

News and Views

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

Marion Fellows: first MP to receive our Autism Friendly Award!

**The constituency office
of Marion Fellows MP has
become the first in the UK to
be certified as autism-friendly.**

Office staff learned about autism and made adjustments to the way they work to ensure autistic people and their families, in Marion's Motherwell and Wishaw constituency, can access the services it offers.

This included identifying a designated quiet room where autistic people and their families can go if they are feeling overwhelmed by anxiety or sensory overload, and offering a friendly and welcoming environment that targets the accessibility needs of autistic constituents and their families.

Our Autism Friendly Award recognises organisations that ensure autistic visitors and their families can access and enjoy their venues.

Marion Fellows, Member of Parliament for Motherwell and Wishaw, said: "It is important that my office meets the needs

of my constituents and is accessible to everyone. I would encourage all MPs to do the same. The changes do not need to be extravagant, just subtle changes can make all the difference."

Nick Ward, Director at the National Autistic Society Scotland, said: "As elected representatives, MPs are our community leaders and so need to be a leader in autism awareness and understanding.

We hope that many more MPs and MSPs will follow Marion's excellent example and make their constituency offices autism-friendly. We will then be a little bit closer to creating a world that supports and works for autistic people, their families and carers."

We want to support more organisations in Scotland to become autism-friendly. To find out more about the award, please visit www.autism.org.uk/autismfriendly.



Marion Fellows MP
and Nick Ward

CONTENTS

PAGE 3

News about our meeting with the Minister for Mental Health 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 Maureen Ruddy, a volunteer with our Education Rights Service.

PAGE 6

The latest news from Daldorch House School and our fundraising team.

PAGE 7

It's over to our supporter Hayley Ross for drawings depicting a meltdown.

PAGE 8

Get to know Patsy, our new Senior Branch Engagement Officer and find out how you could join our team!

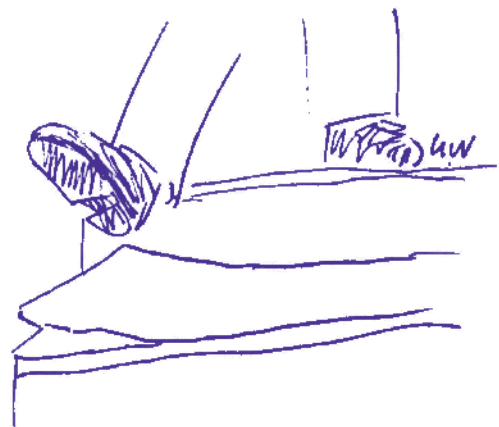
FROM OUR EDITOR

You may remember that I injured my foot last year. Well it has happened again. This time, more seriously - I twisted my ankle while tripping on a step while delivering pizzas.

Unlike last year, this time I went to the accident and emergency department the next morning to get it x-rayed. The result was torn ligaments. It will take several weeks to heal and I have been given a splint binder to wear when I am moving about. This was the first time I had been to accident and emergency alone. Last year my mother came with me. I have learnt my lesson.

I looked back over to the introduction I had written last year and noticed that I had said very little, due to the detail of my injury taking up so many words. So, this time I wanted to say what I had no room to say last year - if you are suffering from something painful (sore joint, back, foot, etc) or something seems wrong with you (temperature, bleeding, depression, etc) please tell someone! Don't suffer in silence. This is a hangover from when we did not have the healthcare system we have today. Think about it. Back in the 1800s, when a delivery person injured their foot, was it possible for them to go to a doctor and have it checked out? Exactly.

Gordon Wallace
Editor



Gordon slipping and injuring his foot

WE MEET THE MINISTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH

We recently met with Clare Haughey, Minister for Mental Health, to discuss the issues and topics affecting autistic people and their families in Scotland.

The meeting took place at Scottish Parliament and was an opportunity for us to tell the Minister about the barriers autistic people and their families face in accessing help and support – and to share our recommendations for how Scottish Government can help.

During the meeting, we discussed our charity's continued concern about autistic people sectioned under mental health legislation. We highlighted the lack of appropriate provision in local areas, meaning autistic people can be stuck in assessment and treatment units.

We also discussed how pleased our charity is with the reviews the Scottish Government is undertaking into mental health legislation, and our contribution to Andrew Rome's Independent Review of Learning Disability and Autism in the Mental Health Act. We found the meeting to be very beneficial and we plan to continue to work with the Minister to help improve the lives of autistic people in Scotland.

We meet the Minister for Mental Health



update

FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Welcome to another jam-packed edition of *News and Views*.

