

Our work celebrated in the Scottish Parliament!

Over 120 people attended a reception to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the National Autistic Society Scotland, which was hosted in the Scottish Parliament on 6 December. The event celebrated our charity's past, present and future, highlighting the work we've done to help create a society that works for autistic people.

Stephanie Callaghan MSP sponsored the event, which also included speeches from the former Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care, Kevin Stewart MSP, and Convener of the Cross-Party Group on Autism, Alexander Burnett MSP.

The Master of Ceremonies for the evening was Jason Ferguson, who is autistic and participated in our Moving Forward+ with Cashback programme. Attendees also heard from Carrie Watts, Chairperson of our Highland Branch, and had the opportunity to see Sean Logan, finalist of Channel 4's *The Piano* and star of the BAFTA-Scotland winning short film *Harmonic Spectrum*, perform.

Our Director, Rob Holland, spoke at the event too, reflecting on our history as an organisation, as well as highlighting our range of services and positivity for the future.

The reception brought together autistic people, family carers, staff, fundraisers, volunteers, funders, third and public sector partners, MSPs and government officials.

Reflecting on the event, Stephanie Callaghan MSP stated: "It is vital to have representation of the autistic community in the Parliament and I am so glad that we were able to celebrate the achievements of the National Autistic Society in Scotland over the past 25 years and hear the inspiring stories of lived experience.

"The National Autistic Society is transforming the lives of people on the autism spectrum in Scotland and I look forward to celebrating their next milestone!"



The speakers at our Parliamentary reception

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FROM OUR EDITOR

What is acceptance?

Acceptance is understanding. Understanding that the world isn't perfect. It's not black and white. It's over 50 shades of grey. One can't live on absolutes alone. Good. Bad. Right. Wrong. This. That. The world is not like that, and such a world won't really work. Some imperfections are needed for situations that can't be dealt with by absolutes. It's impossible for a creator to see every single situation that could happen to their creation, be it a picture, a meal, a product, a law, or a universe.

Autistic people are one of those shades of grey this world has. Yes, they do have a condition. But does that mean they can't do anything? No. There are plenty of people (like me) who have talent and useful skills. It's just the way society has been set up kind of makes barriers preventing them from using these skills for a greater purpose. In short, the most talented job applicants may also be the worst at passing job interviews... or appear "non-acceptable" for whatever reason the interviewer can make up. There may be valid reasons for some, but often not. Accept we are different from the norm, or lose talent.

Gordon Wallace
Editor



Gordon's illustration of what acceptance means to him

GLASGOW BRANCH LAUNCH EVENT

Following our announcement in the previous *News and Views* that a Glasgow Branch was due to launch in January 2023, we are delighted to welcome our newest branch in Scotland!

A launch event was held at the Whiteinch Centre on Tuesday 17 January, with a speech from Director Rob Holland and an introduction to the volunteers who will run the branch.

The event also included a Q&A session, where attendees could ask the new branch committee about what services and support they can provide to the local community.

The National Autistic Society Scotland has a network of branches across the country, which are entirely volunteer-led by autistic individuals and family carers. The branches provide support to autistic people of all ages and their families, and often organise and join in with fundraising and campaigning.



The new Glasgow Branch committee

For more information about the Glasgow Branch, email Patsy Devlin at patsy.devlin@nas.org.uk

update

FROM OUR DIRECTOR

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

As part of World Autism Acceptance Week, we asked our supporters, "what does acceptance mean to you?" The responses have been enlightening, with the common thread being the need for inclusivity. This is a key concept if society is to be truly accepting of autism, as it needs to not only understand, but be willing to change, in order for autistic people to feel included.

We have been hard at work increasing acceptance through our policy work, with the launch of our *Closing the accountability gap* report, co-authored with Scottish Autism. This report found overwhelming support for a commissioner to promote and protect the rights of autistic people, and we urge the Scottish Government to move forward on its commitment to establish a commissioner as soon as possible.

