

# Annual Report 2022-2023

*Building an inclusive society*





*Autism NI held their fifth Glow Walk with local families at Stormont in November 2022.*

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## Our Year in Numbers

  
**1,578**  
members

  
Overall **97%**  
satisfaction on our training courses

  
**2,886**  
total sessions delivered by our Projects and Early Intervention Services

  
Over **7,500**  
Helpline calls

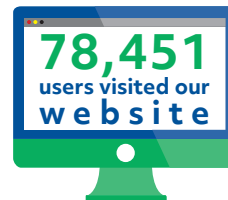
  
Over **30,000**  
'Followers' on Facebook

  
**2,273**  
participants received training

**30%** Increase in Autism Card Applications



  
**213**  
Support Group meetings

  
**78,451**  
users visited our website

  
**255**  
people achieved AQA Unit Award Accreditations in Autism

  
**20+**  
Family support groups across NI

## Chairperson's Report



David Heatley  
Chairperson

This was a very progressive year for Autism NI as our services reached more people than ever. With over 7,500 calls to our Helpline, it is clear that autistic people and their families rely on the knowledge, advice and resources that our Family Support team brings. Understandably, since the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen a rise in calls on emotional support for children, young people and parents and carers.

Many parents and carers attended our support courses and key businesses and schools achieved our Autism NI Impact Award. It's great to see many establishments supporting the autism community by putting adjustments in place to increase accessibility for their neurodiverse employees and customers. Our Training team delivered a range of courses to 2,273 people in the last year.

Our Early Intervention service expanded further, with nearly 3,000 families receiving what we know is a lifeline support service to so many. This area of work is critical to ensuring that our children have the best start in life, and it is something that we want to see all autistic children avail of throughout Northern Ireland.

Another highlight of the year was the Glow Walk which was held at Stormont with our families in November. It was great to see so many families enjoying the fun activities from Fitness Freddy to the U105 crew.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Board of Trustees for their dedicated efforts in governing the Charity.

Finally, my thanks to the staff team, our volunteers,

fundraisers, charity partners and funders, without their support our work would not be possible. We all need to continue to work together implementing our vision of an inclusive society where autistic people can achieve their full potential.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Heatley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

## Chief Executive's Remarks



Kerry Boyd  
CEO

As I look back on the past year, I am extremely proud of the steps that the Charity has taken to deliver services that have made such a positive impact on our autism community.

Autism NI has continued to campaign for the full implementation of the recent Autism (Amendment) Act, which was passed in March 2022. As the Secretariat of the All Party Group on Autism, the Charity plays a pivotal role in supporting positive change for autism services in Northern Ireland and we continue to make progress during a period of time when the NI Assembly is not functionally fully. Autism NI was also recognised for its hard work in campaigning for the recent legislation passed as our team were awarded the 'Outstanding Achievement Award' at the Families First Awards in April 2022.

The Charity's services have grown and this includes the expansion of our Autistic Adults Service including the employment of an Autistic Adults Support Officer and the delivery of Autistic Peer Support Networks. These services were created through co-participation with our autistic adults and have been positively received. For the first time, our adults feel supported and empowered in areas such as employment, education and social outings.

I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of our staff team during the last year. Autism NI's neurodiverse team continue to provide knowledge, expertise and motivation in their work to ensure that all autistic people and their families are being fully supported.

Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to all our stakeholders, ambassadors, volunteers, partners and donors for their dedication and commitment to Autism NI. Without their support, Autism NI could not deliver our vital support services and continue to build and advocate for an inclusive society for everyone.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kerry Boyd". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

## Family Support

One of our longest established services is our Family Support provision, which continued to be operational across local communities in Northern Ireland providing tailored support services. We recognise the skills and resilience of the Autism NI Family Support Team. We listen to our members and provide a range of services to ensure that autistic children, adults and their families increased support networks, confidence, well-being and connectedness. Integral participation is at the core of what we do. We continue to form and maintain relationships with community, voluntary and statutory services to provide a vital services to families and individuals.

Autism NI is fortunate to have a neurodiverse team, which has not only grown but with continued determination they ensured that families have benefited from a range of early supports. Over the past year, referrals to Autism NI for early help have increased across all our areas of our work.

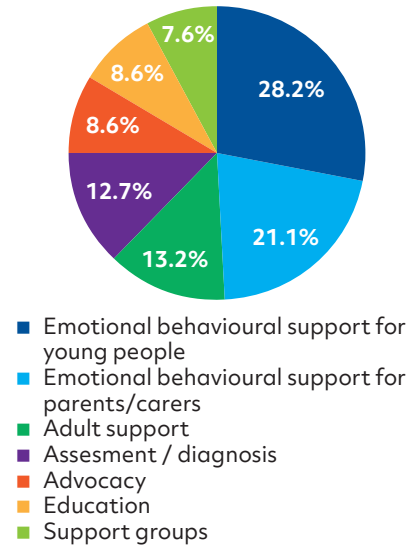
### Individual Support

Our Helpline is the first point of contact for many autistic people,

families and professionals pre and post diagnosis.

During 2022/23, Autism NI received over 7,500 direct contacts which enabled the team to advise autistic people and their families on support available and additional interventions including practical resources, one-to-one sessions, and a listening ear. Additionally, we provided information, advocacy, signposting, and a range of bespoke supports.

### Areas of support needed



We receive regular positive feedback on our Helpline, indicating how much the support really matters and makes an invaluable difference to the people we are working with.

*"I called Autism NI's Helpline and for the first time I felt heard as a parent. They tapped me into services at Autism NI which I've been so appreciative of as I really didn't know who to turn to on the start of my own journey with my autistic child."* Parent



### Individual Support for Autistic Adults

In partnership with the Belfast Trust, our Autistic Adults Support Officer offers tailored support to autistic adults who wish to voluntarily avail of support in areas including employment, relationships and social opportunities.

*"This is the only help I have received since my diagnosis, and I am so grateful for your support."* Autistic Adult

## Autistic Adult Peer Networks

We provide two online peer network services for autistic adults, one for over 18-year-olds and the other for over 30-year-olds. Our peer networks provide an opportunity for autistic adults to socialise and interact with others in a relaxed and safe environment. We are proactive in listening and responding to individuals needs and adapt participation to include text base communication. There have been 192 autistic attendees to date, with some of the groups meeting in person.



## Support Groups

Our Support Group Co-ordinator brings together a vibrant volunteer network across Northern Ireland, which is central to helping us deliver essential supports in the community.

Every volunteer makes a unique and distinct contribution, they strengthen a wide variety of initiatives, and are an integral part of the Charity. Their invaluable expertise, peer support, skills and diversity complement the work of our Family Support Team, in delivering essential services to the autism community. During the pandemic many of our volunteers upskilled, and their dedication made a vital difference to the autism community across Northern Ireland.

Autism NI volunteers participated in 213 Support Group meetings focusing on education, assessment, mental health and anxiety. The practical knowledge and invaluable peer expertise shared in these meetings, provides an obligation to influence policy and practice. The success of the model remains, and the network experienced an attendee increase across meetings this year.

*"I went along to the Support Group meeting on Wednesday night. Everyone was extremely welcoming and happy, it was lovely. I don't get out much so it was a real treat to talk to people who understand, and I will definitely be a regular attendee."*  
**Parent, South Belfast Support Group**



*Autism NI volunteers attend Family Fun Day in W5*

## Autism NI Members

Autism NI has 1,578 members who make an invaluable difference contributing to improved supports for autistic people and their families across Northern Ireland. Individual members have agreed to participate within the legal requirements of the Charity and its Mission, Vision, Ethos and Code of Conduct. The benefits of our membership often extend to whole family participation through family days, training courses and the opportunity to shape the impact the Charity has across the autism community, through individual engagement.

