



National
Autistic
Society



**Creating a society that
works for autistic people**

National Autistic Society Impact Report 25/26
Your support has changed lives

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A message from our Chief Executive

This year, we have continued to provide vital support, advice and guidance whilst making meaningful progress towards our mission of creating a society that works for autistic people and their families.

Together, we've reached more people than ever before. **Over 1.4 million people accessed our advice, guidance and support this year, finding trusted information and connection** when it mattered most. Across our services and programmes, **we've seen individuals grow in confidence, independence and wellbeing**, whether through our community support, schools or specialist services. We have also continued to drive change across wider society: **challenging misinformation and increasingly negative narratives about autism, running a public awareness campaign, shaping policy and working with professionals and organisations to improve understanding of autism across society.**

A heartfelt thank you

None of this would be possible without our supporters and fundraisers, whose generosity enables us to reach more people and widen our impact. I am equally grateful to our incredible staff, volunteers and partners, whose dedication makes our work a reality every day. Above all, we thank the autistic people and families we support, for trusting us, for sharing your stories and for helping us ensure that lived experience remains at the heart of everything we do.

It's been a year that has shown us just how urgent our mission remains, particularly in the face of persistent and harmful misinformation about autism. While we are proud of what we've achieved, we know there is much more to do. Our new Vision to Reality strategy for 2026-2030 was updated to respond to these challenges: the need for timely diagnosis, better mental health support, improved access to appropriate education and sustainable employment and a stronger challenge to negative public attitudes and misinformation.

As we move through 2026 and beyond, our focus is clear: to be more targeted, responsive and impactful than ever before. While I am stepping down from my role as Chief Executive, I leave with a profound sense of pride in what we've achieved together and confidence that the charity is stable, resilient and in capable hands. Together, we will keep working towards a society where autistic people are understood, accepted and able to thrive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Caroline Stevens'.

**Caroline Stevens,
Chief Executive**

Your support in numbers

In total, you raised more than

£8.2 million

to help support our vital work.

In World Autism
Acceptance Month,
you raised an amazing

£415,000

Mattel's Thomas
and Friends 80th
anniversary auction
raised a staggering

£405,948

7,372

of you took part
in one of our virtual
challenges, raising over

£1 million

28,000

of you signed our
Truth: It Matters letter
against unscientific
and harmful claims
about paracetamol
causing autism.

16,516

of you helped shape
our work by being
dedicated members
of the National
Autistic Society.

**1.5 million
people**

watched our
*It's How You
Show Up* film.

Over

532,000

miles were covered in
total by our supporters!
That's enough miles
to travel around
the world over
20 times!

The power of your support

“

“I came to find information about autism because I think I might be autistic. I was so overwhelmed with the positive and inclusive view of autism. It was such a reassurance after seeing the way autism tends to be portrayed (ie like it’s a problem).”

Website visitor

“The techniques and information we’ve covered have been life-changing.”

Parent on our EarlyBird Plus programme

“The forum helped me find a job that does not damage me mentally. It helped me find like-minded people who share my interests and passions and validated my experience of being profoundly different.”

Online Community user

“... the most important thing to us as a family is that our son is listened to and looked after as we would look after him. It is done very well at the NAS.”

Parent of a person we support at one of our adult day centres

“For a while, I did feel very alone. I felt like no one in the world can understand my brain. I came here and suddenly, it’s like, oh, I have found my people.”

Pupil at Robert Ogden School

“The guidance, community and expertise we’ve gained through the National Autistic Society has been invaluable to our family.”

Supporters who are Circle of Friends members

“I really enjoyed the group, which is very odd for me, but I felt like I could just be myself, and people got me. I can’t tell you how happy it made me.”

Branch member

”



Impact:

Driving awareness and changing society

Challenging misinformation

At the National Autistic Society, we have a mission to help build a better society for autistic people and their families to thrive in. Part of this is challenging misinformation and negative narratives about autism. Here are some examples from the last year.

