



Strategic Plan 2024-2029

www.autismni.org

Building an inclusive society

Contents

	Page
Forewords.....	3-4
About Autism NI	5
Our Core Values	7
Autism in numbers	8
Our Priorities	9-13



Photo: Families enjoy W5 Family Fun Day during World Autism Acceptance Week

Chairperson Foreward



David Heatley

I am incredibly proud to introduce our new Strategy: Building an Inclusive Society. The work that has been achieved by the Charity historically has been groundbreaking particularly in respect of the successful lobby campaign of two pieces of autism specific legislation, the Autism Act 2011 and the Autism Amendment Act 2022. Through the hard work of the staff team over recent years, our services have reached more people than ever before and our lobbying efforts have led to improvements in provision such as the introduction of the first NI Autism Strategy in 2013 and a new data collection requirement through the NI Census which showed us for the first time the size of our autistic population within Northern Ireland.

I am therefore delighted that this new strategy will strive to continue our vital work, as well as expand our reach, influence, and impact of services going forward. It is through a competent, diverse and passionate team that our strategic priorities for the next period will be achieved and I am grateful to be leading such an enthusiastic and committed team.

David Heatley



CEO Foreward



Kerry Boyd

I am excited to launch our new five-year strategy, which has been created with the needs of autistic people at its core. The Strategy will be used to guide the Charity's direction and define its priorities going forward. The strategy has been developed by our neurodiverse staff team through working with autistic adults and families and understanding what exactly they need in order to lead a fulfilled and healthy life. The contents of this strategy will be the thread that runs through all of Autism NI's Services over the next period of the Charity, and it will support the expansion of our work within our growing autism community. Autism NI has expanded its services over the past number of years, and we want to continue to be able to adapt and develop new services as needed. We want to be able to respond to need in an agile and considerate way, listening to our autistic peers to guide our direction.

We have achieved a lot for a relatively small charity over the past 30 years, and we will endeavour to keep achieving positive outcomes in the future. We will achieve this through always staying close to our overall strategic aim of building an inclusive society that works for autistic people in Northern Ireland.

Kerry Boyd





About Autism NI

Autism NI is Northern Ireland's longest serving autism charity and we have provided life changing services for autistic people and their families for over 30 years. We inspire, educate, and empower local communities, businesses, and our government to support an inclusive society where everyone understands and accepts autistic people.

We recognise that a lot has changed in 30 years and awareness of autism has increased, but we also know that there is a long way to go in relation to the general public's understanding of how to support an autistic person through a person-centred approach. We will therefore continue to work in a shared partnership approach with autistic people and their families and deliver essential services across Northern Ireland. By working together, we can achieve so much more and create a better, fairer, and more understanding society for autistic people.

Our services

Autism NI offers local support services for autistic people and their families across the country. Our Helpline provides advice, information and resources for autistic people, parents and carers, as well as professionals. Our Early Intervention Service provides one-to-one support for families after their child has received an autism diagnosis. We also facilitate a Support Group Network that provides support for parents and carers throughout local communities. The Charity also provides specialised support for young autistic people through a Mental Health and Autism Project and a Girls and Autism Project and autistic people who identify as LGBTQIA+.

The Charity is the longest serving autism training provider in Northern Ireland and delivers a range of accredited training to parents, carers, and professionals. We also have an Autistic Adult Support Service as well as an Autistic Peer Network, which provides supports for our autistic adults in a way that works to their needs.

On a wider level, Autism NI provides the secretariat for the All Party Group on Autism within the Northern Ireland Assembly. Through this work the Charity has successfully lobbied for two pieces of autism legislation within the past ten years, the Autism Act of 2011 and the Autism (Amendment) Act 2022.

Photo: Our Family Support Manager enjoying our Family Fun Day to celebrate World Autism Acceptance Week



Our mission

We support autistic people and their families, and campaign for autism acceptance within society.

Our vision

Our vision is an inclusive society where autistic people can achieve their full potential.

Photo: Autism NI staff supporting World Autism Acceptance Week

Our core values

Autism NI is built on three core values. All staff, volunteers, and fundraisers are committed to these values, and dedicated to pursuing them in everything we do. We are committed to offering a range of supports to autistic people and their families and aim to create sustainable outcomes that empower our communities to lead fulfilled lives.

■ We make an impact

We deliver innovation and excellence by nurturing a culture of learning, providing an evidence-based, and person-centred approach in everything we do.

■ We work together

We work alongside autistic people and their families, and build partnerships that will champion better understanding, accessibility, and services for our autism community.

■ We are changemakers

We are brave and relentless in striving for a more informed and inclusive society where autistic people can reach their full potential.



Why we do what we do

Over **35,000** autistic people in NI*



82% of autistic children have a Special Educational Need***



Only **22%** of autistic adults in employment**



1 in 20 school age children***

Over **15,000** autistic school aged children***



2.4% prevalence rate in females***



70% of autistic people have mental health difficulties****



6.9% prevalence rate in males***



1 in 4 autistic children speak few or no words*****

*Census 2021 main statistics for Northern Ireland. **Office for National Statistics 2020. ***The prevalence of autism (including Asperger's Syndrome) in school age children in Northern Ireland 2023, DHSSPS. ****BMA British Medical Association 2019. *****www.autistica.org.uk 2024.

