

News and Views

From the National Autistic Society
Scotland and our volunteers

Winter 2026

NAS Scotland launches 'Act Now for Autistic Rights' campaign

We are very excited to launch our 'Act Now for Autistic Rights' campaign, ahead of the Scottish Parliament election in May! This calls for the next Scottish Government to introduce the Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence (LDAN) Bill to parliament as soon as possible.

Our campaign is split into four key areas: diagnosis and support; accessible healthcare; support in schools; and inclusive communities. Across these areas, the LDAN Bill can play a transformative role by introducing national and local plans to tackle waiting lists, introducing mandatory training in healthcare and education so autistic people's needs are identified and recognised early, and by giving much-needed accountability to the system and

in addressing the gap between the level of support autistic people should have, and that which they receive.

Our network of branches, volunteers and autistic people and families will play a vital role in the campaign and there will be lots of opportunities to get involved, from hosting branch hustings to making your

voices heard on social media in calling for election candidates and party leaders to Act Now for Autistic Rights.

If you would like to read our manifesto or view our campaign videos, please visit our Act Now for Autistic Rights campaign webpage, and be sure to sign up for campaign updates.



Act Now for Autistic Rights campaign logo

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FROM OUR EDITOR

A diagnosis means a lot.

Getting the diagnosis of autism can be a blessing, especially in childhood, where it can affect one's formal education. A university degree could be at stake. I am proof of that (graduated in 2012). However, many people are waiting month or even years for that life-changing diagnosis. And that delay can mean years of trauma, abandonment, discrimination, ignorance, and bullying.

This is where the Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill comes in and why we have to campaign hard for it. With it, we can lift up more autistic people than ever... to university, maybe?

Gordon Wallace
Editor



Gordon's illustration of waiting for a consultation

REIMAGINING ART PROJECT RETURNS

We're excited to announce that the *Reimagining Art* project will return in 2026! This creative initiative supports autistic young people aged 16-25 living in Glasgow and surrounding areas.

The project is delivered at Project Ability Art Studios, offering a safe and inclusive space for young people to interact with different art mediums and express themselves.

Participants can explore a range of art forms such as collage, printmaking, illustration, and sculpture, while connecting with like-minded peers.

The previous group concluded in December 2025, with an exhibition celebrating the artists, their family and friends, and everyone involved in the running of the project.

Generously funded by Creative Scotland and YouthLink Scotland, the project continues to inspire self-expression and community.

We're excited to see the creativity that will flourish as the project continues in 2026.



Reimagining Art project participants and coordinators

Applications are now open, and
you can find out more by contacting
SocialProgrammesScotland@nas.org.uk

update

FROM OUR DIRECTOR



Hello everyone, and welcome to the Winter edition of *News and Views*!

2025 was a really successful year for NAS across our range of projects and programmes. More than 600 people have received direct support from us in Scotland while hundreds more have been supported via information, advice, guidance, and our branches.

With the What's Next? programme running until March 2028 and with Empower Up securing funding over the next two years, it's fantastic to know we will be providing much needed support to both recently diagnosed or self-identifying autistic adults and young people across the coming year and beyond.

I'm hugely excited about 2026 and in particular the launch of our Act Now for Autistic Rights campaign. We were glad to offer a sneak peek of our campaign to our closest friends at a parliamentary reception last year - there was lots of positivity in the room that night and we'll be looking for all branches and volunteers to harness that and make their voices heard to urge all political parties to take action for autistic people ahead of the Scottish Parliament elections in May!

Overall, 2025 was an excellent year for our organisation, and I'd like to thank our staff for all your hard work!

Rob Holland

Director of National Autistic Society Scotland

NAS Scotland Hosts Parliamentary Reception

Late last year, we hosted a reception at the Scottish Parliament. Sponsored by Stephanie Callaghan MSP, this acted as a 'sneak peek' for our closest friends and allies into the upcoming launch of our Act Now for Autistic Rights campaign.

Despite very wet weather conditions, the reception enjoyed a healthy turnout of MSPs, policy staff and third sector partners, alongside a strong showing of our NAS branches and volunteers.

After Stephanie Callaghan welcomed everyone to the event, attendees were treated to an excellent performance by Autistic Campaigner Group member David Nicholson, who played the fiddle. Speakers included Rob Holland, Director of NAS Scotland, who introduced the campaign and emphasised the importance of introducing the Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill as soon as possible, and Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing Tom Arthur MSP, who restated the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling inequalities for autistic people.

The stars of the night, however, were Charleen Morton, also of the Autistic Campaigners Group, and her daughter, Demi-Leigh. At the age of 14, Demi-Leigh spoke powerfully about her experiences in school as an autistic pupil.

Overall, the night was a great success, and we thank everyone who made it along. Hope to see you all (and those who couldn't make it) soon!



Charleen Morton, the Autistic Campaigners Group, and her daughter, Demi-Leigh



Attendees at reception



Musical performance by David Nicholson



What's Next? Programme Launched



In October, we announced the launch of our new programme, What's Next? Running until March 2028, What's Next? is a programme of support designed for recently diagnosed or self-identifying autistic adults who are over the age of 18 and living in Scotland. The programme aims to support and empower autistic people by deepening their understanding of autism and autistic identity, improving wellbeing, and fostering peer connections.

Participants will attend a six-week block of online sessions where they will explore a variety of topics including diagnosis, identity, masking, executive functioning, spoon theory, and making connections.

Rob Holland, Director of National Autistic Society Scotland, said:

"Support for recently diagnosed or self-identifying autistic adults is incredibly important, so it is great to see the launch of our new What's Next? programme. What's Next? will provide a safe space for autistic adults, where they can learn more about what being autistic means to them and meet other autistic people."

