

# News and Views

From the National Autistic Society  
Scotland and our volunteers

Winter 2023

## Have Your Say on the Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill!

**We are delighted that the Scottish Government has published its public consultation on the Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill, which means autistic people and their families can now have their say on what they would like to see included in the new legislation.**

For several years, National Autistic Society Scotland has been calling for a commissioner for autistic people. We are delighted that the public consultation on the Bill includes proposals for a commissioner or commission.

Earlier this year we published the findings of our own survey, which showed that 96% of the 1,215 people we heard from support a commissioner for autistic people and people with a learning disability.

A Commissioner would not only be a champion for autistic people, but

it would also hold local government, national government and service providers to account ensuring that they uphold people's rights and deliver the services they are supposed to.

In the UK there has never been a proposal for legislation like this, with such a specific focus on upholding the

rights of autistic people. This is an incredibly important moment and one which would see Scotland lead the way in real change.

Read the full consultation at [www.consult.gov.scot](http://www.consult.gov.scot)

**My daughter said, 'if I were unable to walk, people would build ramps. Why because I'm autistic am I left to struggle alone?' We feel that a commissioner would help amplify our voice and represent our views. We need someone to fight for the support we deserve.**



Sign up to our mailing list to receive updates as we continue to campaign for a commissioner:  
<https://forms.office.com/e/H4YMH4wdGS>

## CONTENTS

### PAGE 3

Update from our Director and our new Embrace Autism Project.

### PAGE 4

The latest from Autism Support Ayrshire, and our new Empower Up Project.

### PAGE 5

News from our services, including the Chelsea Flower Show Garden and the winner of the Highland Hero Award.

### PAGE 6

The latest from our services, including Winter events at Catrine Bank, and the launch of our new Growing Up Project.

### PAGE 7

Fundraising, including more information on the successful Mojo Talkin' event, and Chloe's amazing 100-mile walk.

### PAGE 8

Meet our staff, including an interview from Roslind, Registered Manager at Catrine Bank, and an introduction to Eilidh, a Social Group Leader.

## FROM OUR EDITOR

Something called the Learning Disability, Autism, and Neurodivergence Bill is going through the Scottish Parliament. What is this, you may ask? It is an answer to a fundamental problem with how mental health was treated in the past. The purpose of this bill is, in the words of the SNP's 2021 manifesto, to "delineate support and services from existing mental health legislation and ensure that human rights are protected and promoted."

In other words, it recognizes that support cannot be "one size fits all", and lumping autistic people and people with learning disabilities with those with very serious issues is like lumping domestic cats with tigers.

A clear barrier between cats and tigers is needed for the cats to get the support and services that will benefit them. A tranquilizer dart is overkill for Tom, despite Jerry's protest.

But this barrier needs moulding. And it can only really be done with the help of the cats themselves. Top Cat (or a commissioner to protect the rights of autistic people) cannot do it alone. Top Cat does not have the same life experiences as you. So please, if the opportunity to meet Top Cat comes, take it. It will help us all.

**Gordon Wallace**  
Editor



*Gordon's illustration of a cat caged like a tiger*

# EMBRACE AUTISM

## Sign Up to join our Embrace Autism Online Groups!

We have partnered with Autistic Knowledge Development (AKD) to develop 'Embrace Autism', a post diagnostic support programme for autistic adults in Scotland.

Funded by Inspiring Scotland, the six-month programme is open to adults who have a formal autism diagnosis, as well as those who are self-diagnosed or awaiting assessment, and consists of both online resources and group sessions.

We have co-designed a series of six post diagnostic group sessions alongside AKD, where participants are supported to share their own experiences and connect with other autistic adults. Six autistic-led short films have also been created by AKD and will be freely accessible online, covering topics that will support adults' understanding of autism.

## Embrace Autism

Join our online group sessions about navigating life as an autistic adult

To sign up to one of our online groups,  
please email:  
[EmbraceAutismScotland@nas.org.uk](mailto:EmbraceAutismScotland@nas.org.uk)

# update

## FROM OUR DIRECTOR



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

I am delighted that the public consultation on the Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill has been published! It is great to see that autistic people and their families can now contribute towards what they would like to see in the new legislation.

For several years, we have been calling for a commissioner for autistic people, and it is clear from our survey that there is overwhelming support for the concept. A commissioner would help to ensure that autistic people get the support that they are entitled to, while also holding local government, national government, and service providers to account.

The proposal of this legislation is a huge step towards our vision of a society that works for autistic people, and it could mean that substantial positive change is on the horizon.



**Rob Holland**  
Director of National Autistic Society Scotland

## NAS Scotland at SNP Conference

In October, NAS Scotland and Enable held an event at the SNP Conference. Hosted by autistic campaigner Kelly Given, the event highlighted the importance of a commissioner for autistic people and people with learning disabilities.

