



Inclusion Awards

A better life for people with autism

Inclu
Award

Foreword



The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Autism (APPGA) wants a society where autism is understood fully and where people with autistic spectrum disorders and their families are respected, supported and receive the same rights and entitlements as others. The winners of the NAS Autism Inclusion Awards provide examples of good practice demonstrating

how social inclusion can be made a reality for people with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). We need to mainstream these examples of good practice, and I hope that highlighting the work of our winners will encourage others to follow their lead.

The APPGA Manifesto sets out specific objectives for the achievement of universal high quality services for people with ASD by 2013. The APPGA is aware that the quality of service provision and opportunities for people with autism currently varies across the country. The Manifesto calls for agencies to work together to facilitate real person-centred planning and inclusion.

Congratulations to all those nominated for an Autism Inclusion Award, it was a pleasure to read about such good practice. It is clear that all of those nominated are very much appreciated for the valuable contribution they make to the lives of people with autism, their families and their communities.

Liz Blackman MP
Chair, APPGA

Terminology

Throughout this report the term 'autism', 'autistic spectrum disorders' and the abbreviation 'ASD' are used to cover the whole range of developmental disorders, which include classic Kanner autism and Asperger syndrome. However, in places we write specifically of Asperger syndrome, referring to those with this diagnosis as a subset.



As an actress, award ceremonies tend to be a fairly regular part of my life – we in show-biz love an excuse to put on a bit of glitter and tell each other how wonderful we are – and over the years I've presented awards to a great many performers, writers and directors. (I've also been the hired entertainment at less glamorous occasions in order to

squeeze a bit of extra cash for The National Autistic Society – such as the irresistible 'Pipeline Industries Guild Annual Awards', where one of the winners wrote a fascinating paper on 'The welding of hot-tap connections to high-pressure gas pipelines'). And as for me: I may not be an Oscar winner, but Alan Ayckbourn told me he thought I must be the only actress ever to have won the Dried Fruit Award – so there.

But these awards are very different – and very special. For too many people with autistic spectrum disorders and their families, life is a constant struggle to access services and support, and we believe this isn't right. The NAS knows that it is possible for children and adults with ASD to be included in the community, to enjoy school, to attend college and to find rewarding jobs. The good work carried out by many individuals and organisations who have shown a long-standing commitment to autism often goes unrewarded, and we felt it was time to change that.

An important message from the Inclusion Awards is that supporting people with ASD and their families doesn't always have to mean enormous expense or major adaptations. Often it is simply a question of flexibility, tolerance and understanding on the part of the people providing the service. All the Inclusion Award winners in this report have shown these qualities, and above all have treated people with autism as people first, with the same right to take part in society as you or I.

We hope that the winners will be an inspiration to all those who come into contact with people with autism. I send my congratulations and admiration to the winners – we know, of course, that there are other countless numbers of unsung heroes out there working hard to improve the lives of those with autism and their families, and I do hope that these awards can be seen as a symbolic thank you to all of them.

Jane Asher
NAS, President

Autism Inclusion Awards

The Autism Inclusion Awards were introduced by The National Autistic Society (NAS) to celebrate good practice and encourage people to think about the ways in which inclusion can work for people with autism and their families. Nominations could be made by anyone affected by autism.

The Awards celebrate inclusion in the broadest sense of the term. This means that the awards celebrate any person or organisation that helps people with autistic spectrum disorders and their families to take a full part in the life of their community. People nominated anybody who they felt had been particularly helpful in promoting inclusion for themselves or their family. This included individuals, such as a befriender or a teacher, or a service/organisation, such as a social group for adults with Asperger syndrome, a nursery or a parent support group.

Children and adults with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) often find it difficult to be included in all parts of society – education, employment, leisure, housing and the local community in general. Within this report are examples of individuals with ASD not only receiving services but also being included and encouraged to take part fully within their local community.

