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**Shine Ireland Launches Social Skills for Autism App with the support of Bon Secours Hospital Cork**

***New App Designed To Teach Social Skills to Children & Adolescents with Autism***

Laura Crowley Director of Educational Support Services with Shine, Harry Canning GM Bon Secours Hospital, Ryan O'Brien as The Alien Kloog, Andrew McCarthy Mission Leader Bon Secours Hospital and Denis Collins CEO of Smarter Dynamics

*Under its Community Initiative Fund, Bon Secours Hospital Cork is delighted to announce that a partnershipwhich began one year previously with SHINE, the Autism Charity who work out of Carraigaline, has come to fruition with the official launch of their Social Skills App.*

*With the support of Bon Secours Hospital Cork, under its Community Initiative Fund, in partnership with IT @ Cork, SHINE have taken a classroom based social skills program for children on the spectrum, to an online platform, making it accessible to families all over the English speaking world.*

*“It shows remarkable innovation by a small Cork based charity, and we are delighted to have been part of their journey, supporting them with expertise and funding”, commented Andrew McCarthy, Mission Leader, Bon Secours Hospital Cork.*

Autism is a bio-neurological developmental disability with the latest research from the Centre for Disease Control in the US showing that autism can now affect 1 in 68 births. Autism impacts the normal development of the brain in the areas of social interaction, communication skills, and cognitive function. The SHINE Centre for Autism in Ireland today launched a new app designed to teach children and adolescents with autism the skills necessary for social situations.

The Social Skills for Autism app is designed to teach children, adolescents, teenagers and young people with autism the social skills they need to operate effectively and comfortably in social situations.

“Children and adolescents with Autism often find social situations very difficult. There are so many social rules that are not instinctive to people with autism, which means that they have to work at learning these rules. This can be confusing and cause anxiety as many social rules are unwritten and not spoken about,” said Laura Crowley, Director of Education at SHINE Ireland.

“The Social Skills for Autism App is based on our PALS Programme (Personal and Life Skills Programme) which has been running successfully since 2010. The PALS programme takes a holistic approach to social skill advancement and includes self-esteem, anxiety management, pragmatic language skills as well as emotional recognition and management and life skills,” she added.

At the start of the app the user will meet Kloog, an Alien from another planet who does not understand social customs or social situations. The user will go on a journey through the social world with Kloog, learning about social rules and customs along the way.

The Social Skills for Autism app also tries to address the nuances in communication and social interaction by introducing the concepts of context sensitivity, social consequences and emotional recognition into social situations and moves away from the stock answer or standard response in specific social situations**.**

“There are a series of fun quizzes built into the app to test concept comprehension and there is restricted progress through the app until the user reaches the required level of understanding. These ‘evaluations of understanding’ are key in ensuring that progress is based on increased competencies in each area of the app,” continued Ms Crowley.

The Smarter Senses Project at SHINE Ireland has been driving the inclusion of technology in programmes for autism since 2010, enabling children to learn, develop and communicate more effectively.

 “The Smarter Senses Project allows the core SHINE values, programs & techniques to continue to raise the bar through innovative tuition, modern techniques and digital tools; all with the simple goal of enhanced empowerment for children,” said EoinMotherway, Director, SHINE Centre for Autism.

Denis Collins, Chair of Smarter Senses Committee at SHINE Ireland commented: "The Smarter Senses vision is delivering a comprehensive model for autism that is growing into a broader platform for thought leadership and broader opportunities. We are building a vision with unique collaboration across industry, academia, government and public sector. This is a very powerful model when executed correctly, we're making a significant difference in the lives of children with autism, and the families who need it the most.”

Bon Secours Hospital Cork funded the development of the SHINE Social Skills App as part of the hospital’s Community Initiative Outreach Programme.

Commenting at the launch Harry Canning, Hospital Manager, Bon Secours Hospital Cork said: “I am delighted for Bon Secours Hospital Cork to be associated with bringing the PALS app to fruition. It ticks a lot of boxes for the hospital as a Community Initiative Project; it provides a key support to children with Autism, and their families, locally, nationally and internationally.  SHINE are a fantastic example of the type of innovation that’s needed in the Charity Sector, and in partnership with other local organisations, we are proud to help support and develop that spirit of innovation.”

The Social Skills for Autism App retails for €4.99 and is now available on iTunes and the Google Play Store. The app was developed by Cork Company Doodle Creative.

For more information visit [www.kloogsocialskills.com](http://www.kloogsocialskills.com/)