

A large, stylized black letter 'A' with a decorative flourish on the left. To the right of the 'A' are five yellow stars of increasing size, arranged in a slight upward curve. Below the 'A' and stars is the text 'A-Stars' in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

A-Stars

10TH ANNIVERSARY

PERSONAL STORIES FROM OUR
PREVIOUS AND CURRENT
FAMILIES



This year at A-Stars we are celebrating our 10th Anniversary. The club was first founded in 2005, with just six families via funding from the 'Barclays New Futures' project. When the funding came to an end parents decided to volunteer to keep the club going, hence in January 2006 A-Stars was established in its own right.

To celebrate, past and present members have shared their memories of how A-Stars has helped them. Each story is presented here anonymously.

Story: I

Hi, it has been a while since we were part of A-Stars and it was nice to sit down and think about the time my son and I came along on a Saturday morning. I am glad the group is still going strong and supporting many more families.

My son is now 20 years of age and since leaving Westfield in Weymouth at 16 he spent 3 years at Farleigh Further Education college in Frome (a specialist Asperger college) where he was supported in a local agricultural college to

complete a level 3 diploma in animal management alongside learning many skills towards independent living. He now undertakes volunteer work once a week.

A-Stars was a huge support to us over the few years we attended as it allowed me to talk to other parents with similar issues to me, supported me with useful advice and gave me confidence at times when I was feeling quite alone. My son was able to be in a non-judgemental environment where he felt comfortable. We really enjoyed the trips out to London and the more local area too. I have recommended the club to many others since we left and hope they have gone along and have benefitted from it too.

Story: 2 :

A-Stars was very useful to us, my son is now a mechanics apprentice with a small garage that does mainly old cars he loves it, and his boss is fantastic with him. It has been the making of him.

A-Stars made life better for him.

Story: 3 :

I started coming to A Stars almost from the beginning I think. It was my lifesaver - to be with other parents and their children who were struggling as I was. I learned lots about Asperger's within the group. I was able to relax and not worry about how my daughter and I were doing for one morning a week. I was also able to relax in the fact that we were all different to the mainstream. We didn't have to be achieving this, that or the other. I also learned of the various resources that I could tap into. I felt very supported by A Stars.

My daughter is remarkable. She finished at Thomas Hardye School and went onto Bournemouth University for one year - a foundation course in photography. She did very well on the course. She then went to South East Asia for 4 months with a girlfriend. On coming home she got herself 3 jobs within 10 days and is now saving hard to go back to Asia at Christmas. She's going onto Brighton University to do her photography degree.

She was always very motivated to be sociable. She has had to learn how to relate to people, be in relationships. Thomas Hardye school was a good place for her. It is a huge school and whilst she could have felt intimidated by the size, it actually worked in her favour because there was such a vast number of people to find a friendship group to be part of. All the kids in the group were able to

accept Aspergers without any problem. One of the things that I admire about her is that she is able to openly acknowledge her disability. In the old days, she wanted to hide it from other people.

Story: 4 :

My daughter is a paralegal, she works full time for solicitors. She is currently living at home but really wants to move to London or Southampton as she is becoming a very well known photographer. She is invited to photograph bands etc and was recently named one of the three photographers in the UK in a list of 35 top band photographers on Instagram.....she is desperate to make this her career.

My son now has a degree in Pre Historic and Roman Archaeology and is living independently on his own in a lovely one bed house. He currently works in the kitchen at a nursing home as he decided not to pursue a career in archaeology so is still trying to work out which direction he wants to go in. The main thing is he is happy and financially independent! Who would have thought!

Both my children have done well despite their disability.

Story: 5

A-Stars was a fantastic resource and experience for us as a family but also especially me. I coped with the possibility of Aspergers but fell apart when it was confirmed. We were then told that we were on our own because there were no services. That was a huge shock. I had so much anxiety about my son and what his future would be but found a lot of information on line so depressing and also he wasn't severe which seemed to put us more in limbo.

Being told about A Stars was the best thing to happen to us at that time. Walking in on the first time it was great to see that everyone was "normal". Both of my children loved it and all the different activities. For me it was like an open warm hug. Everyone understood what we were going through and showed me that we would be fine. To have that support network was such a relief.

The time we spent at A Stars was so beneficial and in fact was probably the hardest thing to leave behind when we moved.

Today we are lucky that we are living in an area (and country) with fantastic resources and services for ASD. My son has had OT, physio and hydrotherapy. The

Psychologists offer a drop in clinic but also you can self refer when you need support. His school are amazing and are already planning ahead for secondary school. He will get a laptop for schoolwork and exams. He has one on one time with a special needs teacher a couple of times a week and also can use the sensory room at school. His teachers communicate with us all the time and he is thriving.

Congratulations to A-Stars on 10 years and good luck for the future.

Story: 6

I have been at A-Stars since it began in 2005. It has always been a place of total acceptance and non-judgement for me, which is why I have felt so at home there. As I grown I have had the opportunity to provide this same environment for younger individuals which has been a true privilege. Therefore, A Stars has always been a vital part of my life.

