

News and Views

From people supported by the National Autistic
Society Scotland and our volunteers
Spring 2021

Our Voice Our Rights campaign launch!



#OurVoiceOurRights
Time to make rights a reality for autistic
people and people with a learning disability.

In January we launched the **Our Voice Our Rights** campaign together with partners **ENABLE Scotland** and **Scottish Autism**.

The campaign calls on the political parties in Scotland to commit to a Commissioner for autistic people and people with a learning disability ahead of the Scottish Parliamentary Elections in May 2021.

As the Government's ten-year Autism Strategy comes to an end, we undertook a major review as part of the Cross-Party Group on Autism to see whether it had been a success. We found that while there were many good initiatives and policies in place, a huge number of people were still not

getting the support they needed across education, health, care and employment.

We believe that a Commissioner would help tackle this and be a powerful champion for change. The role would be the first of its kind in the world, established in law, championing human rights. They would be an important ally to whom individuals and families could turn if they are struggling to get support.

The campaign is very much shaped by the experiences of autistic people and families, such as Suzanne and her son Callum from Dunfermline. Suzanne has fought hard to get support for Callum who is autistic and has a learning disability.

Suzanne told us: "The last year has been tough. When Covid hit, a lot of the services were withdrawn and we were left to deal with health, education and social care issues. It's been really tough for Callum and us as a family and we're still not getting the same level of support. Services definitely

need more money, but also the system isn't joined up and you end up being passed from pillar to post. I think someone or something needs to bring the system together. I also strongly believe there should be someone at a parliamentary level, who families like mine can turn to if we have an issue."



Suzanne and Callum

Why not support the *Our Voice Our Rights* campaign? Take action by visiting the campaign website and taking our E-action which allows you to contact the party leaders, calling on them to include the Commissioner in their manifestos www.OurVoiceOurRights.org

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FROM OUR EDITOR

It has been a while since I wrote something here.

The past year has been a challenge, but some did better/worse than others. As for me, life in lockdown was no different to my "normal" life - as I'm someone whose day is mostly spent in front of a screen or piece of paper. Of course, not everyone lives like this. Some prefer to do things that actually stimulate their muscles, like sport or clubbing.

But what about autistic people? As everyone should know, it varies from person to person, like minds. So, a "one size fits all" answer is impossible to write in a 200-word limit. For some it was no different than "normal". But for some it was difficult. If your routine involved going out or meeting someone regularly, lockdown was a major shock to the system. Some found it hard to process "why?". For parents of kids who needed constant attention, the reopening of schools and nurseries must have released a massive pressure valve - even if it was for a short while.

I do hope we all learn from this experience and make the world better as a result - as it was terrible, mentally, before COVID-19.

Gordon Wallace
Editor



Gordon's illustration of lockdown

NEWS FROM HIGHLAND

Our Highland Information Service has been given a boost with the launch of a new website. Part of a partnership with other charities and professionals at the Pines in Inverness, the website provides information to families about autism as well as available services and support.



Andrew on the Dava Way

It has been paid for by the amazing fundraising efforts of nine-year-old Andrew from Nairn, who is autistic and completed a sponsored cycle along the Dava Way last year to raise over £2,000. Well done Andrew, we wouldn't have been able to do this without you!

If you live in Highland, you can contact our Information Officer Alison for more info:
highland.informationofficer@nas.org.uk
or visit the new website:
www.thepineshighland.com

New Highland Branch launched!

Volunteers have been working hard to launch a new branch with the aim of reaching out and supporting autistic people and families.

We're really excited about this new branch which, given the pandemic and geography of Highland, will be the UK's first 100% online branch. The newly formed committee hope that by providing a positive space to bring people together to share experiences, they can help people feel more connected.

For more info, email:
highland.branch@nas.org.uk

update

FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Hello everyone. I hope this edition of *News and Views* finds you, your family and friends well.



The last year has of course been very difficult for all, but through this hardship we have come together more than ever as a community. I am incredibly proud of the work we have done during this time. We have worked hard to keep those within our care services safe from COVID-19, we've innovated to move our services online and made sure that we are offering the best and most up-to-date information.

In many ways we have become a better organisation: one even more focused on the things that make the most difference to families.

We are supporting over 200 people a week through online social groups and have launched a new Post Diagnostic Support Service alongside partners. We believe this is a real game changer; no longer should anyone just be handed a leaflet after diagnosis and that be it.

We're expanding what was our One Stop Shop information service in Ayrshire and have exciting plans to develop support in Glasgow. We have also launched the *Our Voice Our Rights* campaign and, despite the pressures of lockdown, volunteers have started two new branches in East Renfrewshire and the Highlands.

We are growing our support and our impact and that is only possible with the incredible efforts of our volunteers, fundraisers and members. Thank you for your support and being part of this journey with us. I hope you enjoy this issue.



