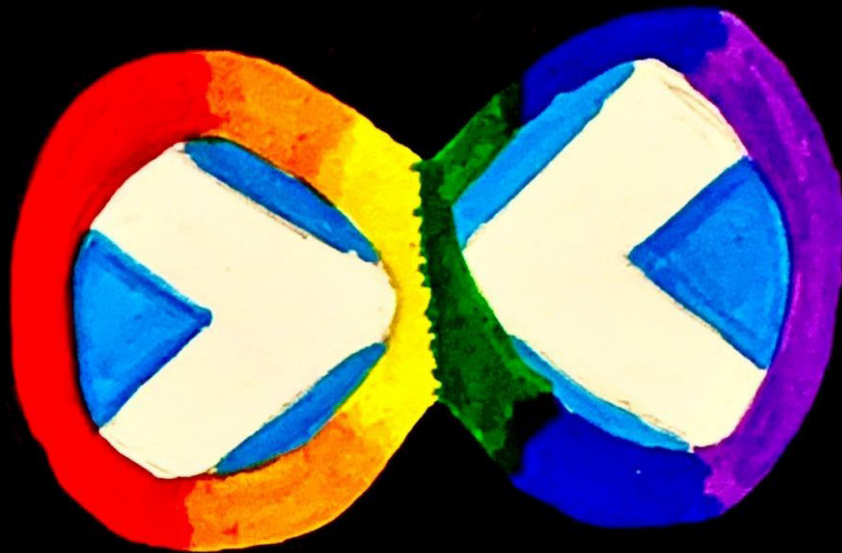


MOVING
FORWARD
WITH



CASHBACK
FOR
COMMUNITIES

Annual Report 2025-26



National
Autistic
Society
Scotland



Contents

Foreword	3
About Moving Forward with CashBack	4
Our Impact	5
Reflections & Learning	6
James' Journey	10
Robert's Journey	12
Thank You to Our Youth Forum	13
Performance against Outcome Indicators	14
Participant Profile	20
Financial Performance	21
Participation and Expenditure by Local Authority	22
Social Media Reach	23
Partnership Working	24
Contribution to Scottish Government Policy	25
Next Steps	27



Foreword

Moving Forward with CashBack has grown into something truly special — a service shaped by the voices, experiences, and hopes of its participants. Many of those we work with come from communities in Scotland deeply affected by crime, adversity, and trauma, yet their resilience and potential shine through every day. Our role has been to create spaces where they can be themselves, receive person-centred support that meets them where they are, and begin to imagine futures that feel possible.

It is therefore with real pleasure that I introduce the 2025–26 Annual Report and would like to pay tribute to the delivery team here at National Autistic Society Scotland for all that they have achieved.

The stories and outcomes captured here reflect the profound difference Moving Forward with CashBack has made — not only for this year's participants and their families, but across the full three years of CashBack for Communities Phase 6.

Finally, it is hugely welcome that we have received funding via Cashback for Communities for Phase 7 allowing us to support a further 210 autistic young people over the coming three years and we thank our funder and Inspiring Scotland for their ongoing support. The impact of this work is heartfelt, it is lasting, and it speaks to the dedication of everyone involved.

Rob Holland

National Director (Scotland and Wales) & UK Strategic Lead for Volunteering

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Holland', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.



About Moving Forward with CashBack

Our programme is staffed by a team of six, operating across two strands. Our 10-15 strand supports autistic young people who are experiencing emotionally based school non-attendance and significant disengagement from education. Our 16-25 strand focuses on autistic young people who are not currently engaged in positive or structured activities.

The programme is funded by CashBack for Communities, a Scottish Government initiative which reinvests funds recovered through the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) into projects that help to create safer and more positive futures for young people. In line with CashBack for Communities' priorities, the majority of participants live in areas ranked within the twenty per cent most deprived on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD 1&2). A smaller proportion of participants from less deprived areas are also accepted onto the programme, based on factors such as deteriorating mental health, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and involvement with the criminal justice system.

Many of our participants are navigating complex family circumstances shaped by poverty, poor housing, parental ill health, and wider adversity. These challenges can make engagement with the programme more demanding, and progress is often incremental.

Across both strands, the service adopts a nurturing, person-centred approach. Support is tailored to each individual, with activity paced according to their needs and readiness. Through this approach, the programme aims to improve wellbeing, build confidence and resilience, and—where appropriate—support participants to re-engage with education and move towards positive, sustainable destinations.