## Autism Card

During 2022/23, we experienced a 30% increase in registrations for our Autism Card. Autistic card holders tell us, it is beneficial in a range of ways and that they use it in their everyday lives.



## Early Intervention

Our ongoing Early Intervention Service builds and strengthens relationships for families whose child has received a new diagnosis. Families referred to the Early Intervention Service from the Trust engage in bespoke sessions. These sessions provided family members with visual strategies and practical tools and support to manage behaviours, play and socialisation.

Autism NI continues to be a strong advocate of partnerships, and we have maintained our relationships with the Belfast, Northern, and Western Trusts Autism Intervention Teams. They have referred directly to the Autism NI Resource or Support Officers, and Early Intervention Officers, who offered bespoke services to families in their local communities.

Autism NI has a proven record in evidencing outcomes, and is well established in the practice of identifying, measuring, and reporting outcomes. In addition, we have a long-standing commitment to hearing directly from and maintaining relationships with autistic people and their families. Participation demonstrates how vital these services are, providing an opportunity for individuals to feed back on their experience and offer suggestions for

future direction. The positive feedback we receive highlights how invaluable the support has been after diagnosis, empowering parents with practical tools and support.

Our Early Intervention Team has successfully provided 2,010 individual sessions. The difference detailed by families included enhanced

understanding of their autistic child's needs, access to information on appropriate services and improved confidence that enabled opportunities. Parental feedback was extremely positive with 97% of families stating that the benefits of the home visits were either 'excellent' or 'good'.

### Traci's Story

Traci is a parent of an autistic child and has been supported through our Early Intervention Service.

*"When I was lost, confused and shunned by services, I felt unheard. I reached out to Autism NI and got put in contact with one of their Early Intervention Officers called Julie. Even just from the other end of the phone she listened and acknowledged my thoughts, feelings and challenges. I felt so supported as we started on this journey, she really did go above and beyond."*

*Through the Early Intervention Service I was provided with learning packs and educational information and this helped me to start using visuals within our home with my son, and we still use them now. I was given the tools I never knew I needed, and the sensory games have helped us all as a family."*





## Mental Health and Autism Project (MAP)



*Our MAP participants solved puzzles at their recent Wizard inspired outing in February 2023*

Our MAP provides one to one support for autistic young people (aged 11-18 years) within the Belfast Trust, via request from the Child and Adolescents Autism Service. In 2022/23, we delivered 408 sessions.

The service offers 8 -12 bespoke support sessions with young people in the home, at school or in the community. Working in partnership, we focus on areas of support needs ascertained by each autistic young person, with a view to increasing confidence, self-esteem, and emotional well-being. This enables

integral participation with each young person, empowering them with ownership regarding the direction of their support. 80% of autistic participants rated the service as 'excellent'.

In building strengths together, we are delighted to report that the average number of outcome areas that autistic participants made progress in, was four.

Areas experiencing the highest percentage change included:

- feelings & behaviours
- education & learning
- and confidence & self-esteem.

*"This has been one of the few helpful services I have received."* MAP participant

## Girls and Autism Project (GAP)

GAP supports autistic girls aged 11-18 years across home, school and community environments. The focus is on supporting achievement, enjoyment and social participation across the Northern Trust. During 2022/23, our GAP Officer completed 395 individual visits and facilitated group activities.

83% of autistic participants during 2022/23 experienced positive change in two or more outcome areas. 100% of autistic girls rated the service as 'excellent or very good'.

*"The Life Skills Officer is super nice and awesome. She helped me with a few things, and I think my confidence has improved since I started."* Autistic participant



*Our GAP participants took part in Equine care sessions during the Summer*

## Training

Our Training Department provides high quality, accredited training and advice to a wide variety of parents, carers, schools, groups and organisations. Our training is evidence based, practical, and is delivered to the highest standard of accuracy to ensure it is effective in supporting autistic people at home, in the community, in school or in a workplace.

During 2022/23, Autism NI's training courses were delivered online and in person. Our high quality courses are delivered by experienced trainers and include interactive activities and group discussion, to enable groups to explore concepts in an engaging and practical way.

Overall, our training team delivered 172 training courses in 2022/23 to 2,273 participants.



*Parents and Carers attended the Fundamentals of Autism training course*

## Support Courses for Parents and Carers

During 2022/23 we continued to provide funded training courses to parents and carers. The courses were delivered to provide continued support to families pre and post diagnosis. We are immensely grateful for our funders, which included PHA CLEAR Project supported by Baily Thomas, Arnold Clark, Awards for AI, Hedley Foundation, Halifax Foundation, National Lottery Fund and Prince of Wales Charitable Trust.

The courses were delivered on topics that were particularly relevant with the challenging circumstances, for example, managing anxiety, dealing with change and transition, emotional regulation and anxiety, females and autism, adolescence and growing up, and supporting a return to school.

*"Thank you so very much. It was a very informative course and I've definitely learned some great techniques to hopefully help my son." Parent*

## Autism Support Officers – Parent and Carer Support Courses

Throughout 2022/23 our Autism Support Officers in the Northern Trust held 97 courses for parents and carers of newly diagnosed autistic children, and those awaiting assessment. Evaluations from this training were extremely positive, with 99.5% of participants rating the course as 'excellent or good' and 100% of parents and carers noted they experienced an increase in their knowledge, confidence and skills in supporting their autistic children.

## AQA Accreditations

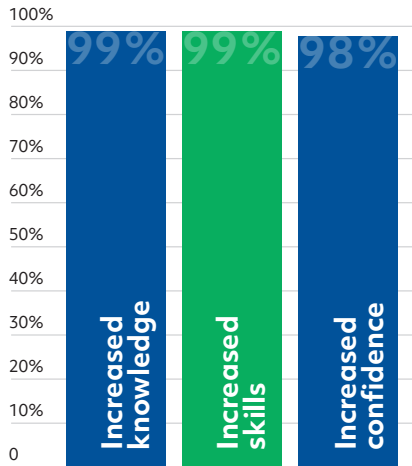
We provide AQA unit award accreditations to people who have attended our training courses, supporting them to demonstrate high-quality learning and self-development. In 2022/23, 255 people completed a range of AQA unit award accreditations to evidence their development.

We are CPD certified. Our courses are quality assured and demonstrate a structured approach to learning and development.



## Evaluations

Evaluation scores for all our training courses remain consistently excellent, demonstrating the expertise of our trainers and practicality of our courses. Overall, our courses are rated with 97% approval for the course content, materials, and communication of the trainer. The course evaluations also demonstrate the positive impact of the training on delegates, with delegates scoring the courses as improving their knowledge (99%), skills (99%) and confidence (98%).



Improvements based on course attendance

## Training for Organisations

Our commissioned training service also facilitated a wide range of bespoke courses for organisations, community groups and staff teams. Our courses were tailored to each organisation based on their needs and facilitated online or in person. We work with organisations to provide knowledge on autism, introduce practical skills on how to support autistic people in the work place and start conversations on building an inclusive environment.

During 2022/23, Autism NI delivered bespoke training sessions to a range of organisations, including Health and Social Care Trusts, Education settings, Voluntary Sector, public facilities, and private businesses.

It is so important that we continue to work alongside organisations to ensure full accessibility for our autistic community. The bespoke training that Autism NI offers allows organisations to design a training programme that will address their particular needs. The training includes the creation of an action plan, developed by the staff team, ensuring ownership of the reasonable adjustments and changes that will be implemented within a set time frame. It is essential that every organisation in Northern Ireland understands that they are legally

obligated to provide equal access to services for autistic people under the Autism Act 2011.

*“It was so nice being trained by someone who is so passionate. I found the interactive activities very interesting. It was first class and so important for employers to learn how to support team members.”* **Professional, Autism and Employment Training**



High Rise achieve the Autism NI Impact Award

## Impact Award

Our Impact Award is a training and support programme to help organisations create a more 'autism inclusive environment' for their staff and customers. The training programme equips staff to better understand autism and how to adapt the organisation's environment to support autistic people and their families. The programme includes accredited training, follow up support to implement an individualised action plan and continued support for organisations who achieve the Impact Award Champion status.



*ICC Waterfront and Ulster Hall achieved the Autism NI Impact Award*

Overall, 135 organisations across Northern Ireland have achieved our Impact Award to show their

commitment to increasing autism accessibility in their organisation, including Entertainment venues and Leisure Centres, Arts and Cultural venues, Shopping Centres and community venues.

A number of our Impact Award Champions have continued to develop their partnership with Autism NI further by completing the process of reaccreditation with the Impact Award programme and accessing further top-up training for staff, to ensure a best practice approach is maintained across their services.

## Impact Award for Education

In 2022/23, we continued to deliver our Impact Award Programme in schools, focusing on promoting a best practice approach to autism inclusion within education settings. Our Impact Award for Education framework provides staff training and awarded organisations who implemented a bespoke action plan of supports for autistic pupils. This programme was extremely popular with 56 schools being awarded with the Impact Award Champion status in the last year, overall 86 schools have received this award.

It is part of Autism NI's longstanding vision to ensure that we create an inclusive society where autistic children

have the opportunity to thrive, and this all starts with ensuring that they have good educational outcomes. As a charity we have lobbied endlessly over the past number of years for mandatory autism training for all teaching staff, but until this happens, we will continue to support our local schools and teachers in every way we can. We want our children, parents and teachers to feel confident and happy within the school environment and therefore providing the right knowledge and resources to achieve this is vitally important.



*Glasswater and Killyleagh Integrated Primary School achieved the Impact Award for Education in February 2023*



## Campaigning

### Autism (Amendment) Act 2022

Since the passing of the Autism (Amendment) Act in March 2022, Autism NI has continued to be the secretariat of the All Party Group on Autism at Stormont and bring forward key issues autistic people and their families are facing. With the absence of the NI Assembly, the implementation of the new legislation has been delayed due to funding issues.



*APGA meeting in September 2022*

Autism NI played a pivotal role in helping achieve the new autism legislation through lobbying the NI Executive. The new legislation focuses on the development of a regional early intervention services, a range of adult support services, an autism strategy with measurable targets and the employment of an independent scrutiny mechanism.

### NI Census Results

The Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency released results from Census 2021 in December 2022. For the first time, the Census included a question to record autism figures in Northern Ireland for both children and adults, with 35,367 people stating they have an autism diagnosis. This recent addition to the census is one that Autism NI has campaigned for and with the passing of the Autism Act of 2011, has finally been introduced. The results are significant, as they can be used to shape autism services for adults and children in Northern Ireland.

### Autism Alliance UK

Autism Alliance UK is a national partnership for autism charities and third party organisations to come together and support autistic people and their families. Our CEO recently presented our journey to achieve the Autism (Amendment) Act 2022 and how we lobbied key government



*Autism NI CEO Kerry Boyd presenting to Autism Alliance UK*

bodies for this vital legislation in Northern Ireland. Other countries within the UK are in the process of lobbying their own government for similar legislation, which will protect the rights for autistic people, collect data and develop autism services.

### Consultation Responses

Autism NI responds on behalf of the autism community to more public consultations by public bodies than any other agency in Northern Ireland. In the past year, numerous responses have been completed and the case for improved provision and adjustments for autism has been submitted to local Councils, government agencies and NGOs. We aim to ensure autism stays on the agenda and that it is recognised and understood within our civil society.

### UU Research Hub

The UU Autism Research Hub is a UU/ Autism NI initiative to enhance the interest and activity in quality research with a focus on autism. Autism NI has a commitment to promoting, recognising, and protecting the role of autism self-advocates and families as co-partners in any such research. Workshops are held to agree priorities, and to enable meaningful and recognised participation from the autism community.

# Autism Acceptance and Resources

## Be Kind To Different Minds

In celebration of World Autism Acceptance Week which ran from 28th March-3rd April 2022, autistic people, families, community groups, MLAs, businesses and schools supported our 'Be Kind To Different Minds' message on social media. Our supporters got involved in our poster campaign and shared their own message on how to build a kinder and more inclusive society.



*Evren shares his message on how we can 'Be Kind To Different Minds'.*

## Family Fun Day

On Sunday 3rd April 2022 we welcomed hundreds of local autism families to celebrate World Autism Acceptance Week at W5, Belfast. The event which has been postponed for the previous two years due to Covid 19, saw families come together to celebrate the local autism community.

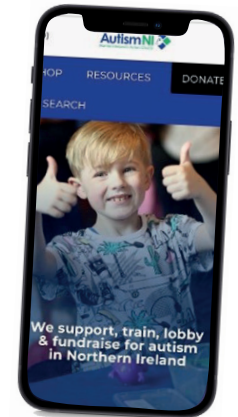


*Siblings Hariette and Oliver enjoy our Family Fun Day at W5*

## Online

Our website ([www.autismini.org](http://www.autismini.org)) is a vital online resource for families and professionals and has a great range of information on services, research publications, fact sheets and downloadable resources on education, anxiety, visual aids and games for autistic children and adults. During 2022/23, our website has been an important online tool for many of our autism families and we seen 78,451 unique users visit our website to access information, services and resources.

We also extended our reach on social media by creating a new TikTok page and regularly keeping supporters updated on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn.



## Fundraising Events

### Zipline

Our fundraisers reached new heights as they took on the longest Zipline in Ireland at Colin Glen Forest Park in Belfast in August 2022.



### Mourne Madness

In August 2022, over 40 people took part in our iconic Mourne Madness trek. The group conquered Slieve Donard as a team and a smaller group then went on to climb Slieve Commedagh and Slieve Bearnagh. The sun was shining, and everyone took in the beautiful views of the coastline.



### Glow Walk

Hundreds of families 'got their glow on' and attended our family fun Glow Walk at Stormont in November 2022. Families got involved in fun and games from the U105 crew, and a dance warm up by Fitness Freddy before taking on a night walk at Stormont Estate.



### Big Christmas Cuppa

Families, businesses, community groups, and schools got behind our 'Big Christmas Cuppa' campaign and held a festive Christmas coffee morning in aid of Autism NI.



### Challenge 22

During World Autism Acceptance Week, over 100 people took part in our virtual challenge based on the number 22 which represented 1 in 22 school age children with an autism diagnosis. Many supporters got creative and baked 22 buns, cycled 22 miles or walked 22k to raise vital funds for Autism NI's services.



*Nuala and Eoghan baked 22 buns and cookies for Challenge 22*



## Superhero Week

Over 45 schools across Northern Ireland took part in our Superhero Week from 6th-10th February 2023. Pupils took on superhero tasks throughout the week whilst asking for sponsorship and learning about autism in their school. At the end of the week, pupils celebrated their achievements with a certificate and sticker badge.



# Corporate and Community Partnerships

## Home Bargains

The staff team at Home Bargains have been supporting Autism NI through a number of fundraising events in store throughout the year, and a group of 14 staff members took part in our Tandem Skydive challenge in June 2022 raising nearly £13,000.

Shoppers can also continue to donate to Autism NI by dropping their change in our collection tins at the tills, which are available across 28 stores in Northern Ireland.



