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## First ever treatment for face-blindness set to transform lives of thousands on autistic spectrum and beyond

A pioneering optician in Scotland has developed the first treatment anywhere in the world for prosopagnosia – also known as face-blindness.



Ian Jordan, from the opticians “Jordans” in Ayr, specialises in visual perception and discovered the method quite by accident whilst treating someone for another sensory processing condition.

Prosopagnosia affects about 2.5% of the population and is characterised by an impaired ability to recognize faces.

The condition usually affects people from birth (developmental prosopagnosia) – it is particularly common amongst those on the autistic spectrum, where over half are affected. It can also occur after brain trauma, for example after a stroke.

For those with prosopagnosia, it has been established that their visual perception pathways have either been damaged or have not developed fully. This means that some of the information the brain requires to make sense of what the eyes are seeing is missing or distorted, which is highly distressing for those affected and has a very negative impact on the lives of children with the condition.

The new treatment developed by Jordan uses a specialised lighting system with a range of 16 million different colours to change the affected person’s ability to process what they see. Looking at the world with certain colours filtered out and other colours enhanced makes it possible for the brain to receive all the information it needs in order to distinguish one face from another.

Once a colour has been found which enables the affected person to see normally, Jordan is then able to prescribe tailor-made lenses in this colour to suit the needs of each individual. Worn every day, these build up the pathway that isn’t working properly, and enable the face-blind person to see just like everyone else.

Speaking about the treatment he has developed, Ian Jordan, said:

“This treatment is a real breakthrough and will be life-changing for those with prosopagnosia because, up until now, there hasn’t been any way to treat it – just techniques and strategies to deal with the consequences.

“Some people are able to piece together a person’s identity by recognising the way they walk, or the sound of their voice, but the prospect of meeting and having to identify new people, either socially, at work or at school, can be very distressing – particularly so for those on the autistic spectrum.

“We manage a lot of different visual and sensory perception and integration problems in practice, from vision causing problems with speech and processing what is heard, to problems with hand / eye coordination, and can literally change lives in many special needs such as cerebral palsy, autistic spectrum disorders, dyspraxia and dyslexia. We are a last resort to many people – and it is rare that we cannot help.”

Isabelle Thorald, who has benefited from the treatment, said:

“Going to see Ian and getting my glasses has been one of the best things I’ve ever done. They’ve made such a difference, as I don’t get into difficulties identifying people or interpreting their expressions anymore.

“Without the glasses, people look quite scary to me because their faces are distorted. I can only see one feature at a time, so if I focus on someone’s eye, for example, their other eye looks like it’s up where their eyebrow should be and, although I can see their mouth, it’s wider on one side, and they look a bit like the Joker from Batman. So everyone looks quite menacing, and it’s difficult to read people’s expressions because all their features are twisted up.

“When I put the glasses on though, everything looks a hundred times better. I know people joke about the world looking better through rose-tinted spectacles, but it’s actually kind of true. I can see a whole face at once when I put my glasses on, all the features are in the right place and other things, like how people’s lips move out of time from the words they’re saying when I’m not wearing the glasses, all become synchronised when I put them on. Even my relationships with friends have improved since I got them and life is just so much easier and more enjoyable now.”