

News and Views

From the National Autistic Society
Scotland and our volunteers

Summer 2022

Glasgow Kiltwalk success!

Our annual Kiltwalk event raised a record £17,000 this year!

In April, more than 50 of our staff, volunteers and people we support took part in the Glasgow Kiltwalk, which was a huge success! Kiltwalkers completed different distances from the three mile 'Wee Wander' to the 'Mighty Stride' from Glasgow to Loch Lomond!

Special mentions go to our fundraising team for their fabulous work in supporting the walkers, and to the staff who took part or supported autistic people and families taking part. Lots of staff and volunteers were also there at the finish line to act as a cheer squad, with plenty of encouragement and pom-poms included!

Thanks to the generosity of everyone involved, as well as a top up from Sir Tom Hunter and The Hunter Foundation, we have

raised over £17,000, which is absolutely amazing! The funds raised will be vital in supporting our services in Scotland, and we can't thank you all enough.

Rob Holland, Acting Director of the National Autistic Society Scotland, said: "The Kiltwalk is an amazing event that allows our fundraisers and

staff to get involved together in doing good and raising money for autistic people and their families in Scotland. It was great to see so many people taking part and showing their appreciation for us. Thanks to the hard work of everyone involved, we raised an outstanding amount that will do so much for the people we support. We are eternally grateful and

can't wait to do it all again next year!"

Kiltwalks are mass participation walking events that raise much-needed funds for us and many other Scottish charities. If you fancy donning the tartan and taking part, there are plenty more Kiltwalk events throughout the year - visit www.thekiltwalk.co.uk to find out more.



Some of our brilliant staff and supporters at the Glasgow Kiltwalk

To find out more visit: www.thekiltwalk.co.uk

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FROM OUR EDITOR

Back in March I did something daring. For World Autism Acceptance Week, National Autistic Society Scotland held an event where brave souls walked on fire.

Yes, you read right. Walked. On. Fire.

Initially, I was asked to do a drawing for the publicity material for the event. A simple Monty Python homage. But then I had a thought. I've seen people walk on fire before (and you know it's possible to do without injury, because you know the science already, and you've seen it covered on *Mythbusters*).

So, I decided to have a go. What chance will one get to do such a thing?

On the day, dressed in a suit and tie, and bowler hat (matching the man in my drawing), I walked on what I can describe as cool sand... with hot patches. One thing the instructor pointed out is to walk fast when you hit the coals. During a brief rehearsal before the event, she said I needed to walk a bit faster.

She did say at least one person doing the walk that day will get blisters.

My feet have healed up well since then.

Gordon Wallace
Editor



Gordon's illustration of his feet

OUR BIG QUESTIONS

We are asking some Big Questions about our charity, and we would love to hear your answers to them. We believe these questions will help us to really understand what we should be doing as a charity to achieve our vision of a society that works for autistic people.

The questions are:

- What does the National Autistic Society mean to you?
- What do you want the National Autistic Society to do in the future?
- What could we do better?
- What do we do really well?

You can answer these four questions however you want - as a word document, a spreadsheet, a scan of written notes, a drawing, a video, a voice recording; whatever works best for you.

You can email your responses to
engagement@nas.org.uk



Branches Awards

The National Autistic Society hosted its first ever Branches Award Ceremony in June! We shone a spotlight on our amazing National Autistic Society branch volunteers across the UK, and we were delighted that the Highland Branch won 'Most imaginative online branch activity' due to their excellent online support. South Lanarkshire won 'Outstanding branch campaign of the year' for their amazing work on the *Our Voice Our Rights* campaign. Well done to all involved!

update

FROM OUR ACTING DIRECTOR

Hello everyone, and welcome to this edition of *News and Views*!

It's been a very busy time for us as an organisation since our last edition, especially on the fundraising front. With so many supporters participating in both World Autism Acceptance Week and the Glasgow Kiltwalk, we are extremely grateful for the generosity shown by everyone!



As for me, I overcame my fears alongside Gordon and took part in a firewalk at our Glasgow offices! It was definitely an unforgettable experience, and it was lovely to see so many taking part, or just watching.

In terms of parliamentary work, I recently gave evidence to an inquiry on a new *Fireworks and Pyrotechnics Bill*. We consider it vital that the voices of autistic people and their families are heard on such an important issue. In addition, our work continues on making the forthcoming Bill for an Autism, Learning Disability and Neurodiversity Commissioner the very best it can be, and one that ensures all views are listened to.

Finally, I'm really excited for what we have planned for the rest of the year, and I hope you will be too. If you're wondering what we're up to, you can find out in the next edition, when we will move into a historic time for our organisation!

Thank you so much for your support, I hope you enjoy this edition of *News and Views*.



Rob Holland
Acting Director of National Autistic Society
Scotland

World Autism Acceptance Week

This year, we celebrated World Autism Acceptance Week between 28 March and 3 April.

We had so many amazing fundraisers this year, with lots taking part in our Super 60 Challenge. In addition, we organised a celebratory Firewalk event at our Glasgow offices (see page 7) as part of our celebrations, with several brave 'soles' taking part!