Truth. It Matters campaign

When US President, Donald Trump, announced unscientific and harmful claims about paracetamol causing autism, we launched a rapid-response campaign within 24 hours. Our press statement featured in 500 items of coverage, including 90 news bulletins on national and regional radio stations, reaching 118m people across print/broadcast and 900m+ online monthly unique visitors. Our charity was interviewed on GMTV, BBC Lunchtime News, ITN Evening News and Sky News.

Our *Truth. It Matters* campaign, started following harmful misinformation from President Trump, reached more than **900 million** people across social media.

Almost 5,000 campaigners asked their MP to say no to benefits cuts.

1.5 million people watched our *It's How You Show Up* film, increasing public understanding of autism and how to support autistic people.

Our SEND reforms survey gathered **over 1,000** responses, and we supported autistic people and families to share their hopes and fears about the reforms.

We asked campaigners to sign an open letter:

“Misinformation and stigma makes life unnecessarily hard for autistic people and their families. Every time we have to spend time unpicking and debunking another baseless claim about autism, that’s less time to focus on the reality.”

Within 48 hours, almost 20,000 people signed the open letter.

Calling out negative narratives

Our Media team continued to challenge misinformation and negative narratives in the media throughout the year. We provided 26 media comments about misinformation, which reached **167.6 million people**.

Across our social media channels, there were **60 published posts** in the year calling out misinformation and negative narratives about autism. These posts had a total of **5,799,844 Impressions**, **335,213 engagements** and **18,593 link clicks**.

Building public understanding

Our public awareness campaign, *It’s How You Show Up*, was launched in April 2025.

The campaign centred around a powerful film starring a real-life autistic father, Chris and his autistic daughter Penny and her mum Katie. It received an overwhelmingly positive response:

“This short video from the NAS powerfully illustrates why ‘showing up’ for autistic people truly matters.”

Comment on social media



Our key campaign message was:

“For each autistic person you interact with, even the simplest day-to-day gestures of support can make a huge difference. How you take little steps to understand our experiences. How you make time for us to process and space for us to regulate. Shift your expectations of us and make it clear that that’s okay. Advocate for us in the workplace and the world, step by step. It’s the way the cumulative effect of these interactions can transform our capacity to move through what can be a uniquely challenging life. Because for every autistic person... It’s How You Show Up.”

Watch our campaign film

Total film views in April 2025 were over **1.5 million**. There were more than **3.3 million impressions** across social media.

We also ran adverts on billboards nationwide, each featuring real-life stories of moments when someone had showed up for an autistic person. These received **over 11 million impressions**, while the digital paid element received a similar number online.

Both drove more than **16,000 visits** to the web page, resulting in almost **1,000 pledges** from people vowing to show up for autistic people in their lives.

I will show up for autistic people by:

739 I want to introduce autism...

I want to introduce autism awareness day to my primary school annually

Lydia

#ShowUpAtWork #ShowUpAtSchool #ShowUpAllTheTime

7 likes

0 shares

712 I will continue to share my own...

I will continue to share my own lived experience as an autistic person and help others at work through our neurodiversity peer circle.

Nick

#ShowUpAtWork #ShowUpAllTheTime

4 likes

0 shares

737 Asking people how they like to...

Asking people how they like to communicate.

Bob

#ShowUpAllTheTime

4 likes

0 shares

Sharing your voices to shape policy

Our charity helps shape policy development at a national level and ensures that your voices are heard in the process. Here are our impacts:

Protect our Benefits

In April 2025, the Government announced their *Welfare Bill*, including big cuts to eligibility criteria for the disability benefit, PIP. The Government's own analysis estimated the cuts would push 250,000 people – including 50,000 children – into poverty. Almost 5,000 of our campaigners joined the sector-wide campaign and asked their MP to say no to the cuts. Together, we forced the Government to remove the most harmful proposals and commit to a review of PIP that is co-produced with disabled people.

Changing mental health law

We have campaigned for years to change the definition of autism in the *Mental Health Act* to stop autistic people being inappropriately detained in mental health hospitals without a co-occurring mental health condition. In December 2025, the *Mental Health Bill* finally passed, a huge win and a vital step to ending the detention of thousands of autistic people in inappropriate settings.

