

# News and Views

From people supported by the National Autistic  
Society Scotland and our volunteers  
Spring 2019

## We deliver our open letter to the Deputy First Minister

We have delivered an open letter to the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney MSP, calling on him to address the barriers autistic children face to accessing education.

The letter, which was signed by almost 3,000 people, was delivered by representatives from our charity, Scottish Autism and Children in Scotland.

It calls for Mr Swinney to take action on the recommendations made as part of our *Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved* report, which revealed that autistic children in Scotland are being unlawfully excluded from school, often multiple times a week.

Mr Swinney has responded and explained what Scottish Government is doing to address the issues we detailed in the report. We were disappointed with his response. You can find it, and read our views, at [www.notengaged.com](http://www.notengaged.com).

We also met with Mr Swinney in February for a roundtable discussion, where we made our views clear - we want Scottish Government to make autism training compulsory for all teachers.

The event brought together representatives from a number of key organisations to discuss ways in which Scottish Government can improve and reform the education system for autistic people.

We will continue to campaign with our partner charities. We are pleased that Mr Swinney has met with us four times in the past five months. He is listening! But now we need him to take action to ensure autistic children and their families feel included, engaged and involved in their education.

Representatives from our charity and our partners deliver the letter



## CONTENTS

### PAGE 3

News about our exciting new partnership with the National Theatre of Scotland and an update from our Director, Nick Ward.

### PAGE 4

Read about what's been happening at Catrine Bank, and the latest branch and social groups news.

### PAGE 5

Meet Gail Ball, a volunteer with our social groups.

### PAGE 6

The latest news from Daldorch House School and details about how you can get involved with this year's World Autism Awareness Week.

### PAGE 7

It's over to you for poems about what it feels like to be autistic and Spring's favourite flower - the bluebell.

### PAGE 8

Get to know Kerry McKeown, our new Befriending and Mentoring Coordinator, and find out how you could join our team!

## FROM OUR EDITOR

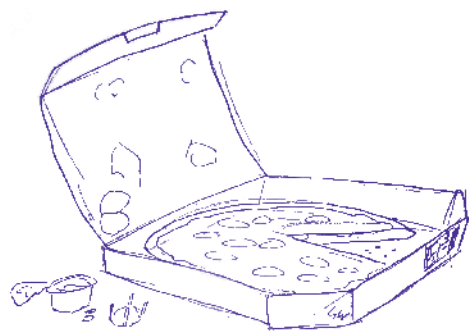
Did you know research by the National Autistic Society Scotland found that only 32% of autistic people are in some kind of paid work? I became one of them, when I started delivering pizzas in December.

It is hard to get a job when you are autistic - it took me until the age of 30 to find paid employment. Many people underestimate how much socialisation is needed in order to get one. You have to contact job agencies, write a CV in an appealing way, and get interviewed by complete strangers who may or may not become your future bosses.

As an autistic person, I was told that academics were important when I was growing-up, meaning learning how to socialise with others was placed on the backburner. In hindsight, this focus on getting good grades was a mistake in prioritisation. What's the point of getting an A in maths if you are not able to advertise yourself to a bank manager looking for a new accountant? Without the knowledge of how to convince employers to hire you, a lot of talent, knowledge, and skills (and teaching hours) will go to waste.

I have only just started my 'working man' period but I am really enjoying it. It pays well and I'm okay driving about town delivering pizzas.

**Gordon Wallace**  
Editor



One of Gordon's pizza deliveries

# NATIONAL THEATRE OF SCOTLAND PARTNERSHIP

We are working in partnership with the National Theatre of Scotland to make its 2019 programme of performances autism-friendly.

Our charity will provide dedicated autism awareness training to staff to ensure autistic people and their families attending performances feel at ease. We will also help to identify adaptations that may be required for productions.

The partnership comes after we successfully collaborated with the Company on its performance of *The Reason I Jump*. It was performed by a group of autistic artists and based on the one-of-a-kind memoir by Naoki Higashida which demonstrates how an autistic mind thinks, feels, perceives and responds.