Nick Ward
Director, National Autistic Society Scotland

Online social groups

Through funding from Scottish Government and corporate partners KPMG, we have been able to support over 200 young autistic people a week through online social groups.

Free to join, the groups are facilitated by staff and volunteers and offer a place for autistic people to connect and talk about the things that interest them.

They're a great way to build confidence and communication skills as well as making friends. It's also a way to find tips about staying healthy and well during this time, and helping people support each other.

There are groups representing different geographical areas, different age ranges, groups for girls and women, LGBT+ individuals, and themed groups such as politics, film, books and LEGO.

The sessions are fun, including virtual tours of famous landmarks, zoos and aquariums, as well as activities like quizzes and even making mocktails!

Our groups are open to anyone who is autistic, or thinks they are - you don't need a formal diagnosis to join our groups. They're open to anyone aged between 12 and 26 years old, whatever your ability or wherever you are in Scotland.

One group member said: "The new online groups have been really fun. There are about ten of us in the group and it works really well. It's good to stay in touch with other people and we've done some exciting things with the group leaders including a virtual tour of San Francisco and crossing the Golden Gate Bridge!"

If you are interested in joining a group, email:
ScotlandSocialGroups@nas.org.uk

Glasgow Communities

We have also secured funding for a brand new 'Autism Friendly Glasgow' project funded by the Glasgow Communities Fund until 2023. This means we can support more autistic people and their families across Glasgow, through local social groups and a new volunteer-led Glasgow Branch.

Update on our branches

Our 15 branches are at the heart of what we do in Scotland. They're entirely volunteer-led by parents, carers and autistic people who want to make a difference in their communities. During the pandemic, branches have moved their support online, offering information, advice and activities within their communities - a lifeline for hundreds of families.

Branches have offered themed children's activity groups during school holidays, online parent and carer support groups, guest speaker sessions on Zoom, online groups for autistic adults, quizzes, arts and crafts and much more!

To find out more about branches in your area, just get in touch. Email:
patsy.devlin@nas.org.uk



New Post Diagnostic Support Service

We have launched a new Post Diagnostic Support Service, aimed at young people aged 12 to 18. It aims to empower autistic young people and their families by providing information and support after a diagnosis.

Young people are supported to understand and embrace their identity by exploring topics such as understanding autism, managing anxiety, social skills and more.

Each group meets weekly to discuss a topic of the day, and take part in short team-building activities to improve confidence and reduce social isolation. After six weeks, the young people can be supported on to other activities and services we offer.

Funded by the Scottish Government through the 'Different Minds' Programme, the service is delivered in partnership with other organisations, including Scottish Autism and Autism Initiatives.

While most people joining have had a diagnosis recently (within the last two years), we will consider those whose diagnosis was more than two years ago.

For more information or to join, email:
ScotlandSocialGroups@nas.org.uk



Andrew is being supported by Moving Forward+

Supporting young people not engaging in education

Moving Forward+, our project for young people not engaging in school, is open to young people aged 12 and over and staying in eligible areas of Glasgow.

We aim to improve young people's confidence and assertiveness and work on a one-to-one basis, as well as in small groups. Additionally, young people work on emotion management, anxiety and social skills including time management, creating routines and independent travel. Ultimately, young people are helped to identify positive destinations, such as returning to school, applying to college or entering employment. The project is currently taking place online, with a view to move to face-to-face when safe to do so.

Andrew is one of the people we're supporting - he loves making props - an interest that he discovered over lockdown. He says: "Making things quickly became an interest and a hobby of mine, then I was inspired to follow it as a career".

He's now applied for HNC in Technical Theatre. He hopes he will gain more experience and learn more about the theatre industry, where he hopes to work.

For more information, email:
Moving.Forward@nas.org.uk

Webinars for parents and carers

We were successful in getting funding from National Lottery Scotland to deliver a series of six online webinars in partnership with Tanya Tennant Training and Consultancy. Over 600 families attended these sessions via Zoom which covered topics around autism, supporting sensory consideration and emotional resilience. We are hoping more will follow! Watch this space...

Autism Support Ayrshire

Some of you may remember the launch of the Ayrshire One Stop Shop back in 2014, providing information and advice locally. Now called Autism Support Ayrshire, we've been successful in receiving a further three years' funding from the Health and Social Care Partnerships to develop an enhanced and more sustainable programme responding to local need. Time to get planning and consulting!

News from Catrine Bank and Daldorch House in Ayrshire

We are immensely proud of the combined efforts of our staff team, parents and guardians, and partners, as we continue to follow the tight restrictions and guidelines to keep our care services free of COVID-19.

Our committed staff team at Catrine Bank continue to work innovatively within the guidelines to provide opportunities and activities for the people we support. A great example of this was the socially distanced pancake making activity to celebrate Shrove Tuesday.

