



National
Autistic
Society

Our charity's challenges and successes

Caroline Stevens
Chief Executive

Transforming lives

Services

Our 2021 Family Survey brought encouraging results:

- **93%** of families say the people we support feel like part of a community with their loved ones.
- **98%** of families say the people we support are protected from neglect.
- **98%** of families say the people we support are treated with dignity and respect.
- **99%** of families say they know how to report any concerns or complaints.



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Spring Forward Challenge

Our Spring Forward Challenge saw the people we support walk 62 million steps.

- From January 2021, many of the people we support took part in our Spring Forward Challenge: walking an amazing **62 million steps** by the end of World Autism Awareness Week in April 2021.
- We created the challenge in response to feedback from families who wanted more opportunities for their loved ones to **exercise during lockdown**.
- We followed this up with a **Summer of Sport**.



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Schools

- Our school staff developed innovative new approaches to supported home and on-site learning.
- Events were set up that were accessible for all at home or school, for example a virtual graduation ceremony at Sybil Elgar School.
- We recruited a new Director of Education and Children's Services.



Transforming lives

Branches

Our volunteer-led branches were a vital lifeline to 17,600 autistic people and their families.

“The Thurrock Branch has been my absolute rock. In lockdown, we had its self-care packages, Zoom call support network and the kids’ social group on Saturday mornings. It has shared important information, like our entitlement to the vaccine and rights at school.”

Robyn, mother to two autistic sons



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Covid updates

- Crucially, throughout the pandemic we gave autistic people and their families clear information and advice to help them navigate all the restrictions and complex changes.
- We provided autism-specific information about masks, home schooling, social care, vaccinations and many other topics on our coronavirus hub. There were more than **600,000 visits** to our coronavirus website hub.
- Our **I am autistic card** was downloaded 1,000 times.



Changing attitudes

Mask exemption for autistic people

- We urged governments across the UK to clarify that autistic people were exempt from wearing a face covering in shops, public spaces and on transport if it caused them distress. We raised awareness of these exemptions in the media.
- We wrote to the major supermarkets to ask them to remind their staff about the mask exemptions.



Changing attitudes

Left stranded report

Following our *Left stranded report*, 11,326 people signed our letter to the Chancellor, calling on him to invest in support and services for autistic people.

“This has had a devastating effect on my family. My husband has suffered anxiety and panic attacks due to the decline in my son’s mental health and the increase in his distress and challenging behaviour. Both myself and my husband had to take sick leave as we had all support withdrawn.”

Anonymous, family member



Other achievements

- We launched a new website, providing more advice and guidance. Our website received 4.9 million visitors last year.
- We embedding the Quality of Life (QoL) framework in our schools.
- Our Autism at Work Summit in March brought together employers including J.P. Morgan, SAP and Sky to talk about increasing job opportunities for autistic people.



Other achievements

- We set up a new Autism Inpatient Mental Health Casework Service.
- We helped persuade the Government to change the definition of 'mental disorder' in the *Mental Health Act* so it no longer includes autism.
- Our campaigning led to the Scottish Government committing to improving teacher training and autism awareness.



Adapting how we work

Externally

We adapted the way we work to cope with the pressure of the pandemic, thinking of new innovative ways to keep our activities going.

World Autism Awareness Week 2021 went virtual

Our brilliant supporters raised over **£332,000** by doing virtual fundraising.



Our training and conferences went online

1,000 people attended our online mental health conference to learn about autism and mental health.



A big celebration



- In 1962 a group of desperate parents formed what would go on to become the National Autistic Society.
- In the last six decades, we have fought for autistic people's rights and have had some huge wins such as the first autism-specific school, the first diagnosis centre in the UK and the *Autism Act* in England, as well as similar legislation in all the nations. But there is still so much to do.
- It's been an extraordinary 60 years. Let's make the next 60 count.



Thank you

