Why GCA Centre for Adult Autism? A breakdown…

GCA – shortened from Greater Chattanooga Aspies. I wanted to keep the GCA brand intact. Other people felt that GCA should be removed from the new name. The precedent on keeping GCA is based off of AARP, formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons. In the 1980s and 1990s, people all over the United States knew of the organization as the American Association of Retired Persons. The organization shorted its name to AARP. That is how people remember the organization – as AARP, not as the American Association of Retired Person. Likewise, I chose to shorten the name of Greater Chattanooga Aspies to GCA. Many people refer to Greater Chattanooga Aspies as GCA, anyway.

Centre – When I sat down with David Ash, executive director of the Community Foundation of Northwest Georgia, the first question he asked me was this. “Who or what is GCA? I know from what you said about your organization that it is GCA. But, a lot of people may not know from looking at Greater Chattanooga Aspies what your organization does. You are a ‘center of information, a center of resources’. People come to your support group meetings, contact you for information, and more. People need to know you are a ‘center of information or resources’”. His logic made complete sense to me.

The use of the word “centre” as opposed to “center” comes from individuals with autism. One of the most common traits of these individuals is their quirky nature, which can be seen by other people as “being odd”. While “center” is the Americanized version of the name, the use of “centre” in this part of the United States is seen as “odd” since the –re ending is rarely used. Given that, the –re ending fits in well with the new GCA name.

For – According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/for), the word “for” means “used to indicate the person or thing that something is sent or given to”. In GCA’s case, this means that GCA Centre’s purpose is being focused on adults who live with autism (or adult autism).

Adult – The focus on GCA has been on adults from its founding in 2010 (young adults came later). GCA Centre for Adult Autism is happy to collaborate with other autism/disability organizations that involve children who live with autism or a disability. However, GCA’s focus has been and will continue to always be on adults, not children.

Autism – As the founder of Greater Chattanooga Aspies (and now, GCA Centre for Adult Autism), I am an adult who lives with autism and have classic autism. I did not speak until I was four years old. The profound influence of growing up during the “dark ages” of autism (when no services were available to diagnose autism) in the late 1960s to mid 1980s of my childhood was huge. I graduated in the bottom half of my high school graduation class with a traditional diploma. I changed college majors seven times before dropping out of the first university the second time and never going back there. I fell through the “cracks of society” many times. When my mom wanted to know why I was “different” than a lot of other children, doctors and other specialists told her that I was “mentally retarded” (otherwise known as having an intellectual disability), “mentally slow”, or had cerebral palsy. Nothing to do with autism.

Southeast USA – GCA got its start in Chattanooga, Tennessee. This is considered part of the Southeast states of the USA. Also, another reason why GCA goes by Southeast USA is that Scott does most of his adult advocacy work in the Southeastern states (mostly Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama – but other states as well).