

News and views

From people supported by the National Autistic
Society Scotland and our volunteers
Winter 2018

Autistic children are being unlawfully excluded from school

In September we published a report in partnership with two other charities on the experiences of autistic children in Scotland who have missed school.

More than a third (34%) of parents who responded to our survey said that their children had been unlawfully excluded in the last two years - with almost a quarter (22%) saying this happened multiple times a week.

An 'unlawful' exclusion is when a school sends a child home without using the formal exclusion process, meaning monitoring and support systems are bypassed. Scottish Government guidance is clear on its position that unlawful exclusions should not happen - yet our research shows that they are happening to autistic children across Scotland.

We met with the deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney MSP, in November to discuss how we can work together to address the barriers to autistic children accessing a fulfilling education - and stop the use of unlawful exclusions.

You can read our report, produced in partnership with Scottish Autism and Children in Scotland, at notengaged.com

Our Education Rights Service provides impartial and confidential information and support to families on education rights. To find out more please visit autism.org.uk/services/helplines/education-rights



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FROM OUR EDITOR

In January I began work on my 'life-time project' - a dictionary of memes.

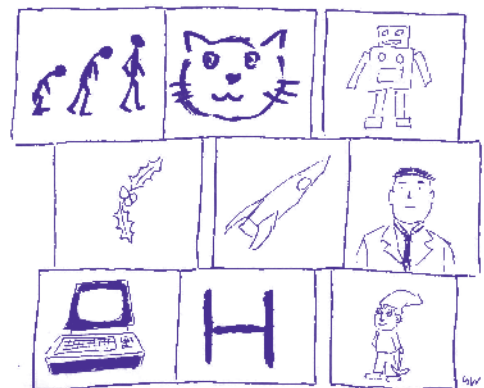
For many, a meme is one of those silly things found on social media posts and comment sections. But actually, if you look up the origin of the term, it can have a broader meaning. Like genes in an organism, memes are the building blocks of culture.

I think I'm the most ideal person to do such a project. I may have been collecting memes mentally since I was a kid, watching TV and looking out for billboards while I was in the car.

By high school I had a neat visual memory for TV shows. I couldn't tell you any verbal jokes and anything like that back then - I was more interested in the sets, costumes and visual gags. It's only later that I re-watched a number of shows and learnt everything else about them. I imagine I'm not alone in doing this. Have you ever watched something as a kid and then re-watched it as an adult and discovered its true nature?

My project is going to take a lifetime to do. I'll explore every aspect of culture from cosmology to embroidery, via music and comics.

Gordon Wallace
Editor



Gordon's meme project

OUR NEW LOOK

You may have noticed that we have a new look!

The National Autistic Society was founded 56 years ago, and since then we've changed what we say and how we look many times. We do this so autistic people and their families understand what we do and our charity's purpose. We also change because understanding about autism is ever evolving, in part thanks to the many successes we've achieved with your help in changing attitudes among the public, businesses and the Government.

We've talked to autistic people, their families and the other people we want to support our charity and, following their feedback, we've changed our vision, which describes what the charity exists to achieve.

**Our new vision is:
a society that works for
autistic people.**

We aim to achieve this through our care and other services, through our schools and our information, which all help people transform their lives; and through our campaigning, training and conferences which exist to change society's attitudes.

To make our hopes for the future clearer, we have also changed how we look – including a new logo. Autistic people – including our ambassador Chris Packham – and their families have told us they really like the new look. We hope you do too!

update

FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Hello! My name is Nick and I am proud to be the new National Director of the National Autistic Society Scotland.



I am so thrilled to be joining a charity which has, for decades, supported autistic people and their families across Scotland. My background is in education where I was a teacher for many years, including a spell working as a learning support teacher and as an assistant head teacher. I have most recently been working as a regional director for a big education charity.