Photo: Autism NI East Antrim Support Group





Our Strategic priorities 2024-2029

Over the next five years Autism NI will continue to grow, develop and deliver services that will support our vision of Building an Inclusive Society. Therefore, we believe the strategic priorities of Autism NI will be to:

1

Listen to those that matter, through designing and delivering services that will benefit autistic people and their families.

2

Provide the right support for all autistic people and their families to ensure they lead fulfilled lives.

3

Empower and educate to improve understanding of autism and how we can support autistic people.

4

Influence change within society through raising understanding and acceptance and make services accessible for autistic people.



PriorityONE

Listen



Aim

We want to ensure that we are doing what autistic people need, through engaging and consulting with them on everything we do.

For too long autistic people have been marginalised with little, to no say in what services they feel would best support them. We want to change this narrative and therefore we believe that our autism community must be involved in the decisions we make in how we design and deliver our services.

What we will do:

- We will work with our Autistic Peer Networks to help us develop new training and support courses
- We will consult with autistic people and their families on what services they feel would benefit them
- We will use data from our services to directly influence what areas of work and emerging issues that we need to prioritise
- We will continue to advocate and lobby on issues that are pertinent for autistic people.
- We will work in partnership with other organisations to ensure autism has as big a voice as possible.
- We will listen to autism research professionals whose expertise identifies emerging areas of need.

Photo: Autistic Adults Peer Network meet up for a social outing



Priority TWO Support



Aim

Provide the right support for autistic people and their families to ensure they lead fulfilled lives.

We exist to support the 35,000 autistic people living in Northern Ireland and their families. This will always be our main priority and it will never change. Our team will continue to work in partnership with our autistic community to shape our services and bring forth evidence-based projects.

What we will do:

- Increase accessibility of information, advice and support available to parents, carers, family members, autistic adults and professionals through our Helpline
- Increase the number of people availing of autism services in Northern Ireland through better promotion and awareness of what we do.
- Provide a 'first port of call' to parents and carers of a newly diagnosed child through our Early Intervention Service.
- Provide support to newly diagnosed autistic adults through an Adults Support Service.
- Support autistic adults in the community who have recently received a diagnosis through the Autistic Peer Networks.
- Provide support for autistic girls in the community, at home and at school through a Girls and Autism Project
- Provide support for autistic people and their mental health through a range of personal support.
- Expand and promote our Parent Support Network in local communities through engaging with parents and carers of newly diagnosed autistic children
- Improve the reach and accessibility of the Charity's services through digital technology to ensure autistic people and their families are aware of the supports available to them.

Photo: Families enjoy Fun Day at W5 during World Autism Acceptance Week



PriorityTHREE Empower



Aim

Empower and educate to improve understanding and support for autistic people.

We want to build an inclusive society for autistic people in Northern Ireland and we can't do this on our own. We need to collaborate with local business, employers, schools and education establishments, healthcare professionals, local government bodies and other charities to educate and influence changes that work best for our autism community.

What we will do:

- Ensure training courses are co-designed with autistic people
- Increase the number of professionals receiving autism training to best support autistic people in the workplace and promote accessibility and best practice
- Expand the range and style of training courses offered to ensure accessibility
- Increase campaigns through digital technology
- Increase public understanding and participation during World Autism Acceptance Week and increase the promotion of campaign message
- Provide clear information and advice to autistic people and their families when they are seeking support
- Inform local government bodies of what autistic people need through evidence-based research
- Influence policy to ensure autistic people are getting the right support and services in Northern Ireland.

Photo: Killyleagh Integrated Primary School achieve Autism NI's Impact Award for Education



PriorityFOUR Influence change



Aim

Campaign and influence positive change within society through building understanding, acceptance and accessibility to services for autistic people.

We want to change public attitudes and understanding of autism to ensure autistic people can live in an inclusive society where they will not face any barriers and live a fulfilled life. We are committed to improving public knowledge on autism, sharing practical strategies and overcoming stereotypes.

What we will do:

- Work in collaboration with autistic people to ensure their voices for change are heard and met
- Increase promotion of acceptance campaigns through digital technologies
- Provide a platform to amplify autistic voices that will inspire others to make a difference in their society
- Grow our support networks in local communities and work with them to promote positive change in their area
- Develop the range of training and support courses available for parents, carers, professionals and autistic adults
- Campaign and lobby for positive change at government level to ensure all autistic people have the right services at the right time
- Build relationships with decision-makers and work with other organisations to support joint lobbying campaigns.

Photo: Autism NI CEO Kerry Boyd, autistic adult Kathy and Autistica CEO Dr James Cusack campaign for a specialised mental health service for autistic people in Northern Ireland

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www.autismni.org



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