This report covers the period from April 2025 to March 2026. As this represents the third and final year of CashBack for Communities Phase 6, the report also includes an overview of performance and impact across the full 2023-2026 funding period.

Our Impact

2025-26

60 Young People Supported



7 Local Authority Areas

East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, Glasgow, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire

Participants from SIMD 1&2 communities **70%**

Average Age **16**

Participants reporting improved wellbeing against SHANARRI indicators **75%**

Parents, Carers & Professionals reporting improved resilience, positive support networks and positive changes in behaviour **86%**

Participants on our 10-15 strand reporting an improved relationship with school **73%**



Participants on our 16-25 strand securing positive destinations **83%**

Amount of social media views **78,543**



Phase 6 2023-26

170 Young People Supported



8 Local Authority Areas

East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, Glasgow, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire

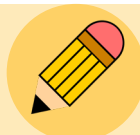
Participants from SIMD 1&2 communities **70%**

Average Age **16**

Participants reporting improved wellbeing against SHANARRI indicators **67%**

Parents, Carers & Professionals reporting improved resilience, positive support networks and positive changes in behaviour **87%**

Participants on our 10-15 strand reporting an improved relationship with school **64%**



Participants on our 16-25 strand securing positive destinations **76%**

Amount of social media views **199,004**





Reflections & Learning

Demand for both strands of the programme has remained consistently high throughout Phase 6, and a steady flow of nominations in 2025-26 meant that the team met our annual participation target by Q3. Our reach within the most disadvantaged communities is firmly established. Seventy per cent of participants in 2025-26 came from SIMD 1 & 2 areas, a level of representation that was consistently maintained across the whole of Phase 6.

Here, we reflect on key observations, challenges and achievements within each strand.

Support for Young People aged 10-15 with Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)

Background

Participants on this strand often experience high levels of anxiety linked to bullying, unmet needs in school, and complex family circumstances. These challenges can significantly affect their ability to engage with education and wider support.

Key Observations

There has been a noticeable increase in younger participants, particularly those in Primary 7 and early secondary school who are struggling with the transition into larger, less supported environments. Earlier referrals have enabled more preventative support, allowing young people to access help before non-attendance becomes entrenched. This marks a positive shift from earlier phases and strengthens opportunities for successful re-engagement.

Challenges

Many young people present with significant levels of anxiety that exceed the remit of non-clinical services, while access to specialist mental health support remains limited. Ongoing pressures within the home - such as poverty, parental ill health, substance use, and complex household needs - can further undermine participants' ability to engage. At the same time, limited resources, staffing shortages, and inconsistent levels of autism awareness within schools can delay or even

prevent meaningful adjustments and school-adjacent pathways to qualifications. For younger participants, a lack of age-appropriate education or alternative activity options also restricts effective destination planning. Together, these challenges underscore the importance of sustained, targeted intervention.

Helpful Approaches

A flexible approach has proved valuable in navigating differences in local authority processes, highlighting the need for strong relationships with schools, services and families.

Youth Scotland Awards have continued to provide an accessible route to achievement for participants who have been unable to engage with formal qualifications. For many, these represent their first formal recognition, contributing to improved confidence and motivation.

Group-based activities have further strengthened engagement. A monthly Lego Club, alongside seasonal events, has provided safe and structured opportunities for social interaction. These complement one-to-one support and support confidence, routine and peer connection.

Achievements

A key focus is supporting young people to rebuild trust in education. During Phase 6, the outcome two indicator "Participants report improved relations with school" achieved 120% against target. Young people reported feeling better understood by school staff, more confident in communicating their needs, and more able to engage in learning where appropriate adjustments were in place.

For some, this progress resulted in a supported return to school. For others, it included improved attendance, engagement with part-time timetables or alternative provision, and a more positive and realistic relationship with education. Importantly, improved attitudes towards education were evident even where a full return was not appropriate. Where immediate progression was limited, support prioritised wellbeing and ensured appropriate onward connections.

"I am a lot less anxious when I come into school now because I can use ear plugs and other tools."

"I used to have very bad attendance during school and felt more anxious last year. Now, my attendance is slightly better, not good but a big improvement from last year. I also feel less anxious."

"I am less anxious about school, and I feel understood and support at school is better."

"I have been doing good in school, and I think I will keep doing well going into the future."

Encouragingly, parents report that the positive changes have continued to make a lasting difference.

"I wanted to share an update with you and also say a massive thank you. J was officially diagnosed yesterday with autism and ADHD after four years of waiting, so it's been a really significant moment for us. Thinking back to that earlier time, I don't think we would have got here

without your support and guidance. You helped me and J understand things when everything felt very uncertain, and that meant more than I can properly put into words.