This is a really exciting time to be joining the charity. In September we launched our report *Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved*, which highlighted the extent to which autistic children are unlawfully excluded from school. We are soon going to be launching a campaign for there to be mandatory training for all new teachers on how to support autistic children. I have also met with Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, to talk to him about autistic kids' right to an education.

Over the next couple of months we are going to be doing lots of work to ensure that our services are of the highest quality, that the charity has a secure financial footing and that we are organised correctly in order to continuously improve and expand our services, influence government and policy, and create a better society for autistic people and their families.

I look forward to going on that journey with you and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support for the National Autistic Society Scotland.

NEWS FROM CATRINE BANK

By Robyn Girvan, Team Leader at Catrine Bank

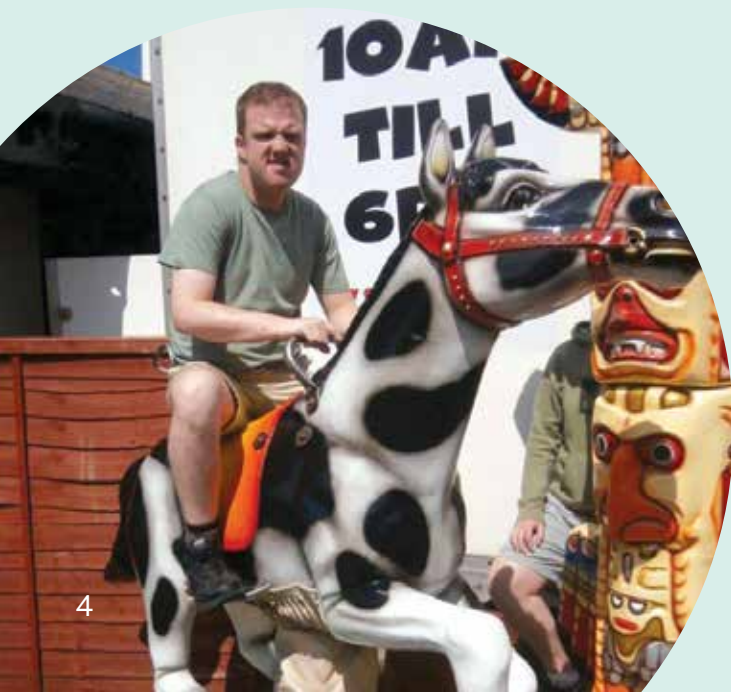
Noel is one of the people we support at Catrine Bank. He thoroughly enjoys new adventures, but plans and preparation are needed in advance of activities going ahead. A few weeks ago, we took him to Craig Tara Caravan Park for the very first time. Craig Tara is about 45 minutes away from our supported living service and we drove there with Noel.

We made sure that we had a structure in place to help Noel manage each day of his holiday, and to make sure it was memorable. There was a great swimming pool that he enjoyed visiting and we also went to the fairground.

We used visual guides to let Noel decide where to go for dinner every night, and he loved the evening entertainment at the caravan park – he was even up dancing!

Noel enjoys looking at pictures of his memories so we made sure we took lots of photos and captured all of these special moments for him.

Noel on holiday at Craig Tara



Nicola and Samantha at a social group

Celebrating our partnership with KPMG

KPMG Scotland selected the National Autistic Society Scotland as its charity partner in 2017. Since then it has supported our charity by holding several fundraising events and providing work experience opportunities and volunteers.

Nicola and Samantha from KPMG both volunteer with our social groups – which often means taking on the people we support at board games!

Nicola said: "I have enjoyed every minute of volunteering. The variety of groups and activities that are available is fantastic and I've tried things I never thought I would do – such as trampolining and go-karting."

Samantha said: "I love chatting to everyone, learning about their life and experiences. I always have fun and leave feeling happy. For the time I'm there, I forget about my own worries and stresses. I think it's such a great experience and would encourage anyone thinking about it to get involved."