Forgotten Voices campaign

We continued to campaign to improve services for autistic people with high support needs and their families. This resulted in respite becoming one of the three key priority issues for the Northern Ireland Assembly Health Committee. It was also identified as a key area for scrutiny within the Autism Reviewer's first annual report. There have been some small changes to respite and residential care in terms of a small number of additional beds becoming operational. However, much remains to be done, and we continue our work in this area.

Let's Get SEND Right

In February 2026, the Government published its long-awaited *Schools White Paper*, with proposals to reform SEND support in schools. These reforms are a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make a real difference for autistic children. Prior to this, through coalition work with the Disabled Children's Partnership, we secured a vital campaign win – a commitment from the Department for Education not to scrap EHCPs entirely.

Our campaign spotlights the experiences of autistic people and their families, and what they really need from the education system. Our consultation guide and surveys gathered over 1,000 responses and supported autistic people to share their hopes and fears about the reforms. We continue to work closely with MPs and the Schools Minister to share our concerns and make sure any reform will truly support autistic pupils.

Eden-Rose's story



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**“We’re not asking for much;
just the right to be happy
and learn at school.”**

Eden-Rose, who told her story as
part of our *Let’s Get SEND Right*
campaign

”



Impact:

Improving lives with advice, support and social connection

In total, we supported over **1,486,000 people** to access information, advice and guidance between April 2025 and March 2026.

We are ensuring that autistic people and families can access the right help, advice and information, when they need it - whether online, by phone or in their local community. Our advice and guidance increases people's understanding of autism, builds confidence across our community and helps people to take their next steps independently.

Advice and guidance

We provide advice and guidance on our website and across resources that helps autistic people and their families to understand autism, the support available and how to navigate through the challenges across society. All our work is underpinned by co-production with autistic people and our community. We ensure our advice and guidance is grounded in robust evidence - lived experience, research and practice.

In 2025-2026:

819,200 people visited our [Advice and Guidance](#) web pages.

2,690 people received help through our direct enquiry and signposting service.

12,860 people received free social care advice and guidance through [AccessAva](#) and our partnership with Access Social Care.

“The information helped me to understand a bit more about what autism is. I was just diagnosed with the condition and feel very overwhelmed, so this really has helped.”

Website visitor



Online Community

Our Online Community is a place where autistic people and their families come together to connect, support each other and share experiences.

In 2025-2026:

489,800 people engaged with our [Online Community](#).

Over half (61%) of users said that the Online Community helps to reduce their social isolation. **67% report** that it has played a critical role in helping them connect with others who have similar experiences.

“Helps me produce strategies for specific upcoming problems or challenges by hearing what others have done in the past.”

Online Community user



Parent to Parent

Our Parent to Parent Service provides emotional support to parents and carers of autistic children/grown-up children. The service is provided by trained volunteers with personal experience as the parent of an autistic child or adult.

In 2025-26:

688 parents received support from our Parent to Parent Emotional Support Helpline.

Parents said the helpline felt unhurried, giving them time to speak in detail about their circumstances and difficulties. They described our volunteers as “genuine” and “empathetic”, and the conversations they had helped parents to feel less isolated (**86%**).

"I now feel that perhaps I am not the failure I thought I was, and I feel more positive about finding ways to help and support my son."

Parent to Parent caller



Autism Services Directory

In 2025-2026, our Autism Service Directory grew, with more services, which meet our strict terms of inclusion, listed across the UK to help autistic people and families to find support in their area. It is now the most popular section of our website.

In 2025-26:

161,400 people used our [Autism Services Directory](#) to access over **532,000 services**.

Our programmes

Our support programmes in Scotland and Northern Ireland help to enhance the wellbeing of participants, increase confidence and reduce social isolation.

Moving Forward

60 people were supported through our Moving Forward programme in Scotland, funded by Cashback for Communities. This is a highly bespoke programme for autistic young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The programme supports autistic young people aged 10-25 who are facing barriers such as experiencing Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA), disengagement from education or a lack of access to positive opportunities.

