."

Fellow senior verbal behaviour therapist at Tomorrow's Voices, Emma Martin, said the autism centre has an open-door policy for those who want to learn about autism.

"We want everyone to see what autism is. We don't want to hide it. Families need more support from the community," said Ms Martin who has a Master's degree in Education with a concentration in high-incidence disabilities.

Ms Pedro-Petty said: "It is hard for families. You have this idea that you are going to have a child, they are going to

go to school and it is all going to be great.

"Most parents get something back from their children but with parents of children with autism they often don't get anything back. The good grades and 'mommy guess what I did at school today?' is not there. The parents are already struggling with this diagnosis and then they take their child out into the community and they get judged even more. It is another cross for them to bear."

Ms Martin said if you have a friend or relative who has an autistic child, try and learn about autism and then help out when you can.

"Just offer to go and take care of that child for an hour or so but also come in and see us train. Watch us so you can give your sister or brother or friend a little while off. Many of these parents don't get a lot of support.

"In a typical home a mom may put their child down in front of the TV while she gets

dinner ready. You can't do that with an autistic child . . . especially with a low functioning autistic child."

Ms Pedro-Petty explained that in a home with an autistic child there are many protections around. "Some parents never take down those baby gates. All the doors are locked as are the closets and cupboards. One child I know just likes to tear up money. You have to be so careful of what you leave around."

Some autistic people in the higher functioning spectrum can go out into the community. "Some can be grocery packers. Some function better than others," said Ms Pedro-Petty.

One of the main things both therapists want to achieve is to have autistic children be happy.

"They have missed so many early skills," said Ms Martin. "They don't get joy from the world. That is one of the things we are trying to get them to do."



Co-founder of Tomorrow's Voices Thea Furbert.

'This is for life'

By Kyle Hunter

When a parent discovers that their child is autistic the challenges can

seem immense. And they are. But one aspect which preys on their minds is that there is no cure. Yes the child can improve but as co-founder of Tomorrow's Voices, Thea Furbert, says: "You have to realise that this is for life."

Ms Furbert is the mother of 16-year-old Cire who is autistic and said that she was fortunate in that she had the help of her sister, parents and others who will help watch her son. Others are not so fortunate.

"You are always worried if there are people who can come into your life and assist you. I know some parents don't have a lot of help. A lot of people with an autistic child cannot go places, they cannot go on vacation. I am fortunate in that I do have family and friends who help but many parents don't. I have a support system. And you can't have a (regular) babysitter like most parents. You need someone who understands the challenges of an autistic child.

"Parents need a break just to go shopping or even go to a movie. It is a challenge by itself to go grocery shopping with Cire. If he is with me he can act out. I have got people who look strangely at me and my son but I just go on and do what I have to do. I can't react to them. I try and treat

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There is no 'off button'

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But they have seen improvement over the years. "When he came to us he didn't do anything. I have seen a lot of improvement," said Ms Pedro-Petty.

Another child who is low functioning like Kuhn is Cire Furbert-Lambert, the 16-year-old son of Tomorrow's Voices co-founder Thea Furbert.

Ms Pedro-Petty said every Friday, Cire goes to the Athletic Club to work out. "But he has to go with two therapists because like Kuhn he has a tendency to bolt (into traffic). He has no awareness of the danger and he has bolted into the road before. Luckily there was a red light and people were slowing down but if there had not been a red light people would have hit him. He has to walk with two people on either side



Photo by Mark Tatem

Kuhn Bean and senior behaviour therapist Emma Martin.

of him to prevent that." Praising the Athletic Club, she said: "They have been great as well as the people working out around him because he can make a lot of noise sometimes. But it is a good way to show the public what autism is."

Cire has a token board and every time he completes a set of exercises he gets a token for the board. When he gets to 10 tokens he can go to the nearby City Cafe and get a smoothie. "They are great to him as well," said the therapist.

'The future is a worry for me'

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him as normal as possible. He is a child, he is my child and I love him to death. But he has the mentality of a three or four year old."

And it is the future which really worries Ms Furbert. "This is for life and the future is a worry for me. He comes to Tomorrow's Voices most of the time but what is in his future? I always have to worry about what is the next step. I have to create that next step. It is very diffi-

cult for a parent because they are always thinking about what is going to happen to their children. I worry about what if I am not here. I have family that helps a great deal but they will be as old or older than me. Parents also have to think 'will their siblings want to be challenged to take care of the child?' It is very much a worry."

Senior verbal behaviour therapist at Tomorrow's Voices, Natasha Pedro-Petty, said the worry about what will

happen to an autistic child when the parents die is very real. She said: "Not knowing what is going to happen to your child when you pass away has got to be so scary for parents. Will the burden fall to their brother or sister? They may have their own family and that is why we in Bermuda need to expand the services for (autistic) adults."

Ms Pedro-Petty said that a residential home for autistic adults with the proper staff was needed.

Funds, volunteers always needed

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non-for-profit organisation and it is no different at Tomorrow's Voices.

Here is what they are looking for:

Lunch Time Volunteers
11.30am to 1.30pm, Monday to Friday. Volunteers will assist with supervising clients during lunch. This would include helping with lunch duties, outside activities and indoor activities which include reading, puzzles or anything to keep clients entertained during the lunch hour.

Weekly Volunteers
Any hours between 9am to 4.30pm. Volunteers who have flexibility in their weekly schedule can come to assist with a variety of in-centre duties. Volunteers can assist with cleaning of the toys, organising toy shelves and book shelves, helping with admin-

istrative duties (filing, copying, etc) and other in-centre jobs that will assist with the centre running smoothly.

Saturday Social Skills Volunteers

9am to 1pm (second and fourth Saturday of each month.) Volunteers can assist with the Saturday Social Skills Group.

Give Resources
If you are looking to donate resources these are some of the things the charity needs:

- Large trampoline
- Outdoor play/swing set
- Outdoor playground safety padding
- Laptops
- Copier paper (letter size)
- White dry eraser boards (letter size or legal size) and dry erase markers
- Play dough
- Washable paints (all colours)
- Outdoor basketball set with basketballs

- Five-inch three ring binders
- Children's educational CDs and DVDs

Contact Information:
Tomorrow's Voices — Bermuda Autism Early Intervention Centre (Registered Charity #816)
Address: 27 King Street, Hamilton HM19
Telephone: 441-297-4342
Fax: 441-297-2342
E-mail: info@tomorrowsvoices.bm

April is Autism Awareness Month

By Kyle Hunter

Bermuda's Autism Early Intervention Centre, Tomorrow's Voices, has a host of fundraising activities planned in April.

April 11: There will be an "Open House" at Tomorrow's Voices. Take the chance to visit the centre at 27 King Street, Hamilton and meet the staff. Find out what they do and why they do it! See how the therapies they use (ABA and Verbal Behaviour Therapy) are changing lives for those touched by developmental disabilities in the community. 10am — 12 noon and 1pm — 4pm.

April 12: The "Saturday Social Skills Group Gives Back to the Community" will be staged. Come join in as clients and their typically developing peers show their thanks by giving back to the community. This giving day will involve delivering their specially made Easter baskets to the elderly. Drop off your child and enjoy a half-day of respite. Volunteer your time and see how you can benefit children with

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