I also wanted to share how well he's doing now. Since leaving school, he's much happier and far more at ease in himself. He's reading and writing without fear, and it's been amazing to see him grow in confidence and understand who he is. It feels like a completely different chapter for him.

I just wanted you to know the impact you've had on our journey. It truly has made a lasting difference."

Support for Young People aged 16-25

Background

Traumatic school experiences, alongside negative encounters in some post-school programmes, have left many young people on this strand experiencing high anxiety. They are often isolated and understandably hesitant to engage in new opportunities.

Key Observations

We continue to see the impact of missed or interrupted education, and the prevalent lack of specialist transitions support. Autistic young people, particularly those living in deprived areas, are often left with no or inappropriate support options, or pressured into mainstream training programmes before they are ready.

Challenges

Repeated experiences of systems that fail to accommodate their needs can erode young people's trust – in services and in their own abilities. This often manifests as anxiety, trauma and low self-confidence when they consider their future. For many participants, the idea of a 'positive destination' can initially feel anxiety-inducing or even unachievable. Given that many are already facing multiple barriers linked to poverty and family circumstances, this can further entrench inequality and limit long-term outcomes.

Helpful Approaches

By focusing on the pathway (and who you can become on that journey) rather than the destination itself, we enable young people to truly understand themselves and take ownership of their futures. Establishing trust with the service and their worker comes first on Moving Forward with CashBack, and through this we develop respectful, productive relationships and safe learning environments. Our outcomes this year again reflect a larger focus on wellbeing, training, education and skills development as first steps on this pathway.

Alongside this, we have further strengthened referral pathways with agencies providing support in numeracy, literacy, independent travel and wider life skills, ensuring participants receive rounded, holistic support that equips them for their life journey.

Achievements

With fewer participants feeling ready for employment, our focus has been on supporting young people to move on to the destinations they feel prepared for.

During Phase 6, the Outcome Two indicators – ‘Participants undertaking training/work experience’ and ‘Participants gaining a college/university placement’ – achieved 167% and 119% of their respective targets.

Young people reported that by gaining a deeper understanding of themselves—and the confidence to express who they truly are—they felt better equipped to move forward into new situations with greater assurance.

“Now I know a bit more about how to support myself, and also what support I can get from others.”

“I feel more happy and content.”

“It felt good to work on myself a bit more and feel reconnected with my community. I am attending social and voluntary opportunities again and I am able to stick to my appointments and ask for help.”

“When I was in High School, I was so anxious that I was throwing up every morning, now I’m excited to go to College!”

“I feel I have gained greater self-awareness of my own thought patterns and behaviour, leading me to feel more confident in myself and self-assured. I have greater hope for the future than when I started.”

We have also heard from young people who took part earlier in Phase 6 and have since moved into paid work or volunteering. Many were not ready for voluntary work or employment during their time with us, but by firstly focussing on soft skills then progressing into training or further education that matched their needs, they were later able to take that next step.

“After the programme, I decided to try volunteering as a stepping stone on the way towards paid employment, as it felt like a more manageable progression for me at this time. Without developing a better understanding of myself and having Hannah to help cheer me on, I wouldn’t have had the bravery to try applying for a volunteer position. “

“Being on Moving Forward with CashBack really helped me get to where I am now. I’ve just started a full-time job in IT, which is something I’ve wanted for years but never thought I’d actually manage. When I was on the programme, everything was paced in a way that worked for me. It helped me build myself up bit by bit until I could actually see that getting a job in tech was possible.”

James' Journey

I started Moving Forward with CashBack when I was 14. Before this programme, I was missing out on school and missing out on going out with my friends. I struggled going out places, whenever I was out of the house, I always had the fear of running into someone from school. I could not go into the shops or shopping centres. I was anxious about going to school because I would have to see other people and be around big crowds. I also kept thinking about if people were looking and talking about me.

I have enjoyed working with Olivia and getting help with overcoming my anxiety and understanding autism and more about myself. We worked on different modules together, from understanding autism, setting goals, confidence and assertiveness, a positivity module, and anxiety. I liked that for the anxiety module there were ways not to feel anxious and for understanding autism I could understand more about autism and myself.

"James feels more ready to try things and seems a little bit better dealing with challenges. He has been engaging more with school, and his mental health is better as he doesn't overthink as much."