Story: 7

A-Stars means such a lot to me and I have been coming for the whole ten years. It's important because I have made so many friends there and have lots of fun memories. I now volunteer there and I enjoy helping outside with the football. For me A Stars is the best club in the world!

Story: 8

I am so thankful that my son and my family found out about Astars. It has been the highlight of my sons week for the last few years.

It is somewhere to go for support and advice from other parents for me. It is also somewhere to make friends and play with kids that understand both for me and my son.

There are always interesting arts and crafts going on, or football, or playstations to play on... And lots of indoor and out door toys to choose from too.

Throughout the year there are various days out organised, and you can choose to take part in as little or much as you want.. There is never any pressure to join in if you don't want to.

We really enjoy being part of the A-Stars " family "

Story: 9

Our Son was diagnosed with Autism in March 2013, we knew about A-Stars before he was diagnosed. At first we were reluctant to join, mainly because we didn't want to admit to ourselves that our son was different. We had been having so much trouble with his school, mainly because they thought they were the "professionals" and knew better than his parents, when actually it was proved they knew very little about how to handle children with a diagnosis of ASD.

We joined A-Stars in January 2014, and have never looked back. Everyone was so welcoming; our son loved it from the first Saturday and couldn't wait to go back the following week. The activities are brilliant, every week there is different craft activity, our son sometimes chooses to take part depending on what it is, often it's a cookery activity, which he loves. The staff running the activities are staff from the Aspergers Base, they are all so good with the children, encouraging and helping them. They are also happy to talk through any problems or concerns you have and point you in the right direction to get help or advice. As well as craft activities, there is Lego, train sets, a Wii, Playstation and numerous IPADs. Outside there are scooters, outdoor games, and the astro

turf if not in use. Once a term we have a Fish and Chip lunch for the very reasonable price of just £1.00.

Whilst the children are having fun there is a coffee room for the parents. We have become regulars and made many friends, its great to sit down have a coffee and a laugh, talk about any problem you are experiencing, often someone has been through a similar situation and can offer advice, or just listen and understand what you are going through. Through A Stars, we have forged links with other organisations such as Cerebra, SENDIAS etc.

A Stars has a very reasonable monthly subscription fee for members just £5.00 per month, this is great value for money as all trips and events are heavily subsidised, and as a member we have a vote at the steering committee meetings and are able to make suggestions for future trips. We haven't been able to make it on all trips, but those we have, we have thoroughly enjoyed, although travel on trips is by your own transport and once we arrive we meet up at the entrance to an attraction, but go our separate ways it's reassuring to know that there is someone nearby, who would understand if you had a problem and you could call on if needed. Trips we have enjoyed through A Stars have been: Paignton Zoo, Paulton's Park, Swimming at Bridport, Monkey World. The next trip we have coming up is a trip on the Santa Special on Swanage Railway.

For the past two years A Stars has entered an Adult Team in the Dragon Boat Racing event at Sherborne Country Fair, and had respectable final placing both years. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed it and we are entering a team next year. Other memorable events include the annual BBQ, where everyone brings a dish and we sit outside in the sunshine (hopefully!) and have a great time while the kids play games, last year there was an Adult V Children Football match. An annual Christmas party held at Sharkeys is great fun with the chance for the children to have a go in the Laser Quest and racing car track, as well as a meal for children the adults are treated to either a delicious Curry or Chilli Con Carne.

Adults get together and have a night out on an occasional basis, it's great to go out and have a laugh and leave the stresses at home.

A Stars really has been a godsend for us, I know our son looks forward to every Saturday, and actually so do we, whether we take our son as a couple or individually. Huge thanks go to the post holders on the Committee, who do so much work behind the scenes to make A Stars what it is.

A-Stars celebrates its 10th Birthday in January 2016, Happy Birthday A-Stars and may you have many more years as a successful happy place.

Story: 10

It took 18 months to get my son to even consider popping along for a peep to see what goes on then he met a boy who was already there and he spoke to him. A-Stars is now an established part of our routine and we haven't looked back. I'm so pleased myself too, to be able to offer my time and support administratively to the group as it is entirely parent-led. This means we all have the opportunity to vote on how the group is run – which is ideal.

From my son's point of view he's amongst others who accept him for who he is without the name tags! It's the only place he will join in with a game of football. He is completely himself at A-Stars, and although it's not always appropriate behaviour we are always able to work through difficulties on the rare occasions they occur. So for two hours a week he's out of the house, having fun with friends and no anxiety.

From our grown up view we're amongst extremely supportive, non judgemental parents. We have been out to

places as a group and take part in activities that we could never have contemplated as a family let alone get my son beyond the front door for.

Hearing guest speakers that you just wouldn't have access to without A Stars is another invaluable part of being an A-Stars member.

Story: II

WHAT A-STARs MEANS TO US:

A – A realisation that we are not alone

S – Support that is always there

T – Terrific friends that we have all made

A – Achievement – sharing successes with the group

R – Resources that are always available via the library

S – Solutions and advice from others who have experience and knowledge