Through a nurturing approach, Moving Forward creates safe spaces where autistic young people can develop skills, explore opportunities and build meaningful connections.

James's journey



“

“I started Moving Forward when I was 14 because I was missing out on school and on going out with my friends. Whenever I was out of the house, I always had the fear of running into someone from school. I was anxious about going to school because I would have to see other people and be around big crowds.

Olivia from Moving Forward helped me with overcoming my anxiety. We worked on understanding autism, setting goals, confidence and assertiveness, ways not to feel anxious. We went on walks through

the local shopping centre and sat in a café, getting a drink. It was a challenge to do that, but it was good to overcome something that I couldn't really do before.

I am now going to school three days a week and hope to build up to eventually attending full-time.

Since joining the programme, I feel confident and comfortable going out and about and to school. I also go out with friends, and I've gone back to football.”

”

What's Next?

We supported 131 adults through our What's Next? programme in Scotland, which provides support before and after receiving an autism diagnosis:

91% of participants said that What's Next? has **improved their understanding of autism.**

79% said participation has **improved their wellbeing.**

The average self-rating score for a participant's **confidence in advocating for their needs as an autistic adult across a variety of settings** increased from **2.2 to 3.1 (out of 5).**

Comfort levels to discuss their autism with family and friends rose on average from **2.7 to 3.4.**

"I've gained an increased understanding of myself and autism, validation, some confidence to seek more support and information going forward. A huge thank you to the team! It's been so valuable."

What's Next? participant



Skills for Life

Skills for Life is a 12-week programme for young people aged 10-17 in Northern Ireland. It focuses on building self-esteem, anxiety management, personal hygiene, managing household chores, money management, travel training, internet safety and social skills. The programme helps to reduce stress and anxiety, improves wellbeing and builds social connections among its participants.

Nathan's story



Nathan joined our Skills for Life programme, coming in with much trepidation and not sure if it would be for him. From the start, Nathan tried everything with enthusiasm. He completed the cookery programme on a high with new recipes to share and cook for his family. He left us as a much more confident young man. His mum Derwyn also completed our Teen Life parent training.

When he turned 18, Nathan volunteered at our 20-year anniversary ball, became a member of our adult steering group and had the pleasure of chatting with The Duchess of Edinburgh at the official opening of our new Randalstown Centre.

We recently supported Nathan on our adult mentoring programme. As a result, he secured a volunteering position at a local community farm. It has been a delight to watch Nathan thrive.

A new autism centre in Northern Ireland

Our state-of-the-art Autism Centre in Randalstown, Northern Ireland, was made possible through the generous support of our philanthropists, trusts and statutory funders, to provide day services for autistic adults with high-support and complex needs. Facilities include an immersive suite, enabling autistic people to safely practise common scenarios such as supermarket visits and having haircuts. Likewise, the sensory suite, outdoor and garden areas, life-skills rooms and gyms are all designed to foster independence, confidence and wellbeing.

Have a look round at [**NAS NI Randalstown**](#)



Impact: **Supporting autistic** **people every day**

Our adult support services, schools and diagnostic centre are improving the lives of autistic people every single day. In our services and schools, we help autistic people to live their best lives and achieve their potential. Our diagnostic centre offers specialist autism assessments with experienced clinicians and clear guidance throughout the process.

Services

We provide residential and supported living services and centres for autistic adults. In 2025-26, 485 people were supported through 11 day services, 25 residential care services, 25 supported living services and six outreach services. We offer person-centred care, designed to enable people to live the life they choose.

In our services, we have supported greater independence and confidence. Across our programmes, people have developed the confidence to do more for themselves and engage more fully in their communities. For example, individuals who previously struggled to go out independently are now travelling, joining local groups and building social connections.

485

autistic adults
were supported
in our specialist
day, residential,
supported living and
outreach services.

394

autistic students
benefited from
specialist education
in our four schools.

178

people underwent
a comprehensive
assessment through
our Diagnostic and
Assessment Service.