We were delighted that the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care, Maree Todd, spoke at the event. The Minister was joined on the speakers' panels by Fiona Jones, a National Autistic Society member and autistic campaigner, and Heather Gilchrist, Ambassador for Enable.



*Our speaker panel at the SNP Conference*

## Autism Support Ayrshire

We are delighted to announce that we have successfully secured continued funding for Autism Support Ayrshire! Well done to the whole team who work tirelessly to provide support to families across the Ayrshires.

Sign up to our Ayrshire e-newsletter:  
[www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/scotland/newsletter-form](http://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/scotland/newsletter-form)

## Empower Up Project Coming to Glasgow!

In January, we will be kick-starting 'Empower Up', a programme funded by Young Start and aimed at supporting autistic young people to build confidence and connections.

**It can be difficult for autistic young people to develop and sustain friendships.**

The programme is aimed at autistic young people between the ages of 12 and 19 who are living in Glasgow (and surrounding areas). Participants in the programme will benefit from structured support to build and develop social navigation strategies and confidence. Social Groups will also be created to encourage the development of peer friendships.

Sandra Buckley, Social Programmes Manager said:

'It can be difficult for autistic young people to develop and sustain friendships with their peers, which can lead to social isolation and loneliness.

With so many autistic young people feeling alone, it is important to ensure that there is support available to help with building confidence and connections. Therefore, we are delighted to launch Empower Up, a project where autistic young people can build friendships with their peers and feel confident enough to communicate in the way that suits them best.'

You can find out more at:  
[www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/scotland/empower-up](http://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/scotland/empower-up)

## RHS Chelsea Flower Show Garden

A National Autistic Society garden themed around autism and masking has been selected as a show garden at the world famous RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

Following RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2024, the garden will be relocated to our Catrine Bank supported living service in East Ayrshire for autistic people, their families, and staff to enjoy.

The National Autistic Society garden will be created by designer and botanist, Sophie Parmenter, and Dido Milne, Director of CSK Architects.

The show garden is sponsored by Project Giving Back, a unique grant-making charity that provides funding for gardens for good causes at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

The garden will explore an autistic person's experience, with 'masking' at the forefront. The term masking describes how autistic people



*The Chelsea Flower Show Garden*

consciously or unconsciously hide their autistic characteristics, in order to fit in and feel more accepted.

## Autism Hero Award for Highland



*Alison and Rachael at the Autism Hero Awards*

**Congratulations to Alison, our Highland Information Officer, who has won an Autism Hero Award as part of the Pines Team Highland!**

The award is for the support provided to families and professionals in Highland through the Pines partnership and the Pines website. National Autistic Society Scotland is part of the Pines team and funds the Pines website.

The Award ceremony took place on the 25th of November in London, which Alison attended. Well done, Alison!

You can visit The Pines website here: [www.thepineshighland.com](http://www.thepineshighland.com)

## Growing Up Project Launched

We are delighted to have partnered with Carers Scotland to develop 'Growing Up', a programme of support aimed at empowering unpaid carers of autistic young people going through big life changes.

This project is funded by the Alliance and aims to support unpaid carers to prioritise their wellbeing, make more informed choices, and better advocate for themselves and their autistic young person. It will also connect carers in communities, creating peer-support networks that will last beyond the lifetime of the project.

The project consists of a series of hybrid workshops for unpaid carers, covering Glasgow, the Ayrshires, Inverclyde, and Falkirk. Each series will consist of five workshops, attended by a cohort of 15 unpaid carers. There will also be one series of online workshops for unpaid carers living in Highland.

A Carers Advisory Group will play a central role in developing and delivering the project.

For more information please email:  
[GrowingUp@nas.org.uk](mailto:GrowingUp@nas.org.uk)