The NAS is all too aware of the struggles people with ASD and their families face when trying to access appropriate services. This report shows that there are excellent examples of individuals and services who fully understand the needs of people with ASD. By giving the Awards and publishing the report the NAS aims to highlight these good practices so that others will follow their lead.

The NAS received 55 eligible winning nominations of which 5 have been selected as featured winners. The winning nominations were divided into 5 categories:

- Autism-specific groups (including schools) and individuals working with children
- Autism-specific groups and individuals working with people of all ages
- Mainstream/non autism-specific schools and organisations for children
- Mainstream/non autism-specific groups and individuals working with children
- Mainstream/non autism-specific groups for young adults/adults

We invited Liz Blackman MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism, to select a featured winner in each category on the basis of the following criteria:

- An ongoing commitment to autism
- New or innovative ways of working with people with autism and their families
- Positive ways in which people's lives have changed as a result of the person, service or organisation nominated.

Although some winners crossed category boundaries, all were assigned to the most relevant category.

The featured and nominated winners covered all abilities on the autistic spectrum, the whole of the UK and age groups from nursery into adulthood. The NAS would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the people who nominated an individual, group, service or school and also congratulate the nominated and featured winners.



Co-ordinator Autism
Services – Child Health
Services, Inverness

Marlyn Campbell

Featured winner

Marlyn's post, Co-ordinator of Autism Services, is funded by the Changing Children's Services Fund, from the Scottish Executive. It is a way for Health, Social Work and Education Services and the voluntary sector to produce and maintain stronger links with each other. Marlyn sees her role as someone who, because she is not employed in an operational context, can 'bridge the gaps' between service providers.

Although this post is very new and has funding only provisionally for two years, Marlyn hopes that this initiative will increase co-ordination of services for children with autism and their families. Working pro-actively in such a way should more than justify its allocation of valuable funds and result in better use of existing resources within the Highlands, as well as provide a good model of inter-agency working for others to follow.

Liz Blackman commented: *"Marlyn listens to service users and uses this information to feed back into and improve services for children with autism. She encourages service users to voice their opinions on various forums and as advocates where good practice has been established. She also signposts people to other services and I chose Marlyn because she is highly thought of by the nominators and the agencies who jointly appointed her to her new position."*

Marlyn's work spans a wide range of different voluntary and statutory agencies as well as parents and carers, all of whom may have different ideas on her role and how it relates to them. This adds to the difficulty of co-ordinating services for a complex condition such as autism.

Marlyn stresses that allowing for a post such as hers can enable more effective co-ordination of multi-agency agreed pathways for Health, Social Services and Education. In many areas around the UK, the quality of services for children with autism very much depends on the autism-specific awareness and expertise of individual professionals. Having a joined up strategy and someone in post to facilitate this inter-agency working would help to remove reliance on individual competence.

Marlyn was nominated by Rona Membury and Isobel Geegan who welcomed her warm and friendly approach:

"Even though Marlyn is very busy she comes out of the office to talk to us, as service users, to find out how services could be improved or if we are being missed."

Nominated winners

Julie Fawns nominated [Michael Crossman](#) for his voluntary work at a special needs base in a local primary school, Aberdeen. Michael, age 16, also volunteers on play schemes during the school holidays working with autistic children, and works part time as a carer for a severely autistic child.

Liz Falconer nominated [Michelle Rodger](#), Fort William, who tutors on a home-based ABA programme. Michelle has supported Liz's son through playgroup and has recently started school support with him.

Sue Thompson and Katrina Preston nominated [Charlotte Hawkins](#) of B&NES (Bath and North East Somerset) Out of School Club for children with Asperger syndrome. Charlotte's enthusiasm has enabled members to take part in a range of activities and to develop their social skills.

Christine Watson nominated [Inside Out](#), a project within [Discovery – Student Volunteering Swansea](#) that provides weekly activities for children with ASD and their siblings.