Joseph's story



Joseph lives at one of our residential homes. Since moving in two years ago, Joseph has learned to cook and clean his room, as well as plan his day with his support worker. He has become more independent and enjoys visits from his family and weekly trips on the bus for a cake at his local café.

Schools

The staff at our schools take a thoughtful, holistic approach to support pupils. Through bespoke curricula and therapy provision, pupils develop confidence, resilience and independence. It is our vision to give our young people the best possible opportunity to reach their full potential.

In 2025-26:

Our schools supported over **394 young people** and achieved sector-leading attendance of **over 92%**.

Albie's story



“

“We went from a child that was only attending a mainstream an hour a day to we haven't had a day off from school. We are happy. It's changed our whole dynamic of family life because I'm a mum now. I'm not a crusader.

The main thing is that Albie is a very bright boy. He gets it, but he needs it delivering in a different way. Presenting in a different way. And they're just able to do that.

Now, he's buoyant coming into school. And I honestly think it is his favourite place to be. It has changed our family. It has changed our lives.”

Annie, Mum to Albie who attends one of our schools

”

Diagnosis

We provide exceptional autism diagnostic services for children, young people and adults, delivered by highly specialist clinicians.

In 2025-26, the clinical team responded to over 900 people who were seeking a neurodevelopmental assessment for themselves or a relative to provide clarification around diagnosis of autism and/or related conditions.

256 people and their families went on to receive a clinical service:

178 people underwent a comprehensive neurodevelopmental assessment and post-diagnosis support through our Diagnostic and Assessment Service.

55 people accessed the clinical consultation service to explore their diagnostic and health-related needs through the Autism Support Plus project, where we provide support to partner organisations.

25 people and their families accessed a full neurodevelopmental assessment through our partner services.

"I know she was very nervous and apprehensive, but the professionalism and empathy shown by the team, along with a very calm, quiet and relaxing environment, made her feel very comfortable and supported."

Anonymous





Impact:

Building stronger communities – for now and the future

Branches and volunteers

Our vibrant network of volunteer-led branches stretches across the UK, providing vital local support and activities for people within their communities. More than **700 dedicated volunteers** ran the branch network over 2025-26, holding more than **230 events** benefiting more than **8,000 people**.

“I’ve been playing D&D [Dungeons and Dragons] with the NAS for over six years, and I can confirm that it’s extremely fun and great for making friends, particularly since it’s difficult making friends in other environments for me. I highly recommend joining and having a go because even if it seems daunting, you might end up loving it.”

Branch member

“I really enjoyed the group, which is very odd for me, but I felt like I could just be myself, and people got me. I can’t tell you how happy it made me.”

Branch member

8,000

people found community and support at our local branch events, run by more than 700 dedicated volunteers.

440

autistic adults benefited from peer support groups in Wales.

Meet Emma from our Surrey Branch



We're proud that Emma Whitfield from our Surrey Branch was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) as part of the King's Birthday Honours.

Emma has volunteered for our Surrey Branch since 2004 and was Chair from 2011 to 2017. She has been involved in lots of different things, not least editing the branch newsletter. This vital source of local news includes details of upcoming activities and events, along with information specifically for autistic people and their families.

Emma said:

"When my son was diagnosed as autistic just after his third birthday, I didn't know where to turn - I didn't know anyone else with an autistic child. The paediatrician gave me the contact details for Sara Truman at the Surrey Branch and after attending my first meeting, I knew I had found my 'tribe'.

"Being part of the committee has given me far more than I've put in: we're a very supportive, hard-working and close-knit group and I've been able to meet so many families and professionals because of being part of it."

Sarah Morgan, Branch and Volunteering Manager, said:

"For more than 20 years, Emma has played a key role in supporting autistic people and their families across Surrey. We are incredibly proud of Emma, the Surrey Branch and all the volunteers who continue to make such a positive difference."

Peer support in Wales

We have helped establish peer support groups across Wales, offering autistic adults the chance to attend a mix of social activities and settings to help reduce social isolation. Groups are led by volunteers who may be autistic themselves or have an autistic family member or other close connection to autism.