## News from Catrine

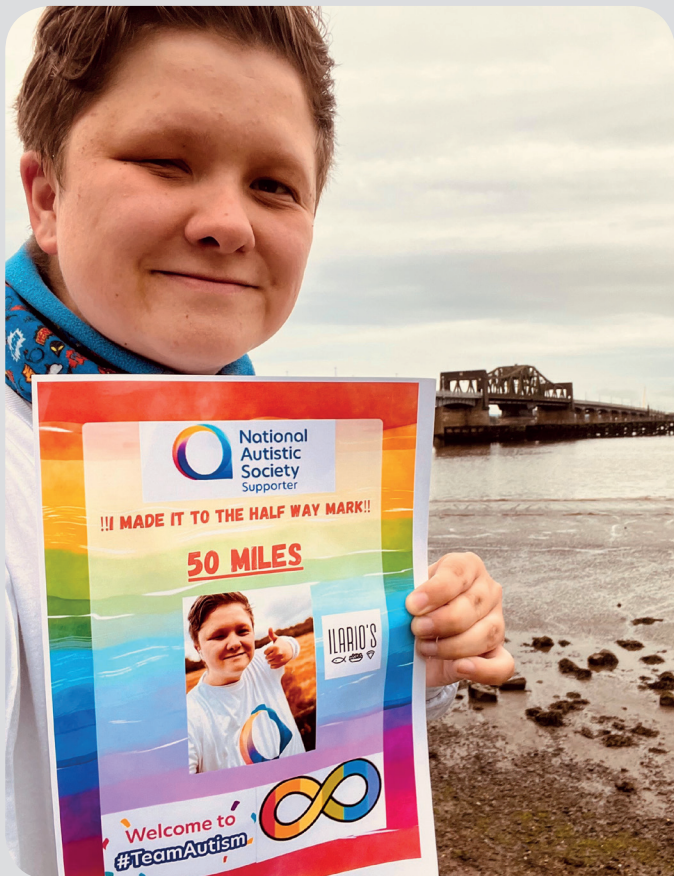
For two years running, Kathleen, Team Leader at Daldorch House, has organised for Hopscotch Theatre Company to come and perform for the people we support at NAS Catrine. This year, the theatre group visited with their production of 'Cinderella' which took place in Catrine Bank's refectory area and was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended! (Oh yes it was!)

This is hugely beneficial to the people we support at NAS Catrine - particularly those who are unable to access large venues in the community like theatres, and who would otherwise never be able to attend a live pantomime performance. For some of the people we support, this was their first ever pantomime experience and - thanks to theatre companies like Hopscotch and Kathleen's efforts to ensure that everyone is included - hopefully won't be their last!



Cinderella Pantomime

## Chloe's 100 Mile Challenge



Chloe's 100-mile Challenge

In October 2023, 21-year-old Chloe took part in our 100-mile Challenge to raise funds for the National Autistic Society!

Chloe's walk was sponsored by her local chip shop, Ilario's, who walked the final five miles alongside her. Chloe raised over £840 in total. Well done Chloe!

When asked why she wanted to walk 100 miles for the National Autistic Society, Chloe said:

'I was diagnosed in 2018, and I wanted to challenge myself to prove to other autistic people that you can do anything you set your mind to. You can still live a happy and fulfilling life.'

## Huge Success for Mojo Talkin'

In the previous edition of *News & Views*, we covered the amazing Mojo Talkin' Event, a northern soul themed fundraising event organised by Paul Wilson.

The event started with a Ride Out for Autism, where around 80 scooter enthusiasts showed their support. An evening of music and dancing followed, as well as vintage clothing stalls and a silent raffle.

We have since found out that Paul managed to raise £4100 at the event, with the company Paul's niece works for agreeing to match the total raised, bringing the final number to over £8000! Well done Paul!



Paul and his son

## 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](http://www.autism.org.uk/get-involved/raise-money)

## Meet Our Staff

We interviewed Roslind Ramsay,  
Registered Manager at Catrine Bank.



**Q: Can you tell us a bit about yourself?**

My name is Roslind and I live in East Ayrshire in Scotland with my husband and daughter.

**Q: How did you first get involved with National Autistic Society Scotland?**

I have worked in Social Care for over 25 years and spent 20 years of that time managing and developing Autism and Learning Disability services across Ayrshire.

I have spent the last two years supporting people with addiction, managing prevention and early intervention services across North Ayrshire. However, I really wanted to return to supporting autistic people, so I applied for the position of Registered Manager at Catrine Bank. I started working here on the 31st of July 2023.

**Q: What do you enjoy most about your job?**

Working with the individuals to help them achieve their goals and making a positive difference to people's lives.

Eilidh Black: Social Group Leader



"I joined NAS on placement with NAS Digital Social Groups and the post-diagnostic project.

"I was diagnosed at 12 and struggled a lot with accepting my diagnosis. I found that a lot of the media and information surrounding autism was rather negative.

"I was surprised by the range of training modules NAS offered and found I was able to be more accepting of myself. Whilst on placement, I got to help at face-to-face events, and it was really valuable to connect with other autistic people and hear about their experiences.

"After placement, I started volunteering with my local NAS branch, which gave me the opportunity to engage with my community. I had no idea the branch existed and had been around for 12 years! Now, I am working as a Social Group Leader with young people. I am extremely grateful to get to be a part of the work that NAS does."

## 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](http://www.autism.org.uk/jobs) or contact our HR team at [scotlandHR@nas.org.uk](mailto: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.

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