As part of the new partnership, the National Theatre of Scotland will also offer work placements to participants of our CashBack for Communities funded Moving Forward employment project.

A performance of *The Reason I Jump*

# update

## FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Hello and welcome to the spring edition of *News and Views*.

I hope your year is going well.



January may seem like a distant memory now but I hope you are still sticking to your New Year's resolutions. If yours was to get fit, then we have the perfect opportunity to put your best foot forward by signing up for our Spectrum Night Walk on Saturday 6 April. It's just one of the many ways in which you can join people from across Scotland and help raise funds during World Autism Awareness Week. Hotfoot it over to page six for details on how you can get involved.

A few weeks ago, I met with the Deputy First Minister, John Swinney MSP, and representatives from other organisations for a roundtable discussion to find out what Scottish Government is doing to address the issues we raised in our *Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved* report. We will continue to campaign over the next few months for reforms to the education system which will make a big difference to autistic people and their families.

I also want to take this opportunity to remind you of what a great resource our website is. There are lots of very helpful articles about autism, supporting autistic people, and our campaigns and activities, so please visit [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk) and check it out.

Finally, I hope you enjoy catching up with our latest news and, as always, if you have any story suggestions, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Best wishes,



**Nick Ward**

Director, the National Autistic Society Scotland

## NEWS FROM CATRINE BANK

By Euan Grant, Team Leader at Catrine Bank

Noel is one of the people we support at Catrine Bank. He thoroughly enjoys new experiences but plans and preparations are needed in advance of activities going ahead.

A few weeks ago we took him on a special day out to Glasgow. We wanted Noel to have a memorable and enjoyable experience which he would be able to tell his friends and family about.

We used visual choice charts to let Noel decide on what activities he wanted to do, and he chose to go bowling and shopping. It took around an hour to get to Glasgow from our supported living service and we drove there with Noel.

Noel had a great time bowling – he was really close to getting a strike at one point! Afterwards, we took him to a nearby shopping centre where he had fun going into different shops and selecting items for his bedroom.

His favourite purchase was a toy zebra. He had wanted to buy one for a while and was really excited to finally find one in a shop. It has since taken pride of place in his bedroom and he loves telling everyone about it!



Noel at the bowling alley



Families enjoy one of the park's illuminations

## Branch news – Illuminight

Autistic people and their families from our branches in East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire and Renfrewshire attended an autism-friendly Illuminight event at Kilmarnock's Dean Castle Country Park.

Branch members enjoyed fantastic light shows and illuminated stories while walking along a 1.5km trail which wound its way through the historic woods.

## Social groups win support from ScottishPower Foundation

We have been awarded £31,000 by the ScottishPower Foundation to support our social groups for autistic young people.

The groups help young autistic people aged 15 to 24 to build confidence, make new friends and overcome social isolation in west central Scotland.

We will use the funds to start three new groups which will give autistic young people the chance to try new activities and have fun. We will also provide transgender awareness sessions and modules on social skills for the first time.

To find out more, please email [sandra.buckley@nas.org.uk](mailto:sandra.buckley@nas.org.uk) or call 0141 221 8090.



## Gail Ball Social Groups Volunteer

Interview and illustration  
by Gordon Wallace

### Q: **Who are you and what do you do?**

My name is Gail Ball and I am a social group volunteer. I work for KPMG which chose the National Autistic Society Scotland as its charity partner two years ago. I have a son, Sam, who is just about to turn 16, and I have been married to my husband Andy for just over three years.

### Q: **Can you explain what KPMG is?**

KPMG is a firm of chartered accountants that offers a wide range of services to clients. I work as one of the support staff. There are more than 500 people who work in our two Glasgow offices, and we have others in most major UK cities. I've been employed by KPMG for almost 18 years, and have had three different jobs within that time.