A big thank you to everyone who supported us this year!



Our work in Parliament - Alex Burnett MSP



I first became aware of the issues autistic people face during my campaigning in 2013. Whilst knocking on doors, I met a family who highlighted the difficulties that autistic people face in the workforce. Looking into this further, I

realised this was just the tip of the iceberg: there was very little advocacy for autistic people at government level and Scotland was missing out on a huge section of society with enormous potential.

I knew then that I had to step in and do something about it by setting up the Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Autism. As the Co-Convenor, I chair the meetings and liaise with the CPG's secretariat; the National Autistic Society Scotland, to discuss and finalise topics, speakers and meeting agendas.

This year, we have discussed the forthcoming *Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) Bill* which would require local authorities to introduce a 'transitions plan' for each disabled child and young person.

Additionally, the CPG has played a role in influencing policy by writing to Ministers. At our meeting in April, MSPs and others heard from autistic people and professionals about the challenges in obtaining a diagnosis and the support (or lack of) that follows.

The CPG on Autism is Scottish Parliament's most well-attended, often with over 80 participants, and we have made it even more accessible to people all over Scotland by continuing to host it online.

If you are interested in attending CPG meetings, contact:
cpg.scotland@nas.org.uk

Autism Support Ayrshire

Our Social Navigation course has recently been redeveloped for online delivery, and has been tested out across our Autism Support Ayrshire and NASplus+ programmes. Social Navigation is designed to be participant-led. Though all topics are already set, the aim is to encourage the autistic young people to discuss and build on their own strategies, as well as support each other through discussions and activities during 15 online group sessions. In Ayrshire, the course was piloted to 12 to 18-year-olds, and for NASplus+, the course was trialled with 14 to 24-year-olds, reaching over 45 young people and their families. After completing the programme, members enjoyed a celebration event and received a certificate of participation.

I enjoyed meeting new people, it was an unforgettable experience

Through member, volunteer and staff evaluation, we have been able to make positive adjustments to the programme going forward. Cielo, who took part in the course, told us: "I enjoyed meeting new people, it was an unforgettable experience and I enjoyed listening to what everyone was getting up to."



Cielo, a participant of our Social Navigation programme

News from Highland



Following on from the success of Eastgate Shopping Centre's Quiet Hour, Inverness is becoming even more autism-friendly!

Smyths Toys Superstores in Inverness contacted our Highland Information Service for support in running an autism-friendly shopping experience, as several customers had approached the store to see what might be possible.

As a result, our Highland Information Service was able to provide useful advice and a training video for staff.

The autism sensory shopping experience runs in the Inverness branch of Smyths every Thursday evening from 6-8pm, and includes dimmed lights and reduced noise, as well as a quiet area.

Alison Footitt, Highland Information Officer, said: "The National Autistic Society Scotland is delighted to be supporting Smyths with their weekly autism-friendly shopping experience. Having already supported the Eastgate Shopping Centre with their monthly quiet hour, we're pleased to see another local business choose to help autistic shoppers. We hope this will further help to make Inverness a comfortable environment that autistic people can feel relaxed to live and shop in".

Meanwhile, our National Autistic Society Highland Branch has been running for over a year. The branch is led by a team of volunteers and offers support to families, autistic people and professionals across Highland.

It is the only virtual branch in the UK and offers a totally amazing service but they need more people to get involved.

Can you help? Whatever time and experience you have will be valued by the branch. Please get in touch at facebook.com/NASHighland to offer help or if you would like some support. You can also email highland.branch@nas.org.uk

Post-Diagnostic Support Service

We're delighted that funding has been extended for our free Post-Diagnostic Support Service until March 2023. Delivered with several other organisations as part of Scottish Government's *Different Minds* campaign, the programme aims to empower autistic young people to develop a sense of identity and belonging. At every session, participants discuss the topic of the day, then engage in a fun activity of their choice. Each programme runs for six weeks and covers topics such as understanding autism, managing anxiety, social communication and confidence.

We have received great feedback so far! The service is open to anyone living in Scotland aged 12-18 and with a recent diagnosis of autism.



Social groups

Our online social groups for young people continue to go from strength to strength with more than 150 autistic people being supported each week. We have a diverse range of groups covering lots of subjects including film and TV, gaming, travel, politics, general chat and loads more! There are groups for different age ranges, genders and geographic areas so why not get in touch to find out more?

For more info on either Post-Diagnostic Support or social groups, contact:
ScotlandSocialGroups@nas.org.uk

Student Support Service

The National Autistic Society Student Support Service provides specialist mentoring, one-to-one study skills, and study assistance (in-class) support for autistic students at universities and colleges across Scotland. This service is funded by the Disabled Students' Allowance.

Our specialist student mentors are highly skilled and experienced in providing autism-specific support to students in further and higher education. Support is tailored to each individual student based on their particular needs and preferences.

Specialist mentors support students with a wide range of issues. They understand that students are affected by social and emotional concerns, as well as academic matters, throughout the course of their studies. Mentors work with students to identify areas in which support is needed and adapt their approach to suit the needs of each student.