## Mercedes Benz NI Truck and Van

MBNI Truck and Van has chosen Autism NI as their benefitting Charity partner for 2023. The staff team started their fundraising by hosting a Christmas Jumper Day in December and raising £422. The team has planned a calendar of events to host throughout 2023.



## Little Wing

During April 2022, Little Wing Pizza supported World Autism Acceptance Month by donating £1 from each special sold during April to Autism NI.



## Linfield FC

Northern Ireland legend and Linfield FC Manager David Healey launched our new partnership with the Club in October 2022. To kick off the partnership, the Club held a 'Keepy-uppy Challenge' on social media and held various bucket collections at home matches.



# Partnerships

Autism NI continues to be a strong advocate of partnerships, and we recognise when another organisation's support and expertise is required. We are committed to further building on our engagement with a wide range of stakeholders within the statutory, community and voluntary sectors and continue to work with individuals and families to empower them.



# Financial Performance

Autism NI is a company limited by guarantee (Company Number NI058548) and an Inland Revenue approved charity (reference number XR22944). Registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland NIC100240.

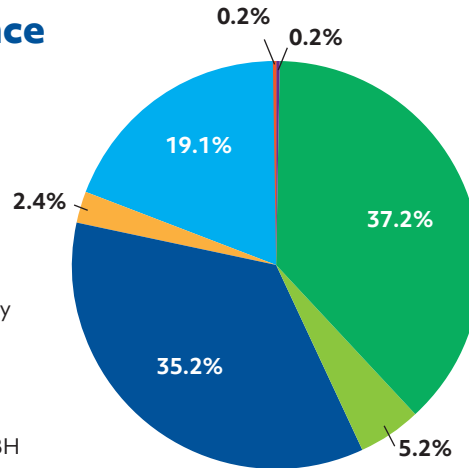
### Registered Office:

Donard, Knockbracken Healthcare Park, Saintfield Road, Belfast, BT8 8BH

### Auditors:

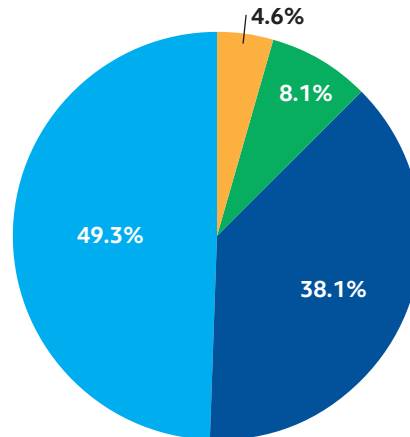
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Belfast  
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For more information about our services or to support our work, call us on 028 9040 1729 or visit [www.autismni.org](http://www.autismni.org)



### Incoming Resources 2022/23

- ◆ Restricted Funding: Grants (37.2%)
- ◆ Unrestricted Funding: Grants (5.2%)
- ◆ Donations and Fundraising (35.2%)
- ◆ Membership (2.4%)
- ◆ Autism Training and Conferences (19.1%)
- ◆ Sale of Merchandise (0.2%)
- ◆ Investment Interest Received (0.2%)



### Resources Expended 2022/23

- ◆ Expenditure on Raising Funds (8.1%)
- ◆ Expenditure on Charitable Activities: Restricted (38.1%)
- ◆ Expenditure on Charitable Activities: Unrestricted (49.3%)
- ◆ Governance Costs (4.6%)

## Presidents

Professor Rita R. Jordan  
Dr Judith Gould

## Vice Presidents

Eileen Bell CBE  
Professor David Sines

## Board Members

David Heatley Chairperson  
Steven Goldblatt Vice-Chairperson  
Dr Clare Bailey Honorary Secretary  
Dr Gloria Duignan Honorary Treasurer  
Jonathan Simpson  
Jeff Hobson  
Dr Karen Jack  
Alan Young

## Patron

Adam Keefe



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