### Q: **How did the idea of the KPMG staff ball come about?**

The KPMG Ball has been going for a number of years now. I've been involved in organising the event for the last six years. I love coming up with ideas for decorating the ballroom and deciding what entertainment we will have on the night! It gets tricky trying to think of new ideas and entertainment but a live band is usually a winner.

The idea for the ball came about as a way to say thank you to our staff for all of their hard work. It's a fantastic night held in a lovely hotel, with lots of food and drink. There's always plenty of dancing and fun had by everyone who attends. We also raise money for our chosen office charity at the event, which this year was the National Autistic Society Scotland.

### Q: **What do you do outside of work? What do you do to relax?**

I enjoy going on holiday. My favourite is a beach holiday where I can catch up on all those books I've not had time to read. I have two gorgeous and loveable Jack Russell dogs called Daisy and Oscar, who I enjoy taking out for long country walks or going to the beach with. Although I'm not so keen to go when it's raining!

**It's a fantastic  
night held in a  
lovely hotel, with  
lots of food and  
drink.**

## VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteering with the National Autistic Society Scotland is a great way to meet new people and learn new skills, whilst making a real difference to the lives of autistic people.

We are recruiting volunteer befrienders and mentors for our Person to Person service which supports autistic people aged 26 and over.

The project helps autistic people overcome challenges and meet goals, such as taking part in social activities, facing problems at work, or dealing with complicated banking and housing issues.

As a volunteer befriender or mentor, you will provide support to autistic people in Glasgow and the surrounding areas face-to-face, by phone or by email.

To find out more, please visit [www.autism.org.uk/volunteer](http://www.autism.org.uk/volunteer).

## News from Daldorch House School

By Bernadette Casey,  
Principal

We are always looking for new ways to provide varied opportunities for the young people we support and are pleased to announce this now includes The Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award.

The award is a voluntary programme of practical, cultural and physical activities which help to support the personal development of our young people. To achieve the award, our young people will complete a personal programme of activities in four sections: volunteering, physical, skills and expedition. We're pleased to have three young people already committed to achieving the award, and there's a possibility of a fourth joining them.

This is a really exciting time for our school and we hope that the award will become an integral part of what we offer to the young people we support.



# fundraising

## Spectrum Night Walk is coming to Glasgow!

Will you put your best foot forward and take part in our sponsored walk? Spectrum Night Walk is back in Glasgow for 2019!

Take to the streets of Glasgow on Saturday 6 April with hundreds of other passionate walkers and see the city in a different light as you pound the pavements of our 5k, 10k or 15k route.

The event was a sell-out last year so make sure you sign-up quickly if you'd like to get



involved and help raise vital funds for our charity.

Please visit [www.autism.org.uk/nightwalks](http://www.autism.org.uk/nightwalks) to secure your place and get ready to [#ignitethenight!](https://twitter.com/ignitethenight)

## World Autism Awareness Week 2019 is on its way!

Our favourite week is back and this year we're hoping it will be bigger, better and do even more to help create a society that works for autistic people.

Join people across Scotland and take part in fun activities to help raise funds for our charity and increase autism awareness between Monday 1 April and Sunday 7 April.



Make sure you visit [www.autism.org.uk/waaw](http://www.autism.org.uk/waaw) and download your free fundraising guide. It's jam-packed full of fun ideas and activities to help get you involved in fundraising and help us increase public understanding of autism in Scotland.

## A Smile Inside

By Christopher J. Hill

### 01.01

How dearly, I do wish - and long for,  
someone to share a word;  
but though a desire 'tis, and strong,  
not always, am I sure how to.  
My mind, often so is split over this.  
Should I go and take part,  
or stay alone? So dearly - I am torn.

### 02.01

For, I'm swathed; as if by bands of stillness,  
my body, every step, encapsulated.  
A fine vapour of sand? Or fluid drapes,  
in the air, they form an orb of liquid glass.  
And, yet although I still perceive you,  
beyond these invisible curtains -  
'tis as if I don't belong; am I just a spectre?