To find out more about our social groups, please email scotlandsocialgroups@nas.org.uk



Willow May

Highland Information Service Volunteer

Interview and illustration
by Gordon Wallace

Q: **Who are you and what do you do?**

I am Willow. I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome only three years ago at the age of 38. For me, finding out that I was autistic was a gift. It has allowed me to find out what my challenges are, and to become mentally well for the first time in my life. I'm currently volunteering with the National Autistic Society's Highland Information Service which provides specialised information for parents and carers of young people in education, and transitioning from education.

Q: **What is it like volunteering in Inverness?**

It's really great. Everyone is so friendly and flexible with the days and hours I volunteer. I've helped to make the library at The Pines autism-friendly, and I visit local schools and businesses to deliver autism awareness sessions. I use my own personal experiences to help people understand autism better and bring my talks to life. At the end, everyone always has lots of questions which they want to ask me and this makes me so happy as I feel I am making a difference.

Q: **Can you describe a typical day?**

A typical day usually involves a nice early start. I like to get my daily chores out of the way then

go out with my dog exploring and having fun somewhere out and about. We particularly love going to the woods and beaches, and paddling about in rivers and the sea. I also like to study and learn because I am inquisitive about so many subjects.

Q: **Tell us your background.**

I was born in Kent and moved to Dorset when I was 20 after finishing countryside management at college in Surrey. I lived there until I moved to Inverness in 2015.

Q: **I hear you are an artist? Do you have other hobbies and interests?**

Yes, I am self-taught. My art reflects my passion for spirituality and nature. I love learning all the time. I am also continuously studying some aspect of spirituality and at the moment it's Druidry and spiritual life-coaching. I study everything at home as I'm not keen on classroom or any group situations.

A painting by Willow



VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteering with the National Autistic Society Scotland is a great way to meet new people and learn new skills, whilst making a real difference to the lives of autistic people.

We are recruiting an administration volunteer to support our One Stop Shop in Ayrshire, which offers information, advice and support to autistic people and their families.

As an administration volunteer you will provide three to four hours of support per week and help respond to enquiries, update databases, photocopy and file. You will receive full training and have the opportunity to learn new skills in a supported environment.

To find out more, please visit www.autism.org.uk/volunteer.

News from Daldorch House School

Daldorch House School is celebrating its 20th anniversary with a series of events across the school year.

These events began in September with a lovely afternoon tea for colleagues who started working at Daldorch on the first day it opened and still work at the school today. In October, our Principal, Bernadette Casey, presented our pupils with a portfolio which highlighted their attainments at our Celebration of Achievement event.

In November, pupils put on a performance of the popular book *Where the Wild Things Are* for their families and invited guests, before creating an anniversary fountain in our orchard. Learning in the great outdoors is a big part of what makes our school so unique, and the fountain will be enjoyed by Daldorch House School pupils for years to come. Still to come are a Christmas party and an end of year prom!

Over the last 20 years we have supported and challenged autistic children and young people to make positive progress in all aspects of their learning, to build resilience in order to cope in the wider world and meet their full potential. We look forward to supporting their journeys in the years to come.

Autism Hour

Our second Autism Hour event took place at the start of October with shops and businesses right across Scotland signing up - from the Co-op in Shetland to Greta Green's Gretna Hall Hotel!

We launched Autism Hour after our research revealed that 66% of autistic people feel socially isolated and 44% sometimes don't go out because they are worried about how people will react to their autism.

These businesses took simple steps – such as turning down music and other noise, dimming fluorescent strip lighting and sharing information about autism with employees – to increase their accessibility for at least an hour during Autism Hour week.

We hope that taking part in our event has helped them to see that small changes really



Autism Hour was sponsored by toy shop chain The Entertainer, which has 12 stores across Scotland. It runs a weekly Quiet Hour in all stores.

Fundraising cheque rolls in

Karron Kent from our Fundraising Team visited members of the Inner Wheel of Alloway to collect a cheque and deliver an autism awareness talk. The club raised more than £1,000 for our charity at a concert earlier this year.



Karron with members of the Inner Club of Alloway

If your group or club would be interested in an autism awareness talk, or would like to get involved in helping us with our fundraising activities, please email fundraising@nas.org.uk.

The Hikawa Twins

By Rebecca Twigg

Right now, I'm really into a Japanese franchise called BanG Dream! or Bandori for short. It's often praised by fans for its excellent writing quality for its story and its characters.

Two characters I really like from the series are the Hikawa twins, Hina and Sayo. When I first posted this piece online, I originally titled it 'Like Night and Day' because the twins truly are two completely different people – Hina is very positive and cheerful, while Sayo is strict and serious. Their relationship isn't a simple one either, with the two of them unable to communicate honestly with one another.

The mobile game for the franchise has many stories coming to it soon which promise to develop their relationship and bring them closer to understanding one another. As a final little touch,



the Japanese kanji (the adopted logographic Chinese characters that are used in the Japanese writing system) which makes up their names even feature the words for day (Hina) and night (Sayo).

Wendy's Wish

By Eileen and Neil Douglas

It is five years since we lost our autistic daughter Wendy to breast cancer. Wendy was not able to tell us she was in pain or communicate her symptoms. This meant her cancer was not caught in its early stages. She was 36 years old when she died.

I noticed something was not quite right one day while caring for Wendy and found a lump. I took her to the doctor that very afternoon and she referred to a

specialist clinic. Sadly, it turned out to be breast cancer of the most aggressive kind.

Since losing Wendy, we have made it our mission to raise awareness of cancer in autistic people who, like our daughter, may be unable to communicate any pain or symptoms they may have.

Many years ago, I had a dream that Wendy came here for a purpose which was that others might learn. Perhaps this is it. If just one person, male or female, checks themselves, or is checked by a healthcare professional, then Wendy did not die in vain. Even if you think there is no reason to check, there is always a reason. That is our message.

To find out more and see Wendy's tapestries and paintings please visit:
www.wendystapestries.wordpress.com.



Eileen and Neil Douglas



BECKY PRESTON

Employment Support Advisor

Gordon's illustration
of Becky

Q: Who are you and what do you do?

I'm Becky Preston and I'm an Employment Support Advisor with the National Autistic Society Scotland's Moving Forward project which is funded by CashBack for Communities. I support autistic young people between the ages of 16-24 to gain skills and qualities in order to build positive pathways for their futures.

Q: What made you apply for this job?

Before applying, I had been volunteering for the National Autistic Society Scotland for about three years as a mentor, researcher, and Education Rights Advisor – so I'd had a lot of engagement and experience with the charity before applying. Between that and my time working with young people through a previous job, it was just the perfect fit. So of course I had to apply and was so happy when I found out I'd got the job!

Q: Can you describe a typical day?

A typical day is probably not so typical! There's no strict routine or structure to most of my days. There's a lot of working face-to-face with clients which I love, dealing with enquiries and looking for placements or opportunities for our young people.

Q: Tell us your background.

I studied social sciences at university where I specialised in psychology. Personal experience got me interested in autism too and I'm now doing an MSc in Research Methods in Psychology.

Q: Can you tell us your hobbies?

I really enjoy reading. Boring, I know but I really love sci-fi and dystopian novels. I'm also really into films, again sci-fi and dystopian – my favourites would have to be the Alien films. I also really like being outdoors, and going camping and hiking.

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/get-involved/jobs or contact our HR team at ScotlandHR@nas.org.uk

Did you know...?

Are you a member of the National Autistic Society Scotland? If not, you can join our growing community of over 1,000 people in Scotland and play a vital role in our charity's work. Our package of benefits includes our quarterly members' magazine, *Your Autism*, discounts on our publications and events, and low cost autism insurance. To find out more, please call our Supporter Care team on **0808 800 1050**.

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 58,000 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 spectrum. With your help, we can make it happen.