We look forward to the day when the question "what does acceptance mean to you?" no longer needs to be asked of autistic people and families in Scotland, as they are already fully accepted without fear of judgement or discrimination. With your support, we are sure that day will come.



Rob Holland

Director of National Autistic Society Scotland



New Ayrshire Bulletin

We now have an *Ayrshire Bulletin*, where you can keep up to date with what's happening with our charity in Ayrshire!

This is the second regional e-bulletin that we now publish, with the other being the popular *Highland Bulletin*.

To sign up to our *Ayrshire* or *Highland Bulletins*, visit www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/scotland/newsletter-form

Access Film Club

We are delighted to support Glasgow Film Theatre's Access Film Club for autistic cinemagoers!

Access Film Club holds monthly screenings, designed for people aged 15+ who welcome a relaxed cinema environment. For autistic, learning disabled and neurodivergent people, a relaxed environment can be the ideal way to enjoy a film.

The club is not exclusive and it is important that everybody feels welcome to attend.

**GLASGOW
FILM / THEATRE**

More information about Access Film Club can be found at glasgowfilm.org/shows/access-film-club

our news

Our work in Parliament

96% of respondents support a commissioner



As mentioned in the previous edition of *News and Views*, we have completed work on our report, *Closing the accountability gap*, alongside Scottish Autism. This report has found that 96% of people surveyed support a commissioner to promote and protect the rights of autistic people.

We surveyed 1,215 autistic people, family carers and professionals working with autistic individuals.

The report urges the Scottish Government to move forward on its commitment to establish a commissioner "sooner rather than later", with public consultation now delayed until late 2023.

The survey in the report asked respondents to rank priorities for a commissioner. The majority indicated that the commissioner should hold local authorities, service providers and the Scottish Government to account in providing adequate support to autistic people and their families.

Laura McConnell, an autistic campaigner who is featured in the report, said: "A commissioner for autistic people must hold policymakers and services to account, because when we are supported well, there is no reason that autism should be a barrier to anyone achieving all they are capable of."

Autism Support Ayrshire

At Autism Support Ayrshire, we offer parent/carer workshops. These workshops run for six sessions over eight weeks, and are open to parents/carers living within Ayrshire.

Delivered online via Microsoft Teams, the topics covered include: what is autism, sensory differences and understanding behaviours.

Each session lasts approximately an hour and a half, everyone taking part has autism experience, and it is a calm, comfortable and confidential environment.



For more information, please contact
the Autism Support Ayrshire team at
AyrshireOSS@nas.org.uk

News from Highland



The Highland Service is part of the Pines team behind the fantastic Pines website and YouTube channel. The team have added ten new films from virtual sessions in 2022. This includes presentations from autistic consultants Tanya Tennant (social confidence and isolation) and Kieran Rose (autistic masking and burnout). There are also new films on mental wellbeing, behaviour, computer gaming, teenagers and more.

You can watch the Pines films wherever you live, in Highland or beyond, by visiting youtube.com/@thepines-highland

The Pines are also running virtual events throughout 2023. If you live in the Highlands and are a parent, carer or professional, you can register to attend. All events are free and run in partnership with the Highland Council Pines team and Thriving Families. Most events are filmed, so if you can't join live, you can watch afterwards.

The Pines virtual events can be booked by visiting thepineshighland.com/upcoming-events



Moving Forward+ with Cashback

We are delighted to announce that our Moving Forward+ with Cashback service has just received continuation funding from CashBack for Communities as it aims to help more autistic young people to prepare for employment!

The focus of the project will be autistic young people from the most disadvantaged areas within Glasgow, North Lanarkshire and West Central Scotland.

Through one-to-one coaching and group work, the project will assist participants to build their confidence and develop strategies to improve their resilience and mental health. It will introduce participants to their peers, reducing isolation and fostering a sense of belonging.