### 03.01

Outside, often faces and voices converge.  
Time swiftly jets by; a whisper,  
it evades me. I see, as if through bright haze.  
This world, the individuals within,  
are of noise and alien; I - am a stranger.  
'Tis as if I were locked in glass,  
just a ghost, lost, and enshrouded by veils.

### 04.01

I close my eyes, let beautiful melodies,  
shower me like tender rain;  
they imbue me, my mind in search of flow.  
Streams begin to wash around me,  
give me strength. As if carried on wings,  
that dream world then ascends;  
and I go - I ò so gently float away ...

### 05.01

For, I appreciate the quiet and the calm,  
of my silence, and my solitude.  
Why the wish to talk? I'd rather drift out,  
at times, into that notion-world;  
a shelter - like home, a familiar place.  
Its light is mellow, the air, still,  
thus, gladly, I'd walk those placid paths.

### 06.01

How sad it is! My heart does burn and blaze,  
my being - so full of gleaming life.  
And yet, I'm not sure how to show you this.  
Whenever I try, my every fibre,  
holds me trapped. I could rage 'n cry inside,  
and writhe, but my skin won't yield.  
For that glass between us, you'd just walk by.

### 07.01

When our ways do cross - my words,  
those sounds, at first, unheard.  
I'm sorry, for this cloak around me.  
An answer! I will search, for you,  
just a couple of moments, grant me.  
Let me settle, find my breath,  
...of course, I want to talk with you.

### 08.01

And so, I dream - of that so distant day,  
when, hopefully, I'll walk for myself.  
For all your help, or even simple quietness,  
I'd bow to you with all my heart;  
...your names and your voices, with me.  
I'll always remember the kindness,  
the grace you showed: you saw beyond.

To read more of Christopher's work, please visit  
[www.chrisjhwritings.yolasite.com](http://www.chrisjhwritings.yolasite.com)

## Tread Soft the Bluebells

By William Docherty

Softly tread the bluebells  
abundant at your feet -  
Tread soft the bluebells,  
For your love to meet.

Tread soft  
the whispers  
of your heart -  
with Summer's sunsilken  
Wind, bursting tree boughs above -  
Yes. Tread soft the bluebells -  
Softly tread to love...



## KERRY MCKEOWN

### Befriending and Mentoring Coordinator

*Gordon's illustration  
of Kerry*

#### Q: Who are you?

My name is Kerry and I am the new Befriending and Mentoring Coordinator with the National Autistic Society Scotland's Moving Forward service which helps autistic young people to prepare for employment. It is funded by Scottish Government's Cashback for Communities initiative, and is available for those aged 16-24 who live in parts of West Central Scotland.

#### Q: What made you decide to join the National Autistic Society Scotland?

I was a volunteer employment mentor with the charity before I started my role at the end of October last year. I really enjoyed volunteering and I was confident that I would find the role rewarding. I also knew that the National Autistic Society Scotland is a great organisation to work for and decided to apply and was over-the-moon when I found out I had been successful.

#### Q: Can you describe a typical day?

That's a hard question because every day is different! My role involves training volunteers, meeting with people we support and matching them with a volunteer. I also provide support afterwards to help maintain their ongoing relationship. A typical day would include tasks related to this. For example, one day I might have a post-training interview with a volunteer and a meeting with a new referral to profile their interests. On another day I could have a review with a person we support and answer questions from volunteers who have active matches.

#### Q: What do you do to relax? Do you have any hobbies?

I enjoy going for spa days with my friends. I also find Bikram yoga really relaxing and try to attend classes a few times a week. I like to travel as often as I can too.

## 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](http://www.autism.org.uk/jobs) or contact our HR team at [scotlandHR@nas.org.uk](mailto:scotlandHR@nas.org.uk).

## Did you know...?

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*, discounts on our publications and events, and low cost autism insurance. To find out more, please call our Supporter Care team on **0808 800 1050**.

**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 58,000 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 spectrum. With your help, we can make it happen.