To find out more visit
www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/scotland/support/whats-next

Empower Up Receives Further Funding

The Empower Up programme has received further funding to continue to build confidence and connections for autistic young people. The programme, which is aimed at autistic young people aged between 12 and 18 in Glasgow and the surrounding areas, gives participants structured support to build and develop social navigation strategies and confidence.

Social groups will also be created to encourage the development of peer friendships, helping reduce isolation and improve wellbeing. The programme will also see the continuation of a Youth Steering Group helping to shape and evaluate the programme throughout its delivery.



To find out more visit
www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/scotland/empower-up

A Tribute to Our Volunteer – Paul Davies

Paul Davies was a social group volunteer with our Autism Support Ayrshire service, supporting the members of the Coffee Club for autistic adults.

Paul joined the Coffee Club in 2021 with the hope of building his social confidence. From the very beginning, his journey was nothing short of inspiring. Over time, Paul's confidence grew, and his natural empathy began to shine through. He became a thoughtful listener and a trusted sounding board for others in the group, offering support and understanding when it was most needed. Those qualities led him to become a valued volunteer within the social group, where his compassionate nature made a meaningful difference to the well-being of everyone in the group.

We were deeply saddened to learn of Paul's sudden passing in April 2025. His loss was felt profoundly by both staff and Coffee Club members. In honour of Paul, the Autism Support Ayrshire team held a special coffee club session where everyone shared



Paul Davies

reflections about what Paul meant to them. The heartfelt memories were compiled into a keepsake book and sent to Paul's family.

The thoughts and condolences of everyone at National

Autistic Society Scotland are with Paul's Family. Paul's wisdom, and kindness will never be forgotten. He brought so much positivity to our group, and his memory will always remain a treasured part of the Coffee Club.

New Online Photography Group

Our South Lanarkshire Branch is launching a new photography group. This group is for those aged 16+ and will provide an opportunity to learn and practice photography skills whilst meeting others with a shared interest. The group will be rolled out to some Scottish branches soon after.

"We are keen for this to be an inclusive group where people can relax and have fun whilst learning new skills. You don't need any expensive photography equipment - a basic smartphone will do!"

Through a new theme each month, attendees will be introduced to different photography techniques. We look forward to seeing any photos attendees would like to share and would be delighted to showcase these at our branches.

The Group will meet online on the 1st Monday of the month at 7pm starting from 4 February 2026.

Register interest by emailing:
southlanarkshire.branch@nas.org.uk

Please type 'Photography Group' in the subject line of your email.

Parents & Carers Support Groups

Good support for families is vital and most NAS branches in Scotland offer some form of Parents & Carers Support Group, either in-person, or online. These groups provide an opportunity for parents and carers to meet others also living with a family member who is autistic. They offer a safe, non-judgemental environment for people to meet, share their own experience and to listen to others.

"For all of you who are doing your utmost to help your child(ren) and just need a listening ear, understanding and support...we're here."

Each of our groups are different with some focussing on sharing information to help parents develop knowledge and skills e.g. through workshops, whilst others are informal and involve a coffee and a chat.

Some groups go on to organise autism friendly family activities and outings for example a trip to Edinburgh Zoo. Some help remove barriers faced by families to things others take for granted, like organising an autism friendly photo shoot to enable getting a good family photo for the first time. Check out your local branch for more details.

Fancy raising money for us?

We have a wide range of in-person and virtual events for you to take part in, and lots of fundraising ideas if you would like to do your own thing. Visit our website to find out more www.autism.org.uk/get-involved/raise-money

Meet our staff

Meet Monika
Klary, Media and
Communications
Officer



Q: Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

I moved to Scotland in 2019 to study Digital Media at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen. After graduating I did an internship in a communications role.

I moved to Glasgow in 2025 to work as a communications assistant for a local charity. I volunteer within the autism community, so I was attracted to the opportunity to work for NAS.

I love reading, video games and board games, so outside of work you'll catch me doing one of the above!

Q: Why did you join the National Autistic Society?

I'm excited to have joined the team in December. I'm passionate about driving meaningful conversations and change, working in communications enables me to do that.

As an autistic person myself it's exciting to be a part of a charity that champions rights of autistic people.

Q: What needs to change to make things better for autistic people?

I think awareness is key. There is still a lot of education that needs to happen for the public to understand autism better. I also think making public spaces more autism friendly would be a big improvement for our community.

Job opportunities

Do you...

- want a rewarding job that offers satisfaction, variety and flexibility?
- enjoy working with people and want to make a real difference?
- have excellent life skills that you can share?

To find out about our current vacancies and more opportunities with the National Autistic Society Scotland, please visit www.autism.org.uk/jobs or contact our HR team at scotlandHR@nas.org.uk

Are you a member of the National Autistic Society Scotland?

If not, you can join our growing community of over 1,200 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 events. To find out more, please call our Supporter Care team on **0808 800 1050**.

About us

The National Autistic Society Scotland is here to transform lives, change attitudes and create a society that works for autistic people.

We transform lives by providing support, information and practical advice for the 56,000 autistic adults and children in Scotland, as well as their family members and carers.

Autistic people turn to us at key moments or challenging times in their lives, be it getting a diagnosis, going to school or finding work.

We change attitudes by improving public understanding of autism and the difficulties many autistic people face.

We also work closely with businesses, local authorities and government to help them provide more autism-friendly spaces, deliver better services and improve laws.

We have come a long way but it is not good enough.

There is still so much to do to increase opportunities, reduce social isolation and build a brighter future for people on the autism spectrum. With your help, we can make it happen.