At the start of this summer, I visited the constituency office of Marion Fellows MP to present our Autism Friendly Award. Marion's office has shown a real commitment to ensuring it is accessible for autistic people and their families, and I'm so pleased we were able to formally recognise their achievement. It was wonderful to speak to Marion and her staff about the adaptations they have made for autistic people – and we want to encourage more MSPs and MPs to do the same.

Daldorch House School held an end-of-term prom this summer too and I would like to thank everyone who was involved in helping to make the evening so special for the people we support. Turn to page six to read more.

Were you one of our 70 branch members and their families who attended Dreamnight at Blair Drummond Safari Park? Jenni Nicoll from our North Ayrshire Branch has written an article on page four about how much the event means to her family.

In September, for the first time in many years, we will be hosting a conference on the important issue of Women and Girls and I'd love for you to come along! Find how you can attend by visiting www.autism.org.uk/conferences.

Finally, I want to share some good news with you. Caroline Stevens will be joining our charity in November as our new UK Chief Executive. Caroline will be joining us after six years serving as Chief Executive of KIDS. I look forward to welcoming Caroline to Scotland and showcasing the important work we do across the country.

As always, thank you for your support,



Nick Ward

Director, the National Autistic Society Scotland



NEWS FROM CATRINE BANK

By Euan Grant, Senior Support Worker at
Catrine Bank

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

A few weeks ago, we took Noel to Craig Tara Caravan Park for his annual holiday. Craig Tara is about 45 minutes away from our supported living service and we drove there with Noel.

We made sure that we had structures in place to help Noel manage each day of his holiday, and to make sure it was memorable. Noel loves going to the caravan park and we have supported him to do so on several occasions since 2017. Noel enjoyed visiting the swimming pool and we also went for walks along the beach.

We used visual guides to let Noel decide where to go for dinner every night, and he loved the evening musical entertainment at the caravan park - the tribute acts were his favourite!



Noel
enjoying his
holiday

Our dreamy night at Blair Drummond Safari Park By Jenni Nicoll, North Ayrshire Branch Member

My two sons and I were among 70 children and their families who recently spent a magical afterhours evening at Blair Drummond Safari Park.

Dreamnight is an international event that sees zoos, wildlife parks and aquariums open specially for children and families who are living with life-long illnesses or disabilities.

We had an amazing night and were able to spend quality time together as a family - without people staring, making comments or judging my sons' behaviour. It can be hard to get out as a family which is why I am so thankful that Dreamnight exists and allows us to make special memories together.



Liam and Sean enjoying the rides

KPMG extend partnership with our charity

Advisory firm KPMG have announced the extension of their support for our charity until 2020.



Staff from the firm's Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen offices have volunteered more than 250 hours, and raised £70,000 to help fund our social groups since our charity partnership began in 2017.

Our social groups are a Scotland-wide, locally run programme that offers opportunities for autistic people to socialise, mix with peers and be themselves. The groups meet regularly and equip members for living independent lives by providing opportunities to form close relationships, as well as developing self-confidence and social skills.

If you would like to find out more about our social groups, please email sandra.buckley@nas.org.uk or call 0141 221 8090.



Maureen Ruddy Education Rights Service volunteer

Interview and illustration
by Gordon Wallace

Q: **Who are you?**

My name is Maureen Ruddy and I volunteer with the National Autistic Society Scotland's Education Rights Service.

The service provides impartial and confidential information and support to families on school education rights and entitlements. I was a primary school teacher, head teacher and subsequently quality improvement officer with Dundee City Council for 40 years before my retirement in 2006.

After successfully undergoing a number of training modules on education law and additional support needs legislation, I became an Education Rights Service volunteer nine years ago. I provide parents and carers with telephone advice and information to help equip them with the tools they need to access efficient and effective education that their autistic children are entitled to.

Q: **Why did you decide to become a volunteer?**

I decided to volunteer when my lovely grandson, Joseph, was diagnosed as autistic. Our family

knew little about autism and I wanted to know so much more to help support Joseph and his parents. I sometimes find it difficult to make time every week to speak to a stranger on the phone - life can get in the way but I continue to volunteer because I love being able to advise people who are very often in a desperate situation. Their gratitude can be overwhelming, humbling and a joy to receive. We ask everyone we support to complete a survey to make sure we are meeting their needs and providing a high-quality service.

Q: **Can you tell me more about yourself?**

I live a very full life and I am usually on hand to help with my grandchildren when needed. My husband and I have travelled extensively throughout the world and have visited five continents. We have a great love of cruising.

Q: **Do you have any hobbies?**

I like to go walking every morning and attend pilates classes twice a week. Music has always been my passion and I am the musical director of a local women's group and Parish Church Choir.

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.