The project is aimed at autistic young people aged 10-15 from Glasgow and North Lanarkshire who have either stopped engaging with school or have been excluded from school, as well as autistic young people aged 16-25 from Glasgow and other local authority areas across West Central Scotland who are no longer in education and are not yet engaged in a positive vocation.



Previous Moving Forward+ with Cashback participants

For more information about eligibility or how to sign up to the project, email moving.forward@nas.org.uk

Adult Mentoring Glasgow

Are you an autistic adult aged over 25 and living in the Glasgow City Council area?

Participants on our mentoring programme are encouraged to identify goals and will be matched with a volunteer mentor who can help keep you on track with achieving these over an agreed period of time.

Goals are personal and can relate to special interests, social activities, employment or whatever you wish to work on.

For more information about our adult mentoring project, whether to register or ask about volunteering, contact adult.mentoring@nas.org.uk

News from Catrine

We recently welcomed visits from Carol Mochan MSP and Elena Whitham MSP to our adult services in Catrine.

The politicians met support staff and received a tour of our supported living services.

Our two supported living services in Ayrshire, Catrine Bank and Daldorch House, support people to develop skills for ordinary living in their own uniquely designed homes. Support is provided around the clock by our team of dedicated care and additional support professionals.

The charity is currently recruiting for a number of care and support roles in Ayrshire, and recently released a new recruitment video highlighting the qualities that make a good support worker.



Carol Mochan MSP with our team in Catrine

To find out more and apply for roles, visit autism.org.uk/get-involved/work-for-us

Kiltwalk 2023!



Last year's Kiltwalk was an amazing success!

The Kiltwalk is an amazing, inclusive and family-friendly event which helps us raise much-needed funds for our work in Scotland.

This includes our social groups which support autistic young people to connect in a safe and supportive environment to build confidence, develop social communication skills and make friends.

Our groups meet regularly and provide members with opportunities to meet new people and have new experiences. The sessions are facilitated by staff and a team of volunteers, with members deciding where they want to visit and what activities they want to try.

There are several Kiltwalks taking place throughout Scotland in 2023. So, whether you want to take part in the Wee Wander (just three miles) or are feeling brave enough to try the Mighty Stride (23 miles!), why not sign up!

For more information or to sign up to the Kiltwalk, visit bit.ly/3ZVNEvs

Ian and Eve Alderman

A huge shout out to father and daughter duo Ian and Eve Alderman, who walked the length of the UK from John O'Groats to Land's End to raise money for us!

Both Eve and Ian are autistic, and took on the challenge by camping out in all weathers and walking for several miles a day.

Thanks to their amazing efforts, they have raised over £10,000!

Thank you so much Eve and Ian, you are both truly incredible!



Eve and Ian completing their trek in Land's End

Fancy raising money for us?

We have a wide range of in-person and virtual events for you to take part in, and lots of fundraising ideas if you would like to do your own thing. Visit our website to find out more www.autism.org.uk/get-involved/raise-money



Meet the member

**FIONA
JONES**

Q: Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

I moved to supported accommodation a year ago and it's my first time living away from home. I've gained lots of new independent living skills like keeping my room tidy and organising my time better. I've also joined a sports club and I socialise a lot more!

I love to speak up about autism because it helps to make a difference. When I'm not working, I like to go horse riding and swimming, and my favourite thing is to get certificates and awards for activities I have done. I also love spending time with my dog, Rocky!

My ambition is to travel independently.

Q: Why did you join the National Autistic Society?

I joined the National Autistic Society to connect with other people like me. I also joined to help raise awareness of autism and educate others about it. Sending a message can be powerful and I want to send a positive message about autism to as many people as possible.

Q: What do you enjoy most about being a member of the National Autistic Society?

The thing I like most about the National Autistic Society is the work they do to connect autistic people in communities. I feel listened to and respected. I have had the opportunity to have my voice heard, which makes me feel included.

Q: What needs to change to make things better for autistic people?

I think there needs to be more easy read options which are written by autistic adults and children. I also think there needs to be more ways for autistic people to connect and get support in-person, especially in my area.

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.