- James' mum

We have gone on walks through the Forge shopping centre, and I would not have gone in there before. We went for a walk around the Necropolis as well, it was good to get out. I have also been coming out to the library. It was good to try being in a public space that I wasn't used to and I was also able to adjust to the change in locations when the original library we attended closed. We have also sat in a café, getting a drink, it was a challenge to do that at first, but it was good to overcome something that I couldn't really do before.

I decided to go into one of my classes for the first part of the morning and this is something I have never been able to do. I am now going to school three days a week and hope to build up to eventually attending full-time. This was one of my original goals when I started Moving Forward with Cashback. I have also had the opportunity gain a Hi5 award, which showed all the hard work I put into my learning.



Since joining the programme, I feel confident and comfortable going places like the shops or even just out and about and to school. I now only have a wee bit of a fear of running into someone from school. I keep to my own business and don't worry about what they are thinking, I just focus on what I am doing, such as going to the shops and buying something.

I feel a bit better because I can do something now that I couldn't do before. I also now go out with friends when they want to meet up. I felt that I was ready to join a football team and that was a challenge. I went to the football pitches and started going back to the football and practicing.

"Before joining the programme, James was so worried about bumping into people from school when he was out, that he was becoming more and more isolated and anxious. We worked on helping James to learn more about himself and to try out new opportunities out with the home, at a pace that felt safe for him. He's gone from strength to strength. It's been so good to see James start to spend time with his friends again, go back to school and even join a football team."

- Olivia, Engagement Support Coordinator

If any other young people are considering to joining the programme, I would tell them it's a good help and it helped me.



Robert's Journey

Robert is a 22-year-old from North Ayrshire. At his first meeting with Jim, Robert described experiencing significant isolation and a lack of meaningful opportunities to connect with others. He wanted to feel more included and to find ways to use his knowledge and skills productively.

Robert had a keen interest in cycling and environmental issues with a particular passion for birds. This interest provided a valuable starting point for engagement. Quizzes and discussions around Robert's favourite birds enabled Robert and Jim to build a rapport before moving on to discuss strategies that might help Robert prepare for new activity.

It became evident that activity with a practical focus would be most helpful for Robert and so the pair began investigating suitable opportunities within travelling distance of Robert's home, utilising our contacts in the North Ayrshire area. Various leads were investigated, including bike maintenance programmes, conservation projects and animal rescue centres. The opportunity that most appealed to Robert was a conservation volunteer role based at Eglinton Country Park – a location he would regularly cycle to and was very familiar with.

"I've been enjoying Eglinton Park. I feel Moving Forward has provided a good base to explore other possibilities too."
- Robert

A meeting was arranged with the Countryside Ranger at Eglinton, who provided Robert with an overview of the work undertaken by volunteers. Robert was interested to hear of the opportunities to support bird surveys undertaken at the park and was pleased to take up the offer to come along for a taster session. Wellies and waterproofs were the order of the day as Robert got stuck in to assist with

the wetland bird survey that took place just before Christmas. That initial session was enough to encourage Robert to sign up as a volunteer.

Robert reported that he now feels less isolated and more included by being part of a group of volunteers with similar interests. He also noted an improvement in his mental health and believes that the physical activities involved in conservation volunteering will benefit his overall fitness levels.

"It has been a very positive experience for Robert. He has been able to choose himself what he wants to do at his own pace. Communication has been extremely clear and he hasn't had trouble understanding what to expect or where he is in the program. He has found a niche he enjoys in conservation work and is already showing signs of feeling useful and finding the work interesting. He came back last time really happy and buoyed up."
- Robert's mum, Eva



Thank You to Our Youth Forum

A key element that has strengthened the programme in recent years has been our Youth Forum - a steering group made up of young people from both strands of the service, whose insight and feedback have played a vital role in ensuring the programme continues to evolve in line with participants' needs. Their contributions have shaped decision-making, improved the relevance of our activities, and helped us remain responsive to the lived experiences of autistic young people.

With Phase 6 now drawing to a close, and many Youth Forum members moving on to new opportunities, we would like to place on record our sincere gratitude to every young person who has served on the Forum. The Moving Forward with CashBack programme is stronger, more informed, and more impactful because of your input. We wish each of you every success as you move into new chapters.

We are also deeply appreciative that three Youth Forum members have kindly agreed to remain involved for the time being, supporting new participants as they come on board and helping to ensure continuity as we transition into Phase 7.