440 autistic adults have benefited from the programme this year. Our evaluation showed that 77% of respondents said they had increased their social networks and made friends, with 68% saying that the groups had helped improve mental health and wellbeing.

Volunteers say that supporting groups has given them a sense of purpose, as well as improved confidence, social skills and mental health.



"The main benefit is being able to socialise together. Together, we are getting a better understanding of our autistic traits. We are aware of each other's needs. It is very inclusive. It is so important to have peer support groups."

Group member

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"It gives me a sense of purpose. I have not felt I've had a sense of purpose for a long time, and this puts me on that track of being able to help people and give them the means to, at least socially, stand on their own two feet."

Peer group volunteer

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Impact:

Training that builds understanding, access and inclusion

National Autistic Society: Learn supports organisations, professionals and family members to develop their knowledge about autism. This improves the experiences of autistic and neurodivergent people in education, healthcare, social care and employment and at home.

In 2025-26:

Over 11,000 delegates were trained to better understand autism through our training, consultancy and licensed user programmes.

99%+ of participants reported positive experiences and would recommend the training to others.

We refreshed and expanded our professional training offer during the year, including updated EarlyBird, EarlyBird Plus, Essential Autism and Autism and SPELL programmes, supporting professionals and parents to apply evidence-based practice to support autistic people in real world settings. From the previous year, the number of families supported by our EarlyBird, EarlyBird Plus and Teen Life programme increased from **3,522 to 4,176**. Programmes delivered increased from **594 to 663**.

99%+ families who attended would recommend these programmes to other families.

"It's not an understatement to say the techniques and information we've covered over these last few weeks have been life-changing."

Parent - EarlyBird Plus



Training education professionals

The Neuroinclusive Education Network (formerly The Autism Education Trust) trained **54,672 education professionals**.

“The videos of the children talking about their own experiences were helpful and showed the wide range of needs and broke some of the myths relating to autistic people.”

Delegate

“I have been teaching for more than 15 years, and I learnt lots of new strategies.”

Delegate



Accreditation – recognising and rewarding good autism practice

122 organisations achieved Autism Accreditation during the year, with 96.8% of services reporting a positive impact from the process.

Our refreshed Neuroinclusive Access Award (formerly the Autism Friendly Award) supported large-scale accessibility improvements, including on Great Western Railway.

The train operator has created several autism-friendly products to help autistic people travel by train. These include video station tours to help people navigate stations before arrival; sensory packs to make travel more comfortable and 'Try a train' events, which support individuals and groups in developing confidence when travelling.

"It's a great programme that benefits both staff knowledge and customer support. It challenges you to consider a range of aspects to make your business more accessible for autistic people."

Great Western Railway

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Brodie and his mum Hayley

Brodie, 11, who has benefited from GWR's autism-friendly initiatives



Get in touch

There are so many ways you can help us continue to make a difference to autistic people and their families. Whether you choose to take part in an event, fundraise for us, make a donation or leave a gift in your will – your support, however big or small, is helping to create a society that works for autistic people.

Do get in touch if you'd like to find out more how you can help further, we'd love to hear from you. To make a one-off or regular gift, please visit autism.org.uk/donate or email supportercare@nas.org.uk

If you would like to discuss making a major gift, please email philanthropy@nas.org.uk

The generosity of those who leave a legacy gift helps us continue our vital work whilst securing the long-term sustainability of our mission, ensuring we can continue creating positive change well into the future. If you are thinking about leaving a gift in your will, please visit autism.org.uk/will or email legacyteam@nas.org.uk

For corporate partnerships, such as employee fundraising and engagement, commercial opportunities, one-off events and campaigns, or to introduce payroll giving, please contact corporate.partnerships@nas.org.uk

To take part in one of our charity fundraising events, please visit autism.org.uk/raisemoney





**On behalf of everyone we support, thank you.
Together, we are creating a society that works
for autistic people.**

autism.org.uk

The National Autistic Society is a charity registered in England and Wales (269425) and in Scotland (SC039427) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England (No.1205298), registered office 2nd Floor, Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH.