

News and views

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

Autism is a reality for our ambassador, Chris Packham

Autistic people and their families joined our ambassador, TV presenter and naturalist Chris Packham, to learn about Scotland's wildlife and participate in a fun-filled day at Callendar Wood in Falkirk.

Chris, who received a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome when he was in his 40s, spoke to volunteers and staff about our work in Scotland, and the help and support our charity offers.

He then donned our unique virtual reality headset and experienced how an everyday setting like a shopping centre can be overwhelming to an autistic person experiencing sensory overload.

We use the cutting-edge technology to increase public understanding of autism, after it was revealed that almost half (44 per cent) of autistic people living in Scotland



Above: Chris with staff and volunteers

Left: Chris tries our virtual reality headset

sometimes don't leave the house because they are worried about how others will react to them.

Chris' visit was part of a free BioBlitz event which gave autistic people and their families the opportunity to learn about all forms of wildlife from flies, fungi and moths, to mammals, and birds and butterflies.

Fiona McGrevey, Branches and Volunteering Development Manager at the National Autistic Society Scotland, said, "Chris is a huge supporter of our work and I'm so pleased that he was able to try our virtual reality experience.

"It's a very immersive and impactful experience which reinforces our commitment

to finding innovative ways to raise public understanding of autism in Scotland."

Chris Packham said, "The National Autistic Society's virtual reality experience is truly superb and provides an excellent insight into the sensory overload that can occur in difficult environments."

Contents

Page 3

Read about Calum Deverill winning our award for Volunteer of the Year 2018

Page 4

News from Catrine Bank, our local branches and campaigns team

Page 5

Meet one of our volunteers and find out how you can support our social groups

Page 6

The latest news from Daldorch House School, our social groups and fundraising team

Page 7

The A Word, a poem by Florence Brooke

Page 8

Meet Graeme Fitzsimmons, our new Head of Adult Services, and find out how you could join our team!

Welcome to News and **views**

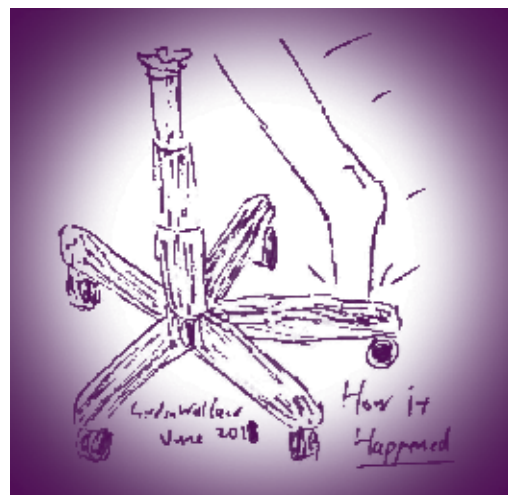
Learning how to deal with an illness or serious injury is something which can be a problem for an autistic person.

Just recently, while walking to my bed, I hurt my foot by accidentally hitting it on the leg of my office chair. The chair was broken (the metal bracket attached to the seat gave way to fatigue), so the hard black plastic spider of legs was easy to bump into. It was dark and the lights were off, my feet were bare, and I had forgotten the legs were there.

For the first few days afterwards, I didn't see it as a serious injury as it didn't hurt that much. I had hit my feet on things before, so I thought it was going to be the same deal, but as time went on, the pain increased. I wasn't able to sleep because of it and in the end I had it x-rayed. Nothing was broken, fortunately. It was just severely bruised.

I imagine others will have experienced such problems too. How can you judge how painful or ill you are if you haven't been in such a state before? And the cult of the 'stiff upper lip' doesn't help either.

Gordon Wallace
Editor



Gordon's illustration of his accident



An update

Welcome to the autumn edition of *News and views*.

It's been a very busy and exciting few months for us here at the National Autistic Society Scotland. In June, we added to our team with the appointment of Graeme Fitzsimmons to the newly created role of Head of Adult Services. You can read more about the wealth of experience and knowledge Graeme brings to the role on page six.

We also had a number of events taking place this summer – Catrine Bank held a second and very successful Music in the Meadows event, and Chris Packham, our charity's Ambassador, delighted branch members by making a very special appearance at Callendar Woods in Falkirk. I'd like to thank everyone who helped to make these events happen, especially the staff from our Day Opportunities and Supported Living services. Turn to page four to find out more.

I'm sure that you will enjoy the poem which 21-year-old Florence Brooke has written on page seven. Florence was recently diagnosed as autistic and the words of her poem, *The A Word*, capture feelings which many autistic people will be able to relate to.

The next few months will be eventful, and will see us appoint a new National Director for Scotland, a role crucial to our Scottish Leadership team. I'll update you on our progress to fill this position in the winter edition of this newsletter.

I hope you enjoy reading about our work across Scotland over the past few months.

Thank you for your continued support,



Fiona McGrevey
The National Autistic Society Scotland

Calum triumphs as our Volunteer of the Year 2018

Calum Deverill was awarded the UK-wide title in recognition of his outstanding fundraising efforts which have raised more than £2,000 for our charity.

This included organising bucket collections, delivering autism awareness talks and helping encourage MSPs to make Scotland a more autism-friendly nation.

Calum, who was diagnosed when he was 10-years-old said, "Volunteering with the National Autistic Society Scotland has allowed me to demonstrate what can be achieved by autistic people, provided the correct support is in place."

Fiona McGrevey, Branches and Volunteering Development Manager at the National Autistic Society Scotland, said, "Calum is an inspiration and, like all of our volunteers, is an asset to our charity. I'm so pleased that we have been able to formally recognise his efforts with this award."



Fiona McGrevey, Branches and Volunteering Development Manager at the National Autistic Society Scotland, Calum Deverill and Annie Wells MSP, Convenor of the Cross-Party Group on Autism

The countdown is on until Autism Hour 2018



Last year, over 5,000 retailers took part in the world's first mass participation Autism Hour. And this year, we're hoping even more will take simple steps for 60 minutes that lead to a more autism-friendly world.

For autistic people, the world can seem full of too much information – and too little understanding. Our research found that 64% of autistic people and their families avoid going out to the shops. They can be too loud, glaringly bright and overwhelming.

That's why from 6 to 13 October, we're asking shops and businesses to make small changes which will make a big difference to autistic people and their families. These simple steps include turning down loud music, dimming bright lights and sharing information about autism with staff.

To find out which businesses and shops are taking part in your area, please visit www.autism.org.uk/autismhour.



Autism-friendly music festival returns

Music in the Meadow made a welcome return to Catrine Bank in the late July sunshine.

Local bands and musicians volunteered to play at the event, which opened with a performance by the Ayrshire Fiddle Orchestra. Family members were invited to attend and there was also a BBQ, face-painting, a bouncy castle and games.

Graeme Fitzsimmons, Head of Adult Services at the National Autistic Society Scotland, said, "Music in the Meadow gives autistic people the opportunity to be part of an exciting festival experience. Attending a music festival is a summer highlight, which is why, for the second year running, we are delighted to be able to hold our own in the beautiful surroundings of our five-hectare back garden."

We hope to hold the festival annually so that the people we support and their families can continue to enjoy Music in the Meadow.

Our dreamy night at Blair Drummond Safari Park

By Jenni Nicoll, North Ayrshire Branch Member

My two sons and I were among 50 children and their families who recently spent a magical afterhours evening at Blair Drummond Safari Park.

Dreamnight is an international event that sees zoos, wildlife parks and aquariums open specially for children and families who are living with lifelong illnesses or disabilities. The wonderful staff at Blair Drummond volunteered their time, and provided an early evening tour of the Safari Park as well as entertainment and refreshments.

It was the best family outing we've ever had! We felt like a 'normal' family and didn't feel alienated like we sometimes do when we go out. It was lovely to see so many children having fun.



Jenni's sons,
Liam and Sean

Meet the volunteer



Kevin Cameron

Social groups
volunteer

Interview and illustration by Gordon Wallace

Q: Who are you?

My name is Kevin. I am 30-years-old and I currently volunteer with the National Autistic Society Scotland, having been a member for about 12 years.

Q: Can you describe a typical day?

Getting out of bed is usually the hardest part! I then take my dog out for a walk and browse the internet for a few hours. Afterwards, I'll play video games which normally last until the evening. Finally, I'll take my dog out for another walk and then spend some more time on the internet before going to bed. I often go out as well, usually to the shops in Glasgow.

Q: What made you want to volunteer?

I was a member of the National Autistic Society Scotland's social groups for quite some time. During that time, I was able to overcome my lack of self-confidence and introverted nature due, in no small part, to the activities we did, and interacting with the other

members and volunteers. I wanted to help others in the way the group helped me so I decided to become a volunteer when offered the chance. Since I did, I am proud to have been able to help others become better at socialising both in and out of the group.

Q: Can you tell us about your background?

I am the eldest of five children. My younger sister is also autistic. I studied computing at college and graduated with a Higher National Certificate. This allowed me to secure a job with West Dunbartonshire Council on a placement for two years. It was extended by a year as they were very impressed with me but sadly it came to an end afterwards. Since then I've worked for Clydebank College, the Lennox Partnership and CMS Surveyors. I'm hoping to secure another more permanent role soon.

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.

You will provide three to four hours of support per week, and help to 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

Fundraising my way across the world

By Gary Ferguson

My first fundraising experience for the National Autistic Society Scotland wasn't glamorous – it was a sponsored walk around Bellahouston Park! Little did I realise that this would be the first of many tremendous and worldwide experiences.

In the years which have followed, I've climbed a volcano in Ecuador and trekked to Machu Picchu in Peru, as well as in the rainforest of Borneo.