Outcome 1: Young people are diverted from antisocial, criminal behaviour and involvement with the criminal justice system

Indicators	2025-26 Planned	2025-26 Actual	2023-26 Planned	2023-26 Actual
Young people report that they feel less inclined to participate in antisocial and/or criminal behaviour	52	43	126	91

Autistic people are more likely to be victims of crime rather than perpetrators but as highlighted by the NAS Youth Justice Report (2022) there are certain aspects of autism that might increase the risk of being involved in criminal activity, including social naivety and difficulties around social imagination which mean that some autistic individuals might struggle to understand the social consequences of their actions. These factors are particularly relevant for those residing in communities where crime is more prevalent.

Our approach remains firmly preventative, helping participants reduce the risk of involvement in anti-social or criminal behaviour by equipping them with the skills and opportunities to build positive peer relationships and by facilitating meaningful, positive engagement with Police Scotland.



Participants give feedback on Police Scotland's guidance around stop and search procedures.

Outcome 2: Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability, and employment options (positive destinations)

Indicators	2025-26 Planned	2025-26 Actual	2023-26 Planned	2023-26 Actual
Young people gain an accreditation for a new skill	52	27	126	55
Young people report an improved relationship with school/education	20	22	45	54
Number of participants taking up: Mod Apprenticeship or Employment	8	3	21	10
Number of participants taking up: Training or Work experience	8	15	21	35
Number of participants taking up: College or University placement	8	11	21	25
Number of participants taking up: Volunteering	8	5	21	9
Stakeholders report an increase in young people's skills	-	90%	-	77%

We are delighted to have exceeded targets for the number of participants reporting an improved relationship with school, securing places at college and moving on to further training programmes. As reported last year, most of our participants continue to view employment and even voluntary work to an extent, as longer-term goals, and this is reflected by the lower number of outcomes in these areas.

As children and young people can sometimes find it difficult to see the progress they have made, we continue to gather feedback from other people involved in participants' lives to help measure distance travelled. It is encouraging to see ninety per cent of these 'other stakeholders' reporting an increase in participants' skills levels in the reporting period and seventy-seven per cent recognising improvement over the life of Phase 6.

"I am a lot more positive about school and meeting new people now. If you asked me a year ago, I would never of thought that I would be back in school. Now I am staying for S5 and actually enjoy school."



Accreditation & Positive Destinations Achieved in 2025-26

Participants gaining Accreditation for a New Skill (27)

Hi5 Awards (SCQF Level 2) x 9
Dynamic Youth Awards (SCQF Level 3) x 14
National 4's (SCQF Level 4) x 3
CITB Health, Safety & Environment Test x 1

Participants taking up a College/University placement (11)

NQ Creative Writing within Professional Industries (SCQF Level 5)
NQ Complimentary Therapies (SCQF Level 6)
Access to Humanities/Primary Education (SWAP) (SCQF Level 6)
NC Social Sciences (SCQF Level 6)
NQ Heavy Vehicle Maintenance & Repair (SCQF Level 7)
Access & Progression (SCQF Level 3) x 3
Creative Writing (non SCQF)
Transitions (SCQF Level 4)
BSc Immunology & Microbiology (SCQF Level 9)

Participants taking up a Modern Apprenticeship/Employment (3)

Hotel Receptionist, Glasgow Argyle Hotel (Full time, permanent)
Crew Member, McDonalds (Full time, permanent)

Apprentice Labourer, SB Contracts Ltd (Full time, permanent)

Participants taking up Training/Work Experience (15)

Introduction to Construction course (TIGERS)
Early Years Foundation Apprenticeship (TIGERS)
Celtic FC Foundation Gateway to Health & Opportunity programme
Impact Arts CashBack Hubs programme x 2
Beauty Therapy course at The Hair & Beauty Training Academy
Work placement at The Oaks Veterinary Practice
Work placement at RSBi (furniture manufacture)
NAS Empower Up programme x 4
NAS Reimagining Art programme x 3

Participants taking up Volunteering (5)

Office and Events Volunteer at Celtic Connections Festival
Conservation Volunteer at Eglinton Country Park
Café Assistant at WRVS
Moving Forward Youth Forum x 2

Outcome 3: Young people's health, mental health and wellbeing improves

Indicators	2025-26 Planned	2025-26 Actual	2023-26 Planned	2023-26 Actual
Young people report an increase in feelings against SHANARRI indicators	52	45	126	114
Young people report that their mental health has improved	52	39	126	102
Young people report that their confidence has increased	52	40	126	98
Stakeholders report perceived increases in: SHANARRI indicators, confidence, mental health and wellbeing improvement	-	90%	-	87%

Young people joining Moving Forward with CashBack, particularly those supported through our 10-15 EBSNA strand, often present with significant levels of anxiety. This is frequently linked to previous experiences of misunderstanding, bullying, or unmet needs within school environments.