Sara Truman nominated [Nicole Scully](#) and [June Wood](#) who organise regular social events and outings for young people with Asperger syndrome in Woking and Guildford.

Helen Blackburn nominated [Vanessa Kirr](#) for working tirelessly for children with special needs in her area. Vanessa is Chair of County Durham Autistic Support Group and a volunteer with the Parent Partnership Service.

Ruth Bate nominated the staff at [Springfield Community Special School](#) in Staffordshire for their commitment, support and understanding. The school provides parents' workshops to help parents manage challenging behaviour and recently set up a new unit to reintegrate children with severe behavioural difficulties into school life.

Tracey Barker nominated [Anita Hughes](#) in Guildford, an independent educational psychologist running social skills groups for children and teenagers with high functioning autistic spectrum disorders.

Paul and Sue Harrison nominated [Mark Harrington](#), a student at Loughborough University and a volunteer with the NAS befriending scheme, who has played a really positive role in their son's life.

Gary Barnett nominated [Sally Stoakes](#) from Hull who has campaigned for the development of local services for people with ASD, and worked to raise autism awareness since the early 1990s. Sally has been involved in developing a wide range of initiatives including: a local support help-line service, accessible play schemes for children with ASD, training schemes for key workers and the development of autistic provision within the local Special School.



Supporting Asperger
Families in Essex
Carolann Jackson

Featured winner

In 1997, shortly after her daughter was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome at age fifteen, Carolann attended a conference about Asperger syndrome. She was struck by the amount of feeling of frustration and anger from the parents there about the lack of help and support they were receiving. At the end of that conference she stood up and shouted out for anyone who would be interested in starting a parent support group.

The response was overwhelming: 65 people attended the first meeting, and from that has grown an organisation of charitable status, which is changing the face of Asperger syndrome provision in Essex. Carolann says that she has achieved this by continually bombarding those in health, education and social services who have a duty towards these individuals and their families. Supporting Asperger Families in Essex (SAFE) also has obtained funding for several projects (but not the administration necessary she added!).

SAFE's direct work has included teaming up with other organisations and includes: Asperger Into Employment (AIM), the Asperger befriending group and soon to be launched AS-IF (Asperger Social Inclusion and Friendship) – a social skills group for children. SAFE also runs training/awareness-raising courses and has been asked to deliver this to GPs in the near future.

Liz Blackman commented: *“Carolann founded SAFE in 1997 and immediately recognised that she needed to change the minds of the decision makers in order to ensure local services were ‘fit’ to provide appropriate support for Asperger Families. I believe many of her achievements will be held up as exemplary practice throughout the UK and I commend her for her incredible work.”*

Carolann believes that the aim and purpose of SAFE is to raise awareness of the needs of individuals with Asperger syndrome and their families. She does this by her constant presence in any situation where a decision is being made which could affect the amount of appropriate help and support that people with Asperger syndrome and their families receive. This includes endless letter writing, phone calls and meetings, all combined with a full time job.

Carolann's efforts are certainly appreciated by SAFE's members. Carolann received 10 nominations – Torgun Bullen, Tracie Smith, Danny Scott-Rockel, Angela Radford, Elaine Reilly, Sue Meyers, Mrs Brenda Holland, Jamie Stewart, Joan & Michael Patching and Nita Jackson.

Nominated winners

Dr Nicholls nominated [The Limes](#), a small residential home in Kent for young adults with ASD, which was set up by Rod and Karen Lebon in their own home. Dr Nicholls' son, Andrew, was the first resident, and has achieved a GNVQ in catering, qualified as a scuba diver, and become a keen yachtsman during his stay.

Felicity Margolis nominated [Paul Mayhew, Headmaster of Cruckton Hall School](#), Shrewsbury, for his commitment and expertise. Paul supported the family for over 2 years, whilst they fought for funding for their son Ben to attend Cruckton. Starting at Cruckton changed Ben's life. Paul manages to get his students accepted into the local community, playing for local sports team and taking part in events.