Most recently, I cycled from Vietnam to the breathtaking temple of Angkor Wat in Cambodia. The heat and the humidity was the biggest challenge but the friendship and support offered by everyone who took part helped get me through.

The knowledge that I am raising funds to help autistic people and their families has always spurred me on.



Gary at Angkor Wat

Who knows what my next challenge will be – I'm always on the lookout. One day I hope to find one which my son will want to complete with me!

Inflatable fun for our social groups



Members from our Glasgow and Dunbartonshire intergenerational groups recently enjoyed an inflatable games day at Mugdock Park.

The fun-filled day was the perfect opportunity to meet new people and take part in team-building exercises. There was an inflatable assault course, space hopper race and the most entertaining of all – a giant tug of war!

Afterwards, everyone tucked into tasty burgers, hot dogs and some ice cream to cool off after the heated competition.

We'd like to say a huge thank to the Big Lottery Fund who made the entire day possible.

News from Daldorch House School

By Carol Povey, Director



We are delighted to have recently appointed Graeme Fitzsimmons to the role of Head of Adult Services.

Graeme brings a wealth of experience and knowledge with him from his career in Scotland's care sector. Graeme has worked with a variety of organisations including Cornerstone, Enable Scotland and Richmond Fellowship.

He is also the Chair for Association for Real Change UK, a charity that advances knowledge, practice and policy in health and social care for the benefit of people with learning disabilities or other support needs such as autism, mental health problems, sensory and physical disabilities.

As the new Head of Adult Services, Graeme will work alongside Bernadette Casey, our Principal, and the soon-to-be-appointed National Director for Scotland to form a Scottish leadership team.

You can find out more about Graeme on page eight.

The 'A' Word

By Florence Brooke

Why did he make that face?
It is hard to try and trace,
What did she mean by that?
Gosh, should I say she's wearing that terrible hat.

The lights are too bright but it's too dark,
I can hear that, as clear as a lark,
Music soothes the quiet space,
Gosh, why is this such a race.

A race to keep up with him and her,
Trying to pick up on every murmur,
To make sense of it all,
Trying to stand up when my legs want to fall.

Going into meltdown,
Knocking on an almighty frown,
Curled up in an inconsolable heap,
Today was just too much of a leap.

A leap into the unknown,
A place that is forbidden and overgrown,
Routine is the friend, structure is the same,
How much longer do I have to continue in this vein.

I can't feel that, it needs to be tighter,
I'm trying to be the fighter,
Of this condition which is alien to me,
But has opened my life up with its key.

The 'A' word is a powerful one to be said,
For all the mixed up reality in my head,
No one would know unless it was shown,
It does really make you feel alone.

The 'A' word being,
Something that more people are seeing,
It's a neurological condition which affects the brain,
Once you have the ticket you're certainly not leaving
that train.

Being born with the 'A' word,
Means some difference has occurred,
I may be the odd girl out,
I know it's nothing to shout about.

Acceptance is the key,
However overwhelming life may be,
The diagnosis can be a wonderful thing,
I'm going to make it that in the contributions to life
that I will bring.



Florence Brooke

Meet our team

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?

The National Autistic Society Scotland is currently recruiting support workers for our services in East Ayrshire and Glasgow. Full-time, part-time, zero hours and nightshift positions are available.

To find out about these roles and more opportunities with the National Autistic Society Scotland, please visit www.autism.org.uk/jobs or call 0141 221 8090 and ask to speak to our HR team.



Gordon's illustration of Graeme

Graeme Fitzsimmons

Head of Adult Services

In every issue, we meet a member of the National Autistic Society Scotland team. Here's what our editor Gordon Wallace found out about Graeme Fitzsimmons, Head of Adult Services.

Q: Who are you?

My name is Graeme Fitzsimmons and I am the newly appointed Head of Adult Services. I'm really excited about this role and I'm looking forward to having the opportunity to work with our staff and the people we support.

Q: What made you apply for this job?

I have a huge passion for autism. I was also excited by the opportunity to help make the National Autistic Society Scotland's number one choice for autism care and support.

Q: Can you tell us your background?

I have worked in social care for nearly 20 years. This has allowed me to gain

valuable experience of working in, and leading, services which provide support to adults and children with learning disabilities, mental health issues, physical disabilities and, of course, autism.

Q: Can you tell us your hobbies?

I love to play golf and have done so ever since I have been old enough to swing a club! Unfortunately, injuries have severely impacted my play over the past few years but I'm thrilled to be back playing competitively. I also love to listen to music and play the piano when I'm not spending time with my two dogs who I adore.

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 Magazine*, 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, challenge attitudes and build a society that works for autistic people.

We transform lives by being a trusted source of practical support and advice for autistic children and adults, as well as their families and carers. We challenge attitudes by campaigning with our local branches and working with businesses and policymakers to change laws and deliver better services.

Since 1962, we have made a lot of progress, but we know there is much more to do, because the status quo isn't good enough for autistic people. With your support, we can change it.