Against this backdrop, progress against these indicators can be challenging; however, we are encouraged to see that a substantial number of young people report improvements in their wellbeing, mental health and confidence. The high number of positive reports from other stakeholders further reinforces the progress made and highlights the distance travelled by participants.

"I've accepted myself more. I've learned a lot more, before I didn't know anything."

"I am open to hearing about other opportunities now"

"I feel like with the help of this programme I have achieved more than I did in the whole of last year."



Outcome 4: Young people contribute positively to their communities

Indicators	2025-26 Planned	2025-26 Actual	2023-26 Planned	2023-26 Actual
Young people report a heightened sense of belonging to a community	52	39	126	78
Young people report feeling their contribution, links with communities and social interaction are improving	52	39	126	88
Stakeholders perceive that young people's contribution, links and social interaction are improving	-	63%	-	64%

Given the high levels of isolation and anxiety experienced by participants, community engagement can feel overwhelming. In response, we have prioritised creating structured opportunities for participants to connect with peers and build relationships within the autistic community. This approach has supported increased social interaction and contributed to a growing sense of belonging, delivered in a way that feels safe and manageable for those involved.

The lower number of stakeholders recognising progress in this area during the reporting period and across Phase 6 reflects the inherent challenges of achieving community-focused outcomes within the relatively short duration of engagement on the programme.

"It's taught me I can be myself in front of strangers and not feel isolated."

"I can now answer strangers if they ask me a question."

"It's helped me being able to talk and build a relationship with other people."



Outcome 5: Young people build personal skills, resilience, benefit from strengthened support networks and reduce risk taking behaviour

Indicators	2025-26 Planned	2025-26 Actual	2023-26 Planned	2023-26 Actual
Young people report feeling more resilient	52	38	126	96
Young people report positive, supportive networks	52	38	126	108
Young people report positive changes in their behaviour	52	39	126	101
Stakeholders report perceived increases in resilience, positive support networks and positive changes in the behaviour of participants	-	86%	-	87%

In last year's report, we explained how feedback from our Youth Forum, programme participants, and autistic colleagues helped us reframe the way we ask young people about improvements in their resilience - a concept many find difficult to reflect on. Building on those changes, we have also been able over the past twelve months to incorporate resilience resources shared by Change Mental Health. These combined approaches have contributed to a noticeable increase in the number of young people reporting improved resilience compared with the first year of Phase 6.

Alongside the support offered by the team, the chance to form connections and friendship networks with peers continues to provide many participants with a strong sense of reassurance. These relationships often contribute to positive shifts in confidence and behaviour over time.

"I liked the modules and the different strategies to help calm down."

"I now know it's okay not to do something if I don't want to do it."

"Even though things can be hard for me, I am coping better than before."

Participant Profile

In response to feedback received from participants, we continue to restrict the collection of protected characteristic data to those areas listed below.

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	Totals
Gender				
Female	14	27	25	66
Male	30	33	32	95
Non-Binary	4	0	3	7
Prefer Not to Say	2	0	0	2
Age				
10-15	25	29	30	84
16-18	8	20	14	42
19-24	17	11	16	44
SIMD area:				
0-20%	33	44	42	119
20-30%	5	9	5	19
30-40%	6	1	4	11
40-50%	2	2	6	10
50-100%	4	4	3	11
Ethnicity:				
African Scottish	1	0	0	1
African Polish	1	0	0	1
British Iranian	0	0	1	1
British Filipino	0	1	0	1
Chinese	1	0	0	1
Kurdish	0	1	0	1
Pakistani Scottish	0	1	1	2
Polish	0	0	2	2
Prefer Not to Say	1	0	0	1
White Other	0	0	1	1
White Scottish	46	57	55	158
Disability:				
Autism	50	60	60	170

Sixteen was once again the average age of participants in 2025-26. We are delighted to see the higher number of girls and young women accessing the programme continue in 2025-26, with representation across Phase 6 now approaching forty per cent.

The programme continues to reach children and young people in greatest need, with 70% of participants joining us in 2025-26 coming from communities within the 20% most deprived areas on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). This is consistent with SIMD 1&2 participation across 2023-26.

Financial Performance

The table summarises our 2025-26 grant request, actual spend, variances, and cumulative Phase 6 totals, with the main variances outlined below.

