National Autistic Society Scotland

News and Views

From the National Autistic Society Scotland and our volunteers

Autumn 2026

Listen to our new *What's Next?* podcast

The first two episodes of the National Autistic Society Scotland's new podcast, *What's Next?* are out now on YouTube and Spotify.

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. It aims to empower autistic adults so they can live confidently as their authentic selves.

The *What's Next?* podcast dives deeper into the topics covered in the programme through conversations with *What's Next?* participants and professionals, exploring autism, identity, wellbeing and connection.

Hosted by Heather Carson and Claire Dobson, Programme Coordinators, the podcast offers access to invaluable insight into the programme and its benefits.

Tune in for real conversations about the guests' diagnosis journeys, experiences of masking, wellbeing and their reflections on what it means to be autistic.

Heather and Claire, Hosts, said:

"We have enjoyed co-hosting the *What's Next?* podcast. It was lovely to meet the guests, and we related to them all in different ways. The content that we cover within the *What's Next?* project is important, so it's great to be able to share some of the information with a wider audience. We are looking forward to releasing more episodes soon."

What's Next?

What's Next? podcast logo

Find out more at: **www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/scotland/whats-next**

National Autistic Society Scotland

welcome

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FROM OUR GUEST EDITOR – CAIDEN PATTERSON

Getting involved in the Act Now for Autistic Rights campaign has meant so much to me and others, as finally I have managed to get into a group that has taken me seriously. My school failed to let me into any campaign groups, so this is a great chance to get our voices out there. It's an absolute privilege to be a part of this opportunity.

Attending Bute House (despite it being so hot on the day) was incredible, to meet the other campaigners again, be part of the group and just show what I'm capable of doing to everyone I know. I would do it again if I could. Because the message is very important to autistic community and families.

As much as it's frustrating that the *Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence (LDAN) Bill* had been abandoned, we still have to keep trying because I think that autistic communities really need to have people they can talk to without judgment and hopefully something good will come out of this!

Caiden Patterson
Editor



Caiden outside Bute House in Edinburgh

National Autistic Society Scotland

update

LIGHT THE WAY AND WALK 5K

This November, we're inviting supporters across Scotland to take part in our new Light the Way and Walk 5K fundraiser.

The event offers a flexible way to get involved, with participants choosing a time and place that suits them throughout November.

Craft a lantern with one of our kits or get creative and make your own. Then take on your walk as the sun goes down, with your lantern lighting the way.

We'll provide fundraising resources, information and rewards to support participants every step of the way. Whether you're taking part yourself or cheering others on, thank you for helping raise vital funds to support autistic people and their families.



Register:
https://bit.ly/light-the-way-walk-5k

FROM OUR DIRECTOR



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

The past few months have been incredibly busy as we have continued our *Act Now for Autistic Rights* campaign. In August, our petition surpassed 1,100 signatures, a significant milestone that reflects the strength of support for autistic people and their families across Scotland.

It was therefore deeply disappointing to hear of the decision to abandon the *Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence (LDAN) Bill* just a week after our campaigners visited Bute House to mark this achievement. However, our campaign does not end there. We have continued to engage with decision-makers and the media, calling on the Scottish Government to be accountable to autistic people and to set out clearly how it will deliver the change our community has been promised for so long.

Thank you to everyone who has supported the campaign in recent months.

As autumn settles in, I hope you have the opportunity to relax and recharge, perhaps while listening to our brand-new podcast.

This is our final edition of News and Views for 2026. Thank you for joining us throughout the year, and I look forward to seeing you again in 2027.

Rob Holland
Director of National Autistic Society Scotland

Fort Kinnaird receives Neuroinclusive Access Award

Earlier this year, Fort Kinnaird, Edinburgh's leading retail park, received our Neuroinclusive Access Award. The award recognises their commitment to making shopping more welcoming for neurodivergent people.

Fort Kinnaird has a webpage highlighting the steps taken to improve accessibility. This includes introducing the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme, which helps visitors discreetly indicate that they may need additional support, assistance or time. Staff have been trained to recognise the sunflower and understand how to offer appropriate support.

Visitors can also borrow sensory backpacks from Customer Services. Designed to support autistic people, the backpacks contain a range of sensory items to help make visits more comfortable.

The retail park has also developed a visual story to help visitors plan their trip. The guide highlights areas that may be noisy or have strong smells, provides information about available facilities and includes a site map to support navigation around the centre.



Fort Kinnaird, source: www.fortkinnaird.com

The Neuroinclusive Access Award supports customer-facing organisations to create neurodivergent-friendly environments and deliver inclusive customer service.

Find out more about the Neuroinclusive Access Award: **https://www.autism.org.uk/learn/what-we-do/autism-accreditation/neuroinclusive-access-award**

Congratulations to Autism Hero Fiona

National Autistic Society member Fiona has received an Autism Hero Award from Anna Kennedy Online (AKO). Fiona was nominated by local councillor Catherine Victor in recognition of her work raising awareness of autism within her community and across Scotland.

Reflecting on receiving the award, Fiona said:

"It was nice to have been nominated for this award and although I did not go to London, I liked that I got a lovely surprise when the award organisers sent it to me in the post. It is displayed proudly in my bedroom.

"It makes me feel proud to be part of my local community and I like that they accept my autism and they make me feel included in all things locally.



