

AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

Focus on 'The Eyes'

April is Autism Awareness Month and recent research shows that the number of school age children diagnosed as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has increased by 67% in NI.

But did you know that specialist eye tests can help? We found out more from local Optometrist, Noel McCrystal from Dungannon, Mid Ulster's leading specialist in visual treatments for those on the Autism spectrum, Asperger's and Dyslexia.

Why are early eye tests so important?

Often difficulties at school can become evident. Research shows that 80% of all learning is visual for children until they are about 12 years old. Critical eye to brain connections are developed in the first eight years of life; correcting visual problems early means greater improvement in visual clarity throughout life. Sometimes children with undiagnosed eye problems are mistakenly put into special needs classes, which can delay their learning.

What are the common visual symptoms and problems for those on the Autism spectrum?

Visual stress caused by word movement or distortion is often a key problem, making reading, writing and comprehension more difficult. Text can swirl, reverse, bleach out or shimmer on the page, causing eyestrain,



headaches, as well as lack of concentration and restlessness. The other main group of problems suffered by such individuals quite commonly include 'facial blindness' (Prosopagnosia) and 'facial distortions' (Prosopometamorphopsia), which is why perceiving other people's emotions in conversation/interactions becomes difficult and is often the reason why they don't look directly at faces, preferring to look away. In addition, issues of one's own (and others) personal space can be an issue, which again is visual and can be helped through the eyes.

What are the best treatments available?

The 'Schoolvision' programme addresses muscular anomalies both in and around the outside of the eyeball and can offer substantial improvements in developing the 'up-close world' for a great number of individuals, helping them to gravitate towards sketching, drawing, writing and eventually reading, as an improved letter and word 'bank' starts to grow in the brain.

The use of specialised coloured lenses through the Orthoscopes system can be very effective, with or without prescription. Orthoscopes is particularly useful for facial recognition issues, helping patients to 'read' facial expressions and hence emotions more effectively. A specialist optician will take the time to address each symptom in turn and offer the latest bespoke solutions.

Noel McCrystal is one of the few practitioners in the UK and Ireland to offer the acclaimed Orthoscopes system and the Schoolvision Programme. Noel is currently shortlisted for the prestigious Optometrist of the Year Award in the national UK Optician Awards 2015. www.mccrystalopticians.com



WATCH DARINA'S STORY: Visit YouTube – McCrystal Opticians

Local mum, Brenda Reid explains how a visit to McCrystal Opticians in Dungannon made a life-changing difference to her daughter, Darina after a recent ASD diagnosis.

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