News from Daldorch House School

By Nicola Boyd, Assistant Psychologist at Daldorch House School

We recently celebrated the end of our school year with a red-carpet inspired prom for our pupils.

To prepare for the big night, we offered salon services such as nail painting and hair styling to pupils. Everyone choose their own outfit to wear – kilts and dresses were a popular choice!

We wanted to make the experience as memorable as possible for the people we support and arranged a limousine ride in the school grounds. Everyone loved it and we took lots of lovely photographs afterwards.

Staff helped transform our gym hall into ballroom and we offered a very special dining experience complete with fancy table cloths and champagne flutes. The evening was brought to a close with a disco and dancing.

For many of our pupils, this was an opportunity to experience an event which many people take for granted. We're so pleased we were able to make the evening so special and are already looking forward to next year's event.

Amy and Connor raise the roof with fundraising gig



Amy and Connor

Amy Callaghan is a participant in our Cashback for Communities-funded Moving Forward employability project. Together with her boyfriend Connor, Amy organised a fundraising gig as a thank you for the help and support she has received from our charity and raised more than £1,000.

You can find out more about our Moving Forward service that helps autistic young people to prepare for employment by visiting www.autism.org.uk/movingforward

It's a tour de force for Neil

We were delighted to welcome Neil Copeland to our Glasgow office a few weeks ago to present him with a cycle jersey ahead of the start of his epic fundraising cycle from France to the Black Forest in Germany.



Neil in his cycling jersey

Neil's sister, Laurie, received support from our charity and very sadly passed away late last year. His route through France, Switzerland and Germany will take him through towns and cities visited with their parents when they were children.

Please visit www.notthetour.com to support Neil and find out more about his trip.



How it feels to have a meltdown

by Hayley Ross

Meltdowns are often very hard to describe to others, especially in the moment of them happening.

It feels like I am drowning in different emotions - it is suffocating. Even when I am doing okay, I feel like there is a rope around my neck ready to pull me back under at any given moment.



**When I have
a meltdown, I
often struggle to
seek help**



It is scary and I never know what to do. Small things can cause me to experience a meltdown - things like too much university work, my mum raising her voice - I really don't know why.

When I have a meltdown, I often struggle to seek help, and sometimes I even reject help for the sole reason of thinking I am a burden to others.

The media often portrays being autistic as a problem - that we need extra support or attention as opposed to non-autistic people. It can be hard to handle sometimes, as I can be over-empathetic and this only adds fuel to the fire.

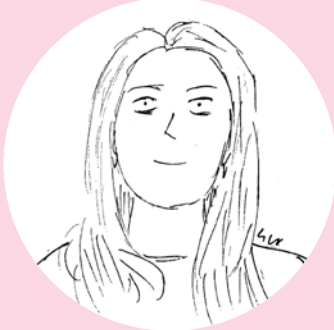
I see social media posts which are supposed to be uplifting but for me, I feel like they are done out of

pity. An example of this is people sharing and liking posts for an autistic child who is celebrating their birthday on their own.

Of course, this is a reality - I myself have experienced this - but when it comes down to it, who out of the people who engaged with the post will actually help?

It feels like a never-ending meltdown and sometimes I don't know how to get back up - sometimes I am not even sure who to trust to help. This is how I felt when I drew this image.





PATSY DEVLIN

Senior Branch Engagement Officer

*Gordon's illustration
of Patsy*

Q: Who are you?

My name is Patsy and I am our charity's new Senior Branch Engagement Officer. I am married to Paul and we have two children. My daughter Kirsty is almost 16 and my son Fraser is 12. Fraser is autistic and was diagnosed when he was four.

Q: What does your role involve?

I help our charity's branches by providing support and guidance on how they can increase their involvement with our campaigns and policies. I also help them to run groups and events for branch members in their local areas, as well as making sure they feel proud to be part of the National Autistic Society Scotland. We have 13 branches in Scotland - each is unique and provides a local hub where parents, carers and autistic people can meet and access groups and activities.

Q: How did you get this position?

I turned to the National Autistic Society Scotland for support and advice when my son was diagnosed. The support and advice I received was invaluable at a very difficult time in my life and I've always wanted to give something back to say thank you. When I saw this job advertised, I just knew I had to apply!

Q: What's been your best moment so far?

Dreamnight at Blair Drummond Safari Park. Our branch members had a fantastic night and I was so pleased to be able to help arrange a personal and autism-friendly evening for the autistic people and their families that we support.

Q: Can you tell us about your hobbies?

I love going for long walks with my dog Gracie. I also belong to a book club and enjoy going along to our monthly get-togethers to chat about the latest book we've read.

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

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*, and discounts on our publications and events. 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.