Fiona with her award certificate

National Autistic Society Scotland

our news

Autism is genetic: what the evidence tells us

Last month, we stated for the first time that autism is definitely genetic. You're born autistic and you're autistic for life.

For a long time, we could only say this was likely, but after reviewing all the available evidence, the answer is now clear: autism is genetic, and most autistic people are autistic because of genes they inherited from their parents. This is why autism often runs in families. Much less commonly, other factors can play a role, usually in combination with genes inherited from parents.

The announcement follows a robust and comprehensive review of high-quality research by Dr Judith Brown, our Head of Autism Knowledge and Expertise, and our team of experts.

This information comes at a time when misinformation is widespread and harmful narratives in the media and politics distract the public from the real issues facing autistic people and their families.

"We wanted to give people a clearer answer, and what we found makes that very easy."

That's why Dr Brown's team at the National Autistic Society undertook a project to examine all the available evidence about what causes autism, analysing 99 individual sources, including 83 research papers.

"There isn't a single 'autism gene'. Thousands of genes combine to make a person autistic. Scientists have identified many of these genes, but they believe there are still many more to find.

There is no genetic test for autism, and we don't fully understand how genes combine to make a person autistic. It is complex, and no simple test can provide an accurate answer."

Why trust information from us?

We have a dedicated evidence and research team that reviews all published evidence on a topic and assesses it against recognised quality assurance criteria.



Dr Judith Brown our Head of Autism Knowledge and Expertise

Read Dr Judith Brown's blog: bit.ly/why-autism-matters

Learn more: **autism.org.uk/causes**

Act Now for Autistic Rights – campaign update

As many of you will know, we've been campaigning since January through our Act Now for Autistic Rights campaign. A lot has happened since then. We've reached some important milestones, and the response from our supporters has been incredible.

Campaign highlights

More than 5,500 letters were sent to party leaders ahead of the Scottish Parliament election, calling for the introduction of the *Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence (LDAN) Bill*.

Our petition urging First Minister John Swinney to include the *LDAN Bill* in the Programme for Government reached more than 1,100 signatures.

On 24 August, staff and campaigners gathered outside Bute House to celebrate this milestone.

Following such a positive response, it was deeply disappointing when the Programme for Government was published in September and the *LDAN Bill* was not included.

The response from our community was immediate and powerful. The decision attracted media attention, and we joined partners across the sector in issuing a joint statement expressing our disappointment. An open letter from columnist and commentator Kelly Given, calling on the Scottish Government to reverse its decision has gained more than 1,700 signatures.

Hundreds of people took to social media to tell us what this decision means for them and their families. While the outcome was not what we had hoped for, the strength, passion and determination shown by our community has been inspiring.

The Programme did, however, include commitment to a national pathway for adults with neurodevelopmental conditions and better access to support for children with additional support needs, regardless of where they attend school.

We want to assure you that this is not the end of the campaign. At the National Autistic Society, we will continue to advocate for autistic people and their families, hold the Scottish Government to account and push for change.

Together, we will keep making the case for autistic rights in Scotland.



Our staff and campaigners outside Bute House, Edinburgh, photography by @juliebeephoto

Learn more: **www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/campaign/scotland**

National Autistic Society Scotland

our impact

A year of growth, confidence and connection

Our annual impact report shows how the *Moving Forward* with *CashBack* programme has helped autistic young people build confidence, strengthen relationships, feel less isolated and take positive steps towards their futures.



Moving Forward participants

Supporting young people to thrive

Many young people told us they felt more able to ask for help, try new things and be authentically themselves after taking part.

"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!"

Programme participant

75% reported improved wellbeing

86% of parents, carers and professionals reported increased resilience and positive changes

64% of participants aged 10-15 reported an improved relationship with school

Opening doors to new opportunities

The programme also helped young people develop skills, explore opportunities and move towards greater independence.

83% of participants aged 16-25 moved into positive destinations such as education, training or employment

60 autistic young people were supported across seven local authority areas during 2025-26

Across the three-year funding period, the programme supported **170** autistic young people.

Looking ahead

We're thrilled that the *Moving Forward* programme has been awarded funding through *CashBack* for Communities Phase 7, allowing our team of six to continue creating impact over the next three years.

National Autistic Society Scotland

our team

Meet our staff



Iain Graham, Student Mentor and Social Programmes Co-ordinator

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?
I started with NAS as a volunteer, and had student mentoring myself, so I was happy to be accepted as a student mentor over 4 years ago! Aside from working to improve the lives of autistic people like myself, I enjoy video games, play and run D&D and reading. I am quite obsessed with coffee, I enjoy going to the gym, going for walks/hikes, bouldering, and have recently started to jog.

Q: What does a typical day of work look like for you?
Social programmes are quite email and meeting heavy, so usually I'm found sitting with a coffee in front of my computer. The role involves contacting and onboarding recently diagnosed or self-diagnosing autistic adults, running the groups, and coordinating with the team so we deliver the best service we can. Mentoring is on campus in Glasgow University and involves meeting students to help and support them as they progress through university. It's very rewarding work, and never boring!

Q: What's a skill you've learned since joining the National Autistic Society?
Better communication skills. I've gotten much more comfortable not knowing in conversation, and I recognise that the essence of communication is miscommunication. We're going to get things wrong, especially when we've been masking for much of our lives and accepting this is quite freeing. It helps me connect with the people I work with.

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.

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: Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH.
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