

News and Views

From the National Autistic Society
Scotland and our volunteers

Autumn 2024

Listen to the first season of our new podcast, **Spectrum Sessions!**

The first season of the National Autistic Society Scotland's new podcast, Spectrum Sessions, is out now on YouTube and Spotify.

Hosted by Heather Carson, our Media and Communications Officer, the podcast aims to platform unfiltered autistic voices, by providing a space for autistic people to share their stories.

The first episode of the podcast released on the 1st of October, and featured Scottish actor Lewis Gribben, who featured in Trainspotting 2 and Channel 4's 'Somewhere Boy'. The final episode is due to release on the 29th of October. A video version of the podcast can be viewed on YouTube, or the audio can be listened to without the video element on Spotify.

This season's guests include:

- **Lewis Gribben** (Actor)
- **David Nicholson** (Musician)
- **Chris Carse Wilson** (Author)
- **Katie Forbes** (Founder of Autistic Flair)
- **Nuala MacDonald** (BBC Documentary Star).

Tune in to hear some candid discussions on what it means to be autistic.

A second season of the podcast is already in the planning stages, so stay tuned for more episodes soon!

Heather Carson, Host, said:

'It was wonderful to conduct the first season of interviews for Spectrum Sessions. Each of the guests had a unique story to tell, and I was able to relate to their stories in different ways. In the episodes, you will hear from some people who were diagnosed later in life, and others who were diagnosed in childhood, and you'll learn about how this impacted their views and feelings about autism. I hope you all enjoy the first season as much as I enjoyed making it!'



Find out more at:

www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/news/the-first-season-of-spectrum-sessions-is-out-now

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FROM OUR EDITOR

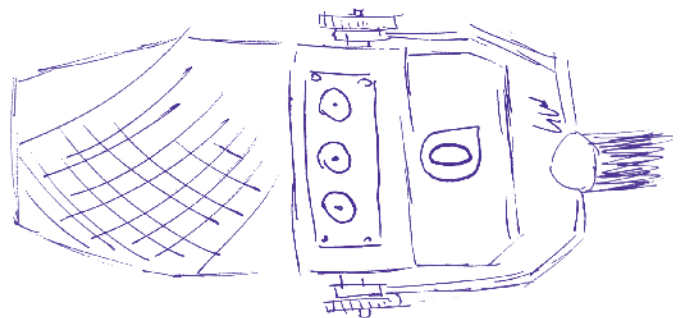
There is a saying among people in the National Autistic Society - "If you meet one person with autism, you only met one person with autism."

Autism is called a "spectrum" for a reason. It affects everyone differently. As a result, if one only sees a few people with autism (personally or in the media) one could get incorrect ideas about the condition.

This is why media outlets that allow multiple people with autism to tell their stories, like the *Spectrum Sessions* podcast, are valuable. By having more honest voices in the ether, a more accurate picture is created.

It's easy to see why such outlets are important. How many people still think that autistic people can count quickly because they saw *Rain Man* or similar depictions? *Rain Man* was released over 30 YEARS AGO. Our knowledge of autism has expanded by A LOT since Dustin Hoffman counted cards in Vegas. We need new genuine voices to update the picture.

Gordon Wallace
Editor



Gordon's illustration of a microphone for autistic voices on the *Spectrum Sessions* podcast

AUTISM SUPPORT AYRSHIRE VISIT



Carol (far right) and
the ASA Team

Carol Mochan MSP visits Autism Support Ayrshire!

In August, Carol Mochan, the Scottish Labour MSP for South Scotland, visited our Autism Support Ayrshire (ASA) service in Kilmarnock, to find out more about the service and how it helps autistic people across Ayrshire. Carol was interested to find out how the service could benefit her autistic constituents, parents/carers, and professionals who may contact Carol looking for autism advice in her area.

It was a very positive meeting, and the ASA team look forward to linking up with Carol in the future to work together to support autistic individuals in Ayrshire.

If you wish to get in touch with the Autism Support Ayrshire service you can either email: autismsupportayrshire@nas.org.uk or you can text/leave a voicemail at **07500974323** for confidential autism information, advice and guidance.

update

FROM OUR DIRECTOR



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

I am delighted that Spectrum Sessions, our new video podcast, has launched! The project has been in the works for several months now, so it is great to see that the episodes are finally available for everyone to view.