We are also pleased at the very high take-up of

COVID-19 vaccination at the two sites, as we look to ensure the safety of the people we support.

We have also recently transformed the education provision at Daldorch House School into a service for autistic

adults, which will enable us to better meet the needs of people we support now and into the future.



Support worker and person we support

Kiltwalk heroes!

Last year's Kiltwalk events had to adapt due to the pandemic with folk across Scotland completing individual challenges to raise an incredible £10,863 for us! People cycled, walked, ran and in the case of members of staff, Nick and Rob, climbed Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh! Rob even managed this with his wee daughter Maia strapped to him (she was just four months old, our youngest ever Kiltwalker!)

This year a virtual Kiltwalk is being held in April so why not don your tartan and raise a few pounds for us. Every donation is topped up by 50% from the Hunter Foundation. So if you raise £100, we get £150.

To register visit:
www.thekiltwalk.co.uk



Rob and baby daughter Maia

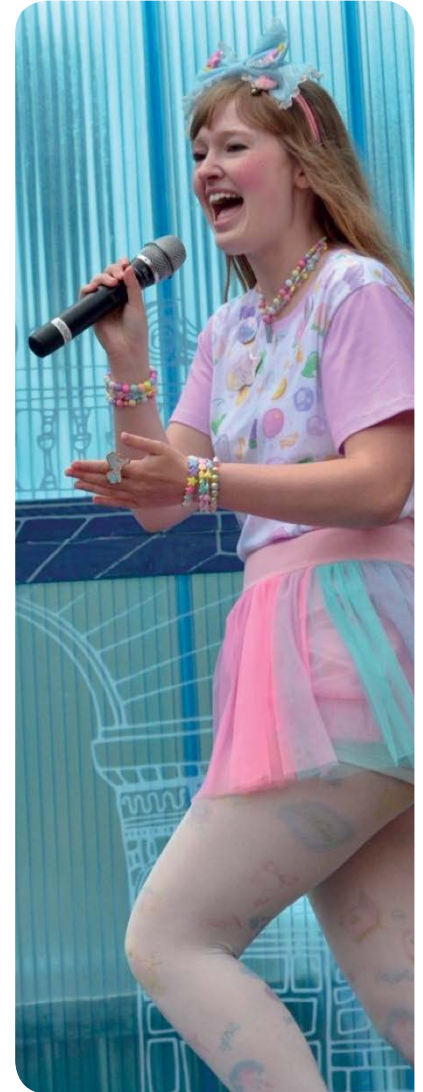
Meet the fundraiser

My name is Rosabelle DeLune. I'm an autistic woman in my 20s and live with my husband and cat. My passion is pop singing, which I've been doing for six years now - both online and at live venues. With the lockdown I wanted to raise some money for National Autistic Society Scotland and so putting on an online performance seemed like the thing to do!

As an autistic person, the strangest thing about performing live is being able to perform song and dance routines confidently, but becoming shy and nervous when socialising or interacting with the audience. I suppose the key word is 'routine'.

I chose the name Rainbow for my event to signify that even though we are all different like the colours of a rainbow, we can make something beautiful when we work together.

I didn't feel it was enough to just fundraise; I wanted to raise awareness of what it's like to be autistic, which is why during the performance, I read aloud anonymously submitted experiences and stories from other autistic people. A lot of people spoke about facing hardships and bullying



Rosabelle

and about the unique talents and qualities they have as a result of being autistic, which was really heartwarming. I was really happy when some non-autistic people told me they learned some things about autism. Everyone had such a good evening and I can't wait to hold another!



DANIELLA ROSSI

**Person to Person
Coordinator**

*Gordon's illustration
of Daniella*

Q: Who are you?

My name is Daniella and I am the coordinator for the Person to Person programme which is aimed at autistic adults over the age of 26 years old. We provide online coffee clubs where autistic people can meet and socialise with each other and our wonderful volunteers.

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

I've known about the great work of the charity for a long time as I used to work as a Community Link Worker and referred people to the helpline and social groups.

Q: How did you find your first coffee club?

I loved it! It was full of people with varied interests and conversation. It was also wonderful to meet our dedicated volunteers and hear about why they enjoy going along. It was also good to see that some members have been coming for a while and some were new to the group.

Q: Tell us more about yourself.

I've worked and volunteered in various community environments over the years. I enjoy watching big things grow from small ideas and have a real passion for art in communities, especially as I enjoy watching people develop and express their own creativity.

The role of co-ordinator probably isn't one that people think of as a creative role but we are challenged every day to "make" and "build" a project by responding to new and varied situations. It has its challenges but it's also a lot of fun.

If you want to find out more about our online coffee clubs, email: persontoperson@nas.org.uk

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 1,000 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 publications and 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.