



KASPAR the Robot - on TRACK, with the BBC Breakfast Team and CBBC's Newsround.

KASPAR, the amazing and lifelike child robot, is featured as part of a **BBC** initiative, which, during the course of five programmes, each focussing on social robotics, will explore some of the ways technology is supporting and changing the lives of those humans who may need a little extra help from these sophisticated **almost** human devices.

The **CBBC's** team will report on how *KASPAR* is helping enhance learning, communication and social understanding of emotions, in pre- school children who have **Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)**.

They follow *KASPAR* as he interacts with children who are lucky enough to attend **TRACKS autism**, the Stevenage based specialist early years centre, which helps prepare children with *ASC* for 'big' school.

TRACKS autism now has a *KASPAR* robot on permanent loan. It is used by this small, highly trained team, to help the children and progress demonstrated is being recorded and fed into the larger *KASPAR* project, developed by the **University of Hertfordshire**. The robot has also been used in the past, in research funded by the **European Commission** and as part of several larger European projects.

Nan Cannon Jones, from *TRACKS autism*, said: "The 'wow' moments, for adults supporting children's interactions with *KASPAR*, provided the motivation for us to invite *KASPAR* to become part of the *TRACKS autism* team. So many children have demonstrated their ability to generalise skills learnt with *KASPAR* to other areas of their learning."

Ben Robins, a senior research fellow in the **Adaptive System Research** group at the *University of Hertfordshire*, is one of the key developers of the pioneering '**KASPAR**' project. He is passionate about just what such robots can achieve to enhance communication and interactive skills in children with *ASC*.

Ben feels that: "Robots are much safer for these children because they can find it difficult to 'read' facial expressions and responses to actions. *KASPAR* can respond to the style of interaction with appropriate feedback and facial expressions. For example, *KASPAR*, if tickled gently can show a 'happy' posture with a big smile and can say, 'This is nice, you tickle me'. However, if the child is too rough, *KASPAR* can give a different feedback showing a 'sad' expression, turning its face and torso away to one side, and saying 'That hurt me'. Through the use of *KASPAR* the robot, children at *TRACKS autism*, parents and professionals, can all work together, to form an important stepping- stone towards interaction with other people."

If you want to learn more about *KASPAR*, or *TRACKS autism*, visit <http://www.tracks-autism.org.uk/> or contact: Sara Campbell, Principal of *TRACKS autism* on T: +44 7955 918248 or Vicki Whent, Communications Coordinator and Trustee – on T: +44 7952 121071.