Unfortunately, alongside the good news of our podcast launch, Autumn has brought with it some disappointing news for our charity, as the recent Programme for Government revealed that the Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill will not be introduced to parliament in the coming year.

It is more important than ever that we continue to campaign for this Bill and ensure the decision-makers understand the barriers autistic people face and the support that is needed.

I want to say thank you for being with us on this journey and, although I know many of you will be feeling frustrated, as I am, I hope you stick with us as we continue the campaign. With a Holyrood election on the horizon, we will be shouting louder than ever!



Rob Holland

Director of National Autistic Society Scotland

An update from our Autistic Campaigners' Group!



Campaigners' Group in Parliament

Our Autistic Campaigners' Group has had a busy few months! The group wrote to the First Minister to highlight the importance of the proposed Learning Disabilities, Autism, and Neurodivergence Bill (LDAN Bill), and also held a roundtable discussion on the proposed Bill in Parliament with MSPs.

The Autistic Campaigners' group was established in 2023 and aims to drive positive change by campaigning for greater acceptance and inclusion of autistic people in Scotland. The group is comprised of eleven autistic adults, who bring a broad range of experience both personal and professional.

In its letter to the First Minister, the group stressed that significant inequalities remain in many areas of life for autistic people in Scotland, and these could start to be addressed through the LDAN Bill. In the time since this letter was sent, the Programme for Government was published and it made clear that the LDAN Bill will not be introduced to Parliament this year.

The Campaigners were understandably very disappointed and took the opportunity to make their frustrations known at a roundtable with MSPs. Our Autistic Campaigners' Group is determined to continue campaigning for this Bill in the years to come.

Well done to all the autistic campaigners!

Highland Award Win!

The National Autistic Society Scotland together with Thriving Families recently received the Highland Third Sector Interface Partnership of the Year award for 2024!

The ceremony took place on the 6th of September, where Alison, our Highland Information Officer, was in attendance.

Congratulations Alison!



Left to Right: Sarah Fowler (Chief Officer Thriving Families), Alison Footit (Highland Information Officer), Rachael Geddes (Pines team), Sarah Hewat (Pines team)

Jason's Podcast Appearance

During August, former Moving Forward+ participant Jason took part in the fifth podcast from the "In our Words" project, which aims to capture the stories, voices, and memories of autistic people, families, and professionals.

Alongside the host and two other autistic people, Jason discussed how support has changed over the years, and the key changes he would like to see happen over the next decade.

Moving Forward+ Participant, Jason, said:

"It was an honour to be a part of the podcast and share my



Jason recording the podcast

experience knowing that people could be listening to it many years from now. For people to better understand autism, they need to be open to more than just the stereotype and understand that autism is different for each person."

Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the "In our Words" project will see all materials catalogued and digitally archived, with the archive being available to the public on the National Autistic Society's website.

For more information visit: www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/who-we-are/in-our-words

Try out the WelcoMe app!



WelcoMe is an application that allows people to let a destination know that they plan to visit, so that the venue can be notified of their needs and preferences in advance.

This helps to ensure stress-free and smooth experiences, so that services can cater to a person's specific needs. There are already many accessible venues using the app, with more to come in the future.

Learn more about **WelcoMe** here: [Welcome for Visitors \(wel-co.me\)](http://Welcome for Visitors (wel-co.me))

25 Years at NAS!

Carol and Jim recently celebrated 25 years of working at the National Autistic Society Scotland! We asked them to write a bit about their time at NAS so far.

Carol Keatings, our Business and Projects Coordinator, said:

'Working at the National Autistic Society Scotland has been a pleasure and a privilege (with some stand out moments along the road, of course!). I would like to say a massive thank you to everyone who has played a part in my 25 years with the organisation. I will always cherish the memories shared, and the relationships nurtured. Being part of NAS, following the progress we have made together, along with the people we support is something I will remember fondly, and always be grateful for.