We also offer in-class support for students who require a study assistant when they attend college or university. Many of our mentors are qualified to deliver one-to-one study skills support.

The service currently supports 80 students across Scotland.



To find out more, email
studentsupport.scotland@nas.org.uk

Firewalk at our Glasgow office



The heat was on as several daring individuals took part in a firewalk challenge to raise funds for our amazing social groups!

The event took place in March, and was organised in collaboration with Clockwise Offices, located in Glasgow's city centre, as part of World Autism Acceptance Week.

The fiery occasion also included a raffle, and a speech by Jason Ferguson, one of the young people we support as well as Acting Director, Rob Holland, before the bold firewalkers conquered their fears and traversed the hot embers, to the delight of everyone in attendance!

Rob Holland, Acting Director, said: "Everybody had great fun at our firewalk event, and we were pleased to see so many people we support and their families attend. Our social groups are vital for so many autistic young people. They help them to build confidence, make friends and practise communication skills, so we're extremely grateful for the kind and generous donations received. Finally, I would like to thank everyone who took part in the firewalk itself, and I hope your feet have cooled down by now!"

Meet the fundraiser Allan

From an early age, we could tell that Maci wasn't developing like other children. Just before her fourth birthday, we had it confirmed she was autistic.

We have some extended family and friends who don't understand autism properly. Regularly we get the reply of "ah, but we're all on the spectrum to a degree." It's frustrating because they don't understand the challenges that you have. The biggest support we could ask for is that others are not judgmental, for example if she has a meltdown while we are out and they learn to adjust to her instead of wanting her to adjust to them.

I love the message that the National Autistic Society Scotland is trying to spread. To ensure that the world accepts those on the spectrum for who they are instead of trying to change them and adjust to society. I also appreciate that they provide support, guidance and advice as well as campaigning for improved rights, services and opportunities for those on the spectrum.

I organised Back to the Comedy, a comedy event in Bishopbriggs with all money raised going to the National Autistic Society Scotland.

Mojo Talkin'

A huge shout out to Paul Wilson, who organised Mojo Talkin', a mod-themed DJ night in Uddingston! The event included vintage clothes and record stalls, as well as a raffle and scooter ride-out. Paul chose to raise money for us as we hold a special place in his heart, due to his own son being autistic. As a result of Paul's hard work, the event raised over £3,000 for our work.



Paul Wilson, organiser of Mojo Talkin'



Allan's wife Christine and his daughter Maci

Thank you so much Paul, and to everyone who took part!



RORY PATERSON

Media and
Communications
Officer

Q: Who are you?

I'm Rory, I'm 22 years old and I work for the National Autistic Society Scotland as Media and Communications Officer. Having joined in September 2021, I'm really enjoying myself!

Q: How did you first get involved with National Autistic Society Scotland?

I graduated from university in the summer of 2021, which was a happy but also nervous time for me. As an autistic person, I knew how difficult it would be to find employment even with a degree, as many employers just aren't willing to see past their preconceived notions of what autism is. Thankfully, the National Autistic Society Scotland gave me an opportunity, and when I got the phone call offering me the role, I was leaping for joy!

Q: What does a regular day look like in your job?

As part of my role, I run the organisation's social media, which includes our Twitter and Facebook accounts. I also work with the External Affairs Manager to respond to enquiries from journalists, as well as help people to tell their stories and experiences and have their voices heard in the media.

Q: What do you enjoy about working for us?

My favourite part is the people who work here, because they're so kind and supportive. Everyone is so genuine in their desire to help people, and it brings me a great deal of job satisfaction. Not only that, but every day is different, so it never gets boring!

Q: What do you do in your spare time?

I'm a massive football fan, though I'm a far better spectator than player!

Job opportunities

Do you...

- want a rewarding job that offers satisfaction, variety and flexibility?
- enjoy working with people and want to make a real difference?
- have excellent life skills that you can share?

To find out about our current vacancies and more opportunities with the National Autistic Society Scotland, please visit www.autism.org.uk/jobs or contact our HR team at scotlandHR@nas.org.uk

Are you a member of the National Autistic Society Scotland?

If not, you can join our growing community of over 1,200 people in Scotland and play a vital role in our charity's work. Our package of benefits includes our quarterly members' magazine, *Your Autism*, and discounts on our events. To find out more, please call our Supporter Care team on **0808 800 1050**.

About us

The National Autistic Society Scotland is here to transform lives, change attitudes and create a society that works for autistic people.

We transform lives by providing support, information and practical advice for the 56,000 autistic adults and children in Scotland, as well as their family members and carers.

Autistic people turn to us at key moments or challenging times in their lives, be it getting a diagnosis, going to school or finding work.

We change attitudes by improving public understanding of autism and the difficulties many autistic people face.

We also work closely with businesses, local authorities and government to help them provide more autism-friendly spaces, deliver better services and improve laws.

We have come a long way but it is not good enough.

There is still so much to do to increase opportunities, reduce social isolation and build a brighter future for people on the autism spectrum. With your help, we can make it happen.