Budget Line	2025-26 Grant Request	2025-26 Actual Spend	2025-26 Variance	2023-26 Grant Request	2023-26 Spend	2023-26 Variance
Staff Costs	204,932	207,767	- 2,835	548,261	569,232	-20,971
Staff Training & Recruitment	900	1,076	- 176	6,281	3,920	2,361
Staffing Project Delivery Costs sub-total	205,832	208,843	-3,011	554,542	573,152	-18,610
Project Delivery: Venues, Events & Consumables	5,160	2,019	3,141	25,405	15,143	10,262
Client Activities & Travel	8,477	8,254	223	22,880	18,025	4,855
Staff Travel inc. Subsistence	4,000	3,888	112	11,380	9,608	1,772
Non-Staffing Project Delivery Costs sub-total	17,637	14,161	3,476	59,665	42,776	16,889
IT Equipment	-	-	-	1,279	879	400
Capital Expenditure sub-total	-	-	-	1,279	879	400
Media & Marketing	6,336	6,386	- 50	17,550	17,895	-345
Organisational Costs	11,928	11,928	-	41,937	39,856	2,081
Management & Marketing sub-total	18,264	18,314	-50	59,487	57,751	1,736
Total Expenditure	241,733	241,318	415	674,973	674,558	415

Staff Costs

In agreement with our Fund Manager, we utilised the 2023-25 underspend to increase both Engagement Support Coordinators to full-time hours from the outset of 2025-26. The National Autistic Society subsequently implemented a pay award for all staff in Q3 of 2025-26. These combined factors resulted in an agreed overspend of £20,971 across Phase 6.

Staff Training & Recruitment

We recorded a small overspend of £176 on Staff Training in 2025-26. However, due to reduced



recruitment needs across Phase 6 and the team's use of free training opportunities, we ended the phase with an overall underspend of £2,361.

Project Delivery: Venues, Events & Consumables

The dedicated meeting space referenced in previous reports continues to provide an ideal delivery environment while generating significant savings against our original projections. This contributed to an underspend of £3,141 in 2025-26 and an underspend of £10,262 across Phase 6.

Client Activities & Travel

As noted in our previous annual report, participant-requested activities during the 2024-25 period were significantly lower in cost than in other years, contributing to an underspend of £4,855 across Phase 6.

Taken together with other smaller variances, these movements resulted in an overall variance of £415 for 2025-26 in Phase 6 overall.

Local Authority Participation & Expenditure Summary

Local Authority	No. of Young People 2025-26	Proportional Spend 2025-26	No. of Young People 2023-26	Proportional Spend 2023-26
East Ayrshire	1	£4,022	2	£8,173
East Dunbartonshire	1	£4,022	2	£8,173
Glasgow	42	£168,923	117	£465,446
North Ayrshire	2	£8,044	3	£12,195
North Lanarkshire	9	£36,198	27	£105,464
Renfrewshire	0	£0	10	£23,738
South Lanarkshire	4	£16,087	6	£39,825
West Dunbartonshire	1	£4,022	3	£11,544
Project Total	60	£241,318	170	£674,558

Social Media Reach

Utilising social media to raise awareness of the impact of our CashBack-funded work remains a priority for the team. To support this, positive messages about the programme were shared regularly across our social media channels, including Facebook, Instagram and X. At the beginning of 2026, the National Autistic Society made the decision to cease posting on X, as that platform was no longer considered to align with our values of inclusivity and empowerment. As a result, Moving Forward with CashBack content is now shared via Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

The content shared focused largely on activities enjoyed and progress made by participants, as well as the team's engagement with other agencies that can provide additional support to young people participating in the programme.

We are pleased to report a sixteen percent growth in reach across 2025-26 with views increasing from 67,438 in the previous year to 78,543. Over the course of Phase 6 delivery, we are just short of two hundred thousand views!



Partnership Working

A key strength of the CashBack for Communities programme is the breadth of opportunities within the portfolio, offering young people access to a wide and diverse range of activities and supports. We continue to utilise the programmes offered by other CashBack partners for the benefit of our participants.

Over the last twelve months, Impact Arts CashBack Hubs and Celtic FC Foundations Gateway to Health & Opportunity programme have both been popular options for our participants. As noted in an earlier section of this report, Youth Scotland's Hi5 and Dynamic Youth Awards have continued to provide an accessible route to accreditation for participants.

We welcomed the opportunity to deliver sessions for fellow CashBack partners over the year. In Q3, colleagues from our 16-25 strand led a Sharing & Learning session for partners, and in Q4 our 10-15 strand team delivered a session for Scottish Rugby coaches working within school-based programmes. These sessions helped deepen understanding of the experiences of autistic young people and shared practical approaches to support participation in programme activities.