The organisation has allowed me to flourish in my personal life, showing me patience and grace through the roller coaster that is family life, while also encouraging career growth and development, encompassing 5 different job titles and 7 line managers. Nationally, the experiences of the autistic community have shifted vastly over the past 25 years, and being part of an organisation which has been a driving force in this is something I will forever be proud of.

Thank you again, Carol!'

Jim Docherty, Prospects Programme Manager, said:

'I'd echo what Carol has said, it has been a pleasure to work for the charity and alongside some great people, whose support, advice and friendship I'll always be grateful for.

In many ways, it just seems like yesterday that I started. I can remember so clearly, reading the letter welcoming me to the charity and my first day in our old office on Union Street. But then – reflecting on some of the events and changes that have occurred, both in society and in my own life, it hits home that 1999 was quite a long time ago!

Thankfully, over those years, there has been significant improvement in areas such as early diagnosis and public understanding of autism. Within the Moving Forward+ team, we see that reflected in the aspirations of young autistic people joining the programme. There is still much to do though and it's great to be a part of an organisation that is so committed to making a difference.

Thanks everyone, Jim!'



Carol and Jim



An Interview with Nuala MacDonald

Earlier this year, Nuala featured in a new BBC Alba documentary about her work to make Ullapool more autism friendly. We interviewed her to learn more about her story.

Q: Can you tell us about the work you've been doing to make Ullapool more autism friendly?

I'm currently working with businesses in the village to broaden their knowledge and understanding of autism, as well as adapt their spaces to increase inclusivity. We already have our first official autism friendly business, the West Coast Delicatessen, who, thanks to their willingness to participate in the documentary that was made about this project, have had customers from around the world visit to see the amazing changes they've made.

Q: How have people living in Ullapool reacted to the documentary?

It was incredibly well received. I think it's so easy to feel alone. The documentary covered both my perspective of life, as someone on the spectrum, but also mums' perspective. I think that alone helped a lot of families who went or are going through similar things to us. They could relate to our story and find courage and strength in knowing they weren't all alone.

Q: What do you encourage businesses to do to become autism friendly?

The first thing I do is explain sensory overload to them, and that will lead to the business having ideas of how they could help with that. For most restaurants and Cafés, it's floorplans, heatmaps



Nuala

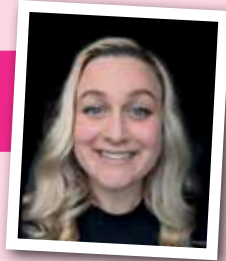
(showing where the noisiest areas are), bookable tables and less lighting/music/candles, but some can also have menus with pictures or even separate rooms where people can eat in quiet.

Q: What message do you hope that viewers take away from watching the documentary?

I really want people to take away a sense of community. I think it's so important for every family, parent or child to know that someone has their back. I also hope that the documentary reaches people who feel they don't have a voice; not a single person should grow up feeling like they aren't good enough or don't matter, and for those people, I hope the documentary helped bring them hope and strength and showed them that they will always be enough.

Meet Our Staff

Meet Olivia Ayres, our new
Engagement Support Coordinator



Prior to my time with the National Autistic Society, I studied European politics and then autism. While at university I volunteered with a programme as peer student mentor to young people.

I have been with NAS since January 2022, working as a Student Specialist Mentor and then soon after as a Social Group Leader. I enjoyed my experience with NAS, which led me to apply for and recently begin my role as a Student Engagement Coordinator.

The work NAS does is important, vital, and I am glad to be a part of a team working to create a more inclusive world.

We interviewed Regina Vereker,
our new Senior Branch
Engagement Officer



Q: Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

I have an interesting background, as I am a trained actor and singer with credits on IMDB who has had a varied professional career including events management, business development and working as a film festival director. I'm also a mum of two neurodivergent children, my son is autistic and through advocating for him and supporting him, I am incredibly passionate about building awareness and supporting autistic people and communities.

Q: What do you enjoy most about your job?

Working with people. I really enjoy meeting with all the different volunteers and working with them to do great things for others. I am in awe of the work the volunteers do and how passionate they are.

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

More awareness of the stories of different autistic people to help dispel the long-time myths about autism. Each autistic person is unique in their profile and sharing the differences as well as the common themes helps to develop understanding of autism.

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.

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.