"The workshop was hugely beneficial for our staff and Development Officers. The tailored, practical guidance has strengthened our understanding of how to better support autistic and neurodiverse young people across our rugby programmes."

- Sama'an Akel, Partnerships & Projects Development Officer, Scottish Rugby

Across the reporting period, the team have also welcomed opportunities to share their expertise with wider organisations, presenting at the Self Harm Network Scotland conference and at the Hyndland Learning Community's professional conference for teachers and education professionals.

Contribution to Scottish Government Policy

The Fair Work Framework

National Autistic Society Scotland is not an accredited Real Living Wage employer but does align to the Real Living Wage rate as a minimum across the organisation. Colleagues who do not wish to work on a permanent contractual basis are offered bank agreements; however, these are not forced on anyone. The charity opposes the use of fire and rehire practice. We manage our gender pay gap, putting in place recommendations on areas that we can improve on, and we offer flexible and family friendly working practices for all colleagues from day one of their employment. We also have a dedicated learning and development team to support staff development.

Moving Forward with CashBack participants who express interest in moving into paid employment are assisted through each stage of the application process. The team carefully screen vacancies, providing participants with advice and guidance and drawing attention to any red flags in relation to employer practices and terms and conditions offered.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

In keeping with our commitment to uphold the principles of the UNCRC, our existing Children's Rights & Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) was reviewed by our Youth Forum and updated in May 2026 to reflect their suggestions. The CRWIA is available to view on our webpage (see link below).

[Moving Forward with CashBack](#)

All members of the Moving Forward team have completed the Scottish Government's "Introduction to Children's Rights" training tool.

Best Start, Bright Futures: The Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, 2022-26

We contribute to the Scottish Government's child poverty delivery plan by supporting autistic children and young people from disadvantaged communities. We work to improve wellbeing, support re-engagement with education, and raise attainment, helping to reduce the poverty-related attainment gap. For those who have left school and are not engaged in positive activity, we build confidence and resilience to support successful transitions into positive destinations, in line with the plan's post-school transitions focus.

We also continue to support participants to access all available financial assistance, including Adult Disability Payment, the ILF Scotland Transition Fund, concessionary travel cards for reduced rail travel where this is the individual's preferred mode of transport, and CEA cards, which enable a companion to attend participating cinemas at no additional cost.

Scotland's 2018-2032 Climate Change Action Plan

National Autistic Society Scotland remains fully committed to positive climate action and issues guidance across its services and activities to promote environmental sustainability.

The Moving Forward with CashBack team demonstrate their commitment to positive climate action by making use of digital technology wherever possible. Although not entirely paper free as some participants prefer traditional resources, our service is administered using entirely paperless processes. This saves trees and the energy that would be used converting those trees into paper and transporting paper products.

Hybrid working and Microsoft Teams significantly reduce the amount of travel undertaken by the team, lessening the carbon emissions that would have been generated by daily commutes and travel to meetings. Where travel is necessary, team members are encouraged to walk or use public transport as far as feasible.

We continue to support children and young people to develop lasting environmental awareness through engagement with our external partners. Activities undertaken this year have included visits to the Glasgow Recycling and Renewable Energy Centre and hands-on conservation tasks delivered in partnership with The Conservation Volunteers. These experiences provide participants with a practical insight into sustainability and help embed a deeper understanding of environmental responsibility.





Next Steps

The Moving Forward team are excited to be part of the next stage of CashBack for Communities, and we see Phase 7 as a powerful opportunity to deepen the impact we can make. The programme's focus on safe spaces, meaningful activities, and holistic support aligns closely with what autistic young people tell us they need most. Creating environments where they feel secure, understood, and free to explore their interests is essential for reducing isolation, building confidence, and opening up positive pathways.

We also welcome CashBack's recognition that supporting autistic young people means supporting the people around them too. Extending support to families and caregivers helps ensure that progress is sustainable and shared. We believe the Phase 7 framework will help us further strengthen our wrap-around approach, ensuring that the most vulnerable young people – and those who care for them – have access to the right tools, relationships, and opportunities to thrive.

Working with our Youth Forum, we have taken the opportunity to refresh resources in preparation for the commencement of Phase 7 and will begin onboarding participants from the early stages of Q1.

We would like to close this report by thanking the Scottish Government's CashBack for Communities programme for providing the means to deliver a service that truly supports disadvantaged autistic young people, and the Inspiring Scotland team for their ongoing guidance and encouragement.