Ian and Gillian Morrison nominated the [Teenscene Project](#), run by the NAS in Glasgow. The project has enabled their autistic son to take part in a wide range of activities in the local community and beyond. They feel that the project has enabled the family to get involved in activities they would never have attempted on their own, building confidence and independence.

Haywood Drake nominated the [Asperger Syndrome Support Group](#), run by the NAS in Surrey, which helps members develop social and life skills. Members appreciate the commitment and experience demonstrated by the group's leaders.

Shirley Jones nominated [Kevin Healey, Chairman of the North Staffordshire Autism/Asperger Association](#). Kevin, who has Asperger syndrome, has secured funding for the group and works hard to promote awareness of autistic spectrum disorders.

Elizabeth Nott nominated the [Essex Autistic Society – Adult Services](#), which has recently celebrated its 20th birthday. The Service helped Elizabeth's son Richard move from his family home of 36 years into a residential placement. She feels that the helpful and supportive staff have enabled Richard to grow in confidence and learn new skills.



**Rhonnda Cynon
Taff Local Authority**

Featured winner

Rhonnda Cynon Taff Local Authority have been developing a continuity of provision for children with autistic spectrum disorders for the last 7 years. These developments have been in direct response to the increasing number of children identified needing additional support. The provision covers all key stages and is a combination of factors including individual support in mainstream classes, communication disorder classes at Key Stage 1 and 2 in mainstream schools.

In 2002 Rhonda established Summerz Kool for disadvantaged young people aged between 8 and 16. A multi-agency approach approach was used to provide a programme of over 30 activities which included go-karting, rock and pop workshops, pony trekking, camping and surfing. The Disabled Children's Team ensured the project focused on inclusion and secured funding in order to offer 1:1 support with one co-ordinator and three support workers. The 1:1 support service was set up to enable young disabled people (including young people with autism) to attend the varied activity programme alongside non-disabled peers.

Liz Blackman commented: *"This authority provides an holistic service for children with special needs (including autism) and their families using a multi-agency approach. A coherent multi-disciplinary approach has to be the way forward in delivering a high quality service for children with autism and other special needs and Rhonnda Cynon Taff offers best practice."*

Rhonnda Cynon Taff promotes inclusion, hence the developing provision in mainstream schools. However, provision has also been developed in local special schools so that as many children as possible can be educated within their own communities. The local authority is also exploring how it can develop 'autism-friendly' schools as well as workshops for parents.

The authority admits that there were obstacles to overcome – staff training being the biggest. As a result a comprehensive multi-agency training programme was implemented, facilitated by The National Autistic Society. In addition to this more specialised training has been implemented for staff working directly with children with autism. The next obstacle is to work with their partners to improve post-16 provision and to investigate new work experience opportunities for pupils with an ASD.

It is this forward thinking and planning that prompted Brenda Misselbrook, who submitted the nomination, to write:

"I feel this authority is not only meeting its legal obligations but is evidently a champion in investing in its staff to ensure the autistic community have a first class staff and create opportunities for inclusion regardless of the severity of autism, not only in schools but also extra curricular activities."

Nominated winners

John Nicholson nominated [Birch Primary School](#) in Berkshire for initiating an inclusion project in partnership with Kennel Lane Special School.

Philip Whitaker nominated [Newbold Verdon Primary School](#), Leicestershire, for setting up a peer tutoring scheme for children with autism. Year 6 pupils participate in weekly play and interactive sessions with their partner, with supervision and help from staff.

Jenny Mayne and Monty Fairfoot nominated [Sally Archer](#) from Hillcrest Primary School in Bristol. Sally has welcomed ABA tutors into her mainstream reception class and promoted an understanding of ASD throughout the school.

Julie Swan nominated the [Specialist Autism Mainstream Service](#) for facilitating appropriate access to mainstream education for children with ASD in Maidenhead.

Elizabeth Streatfield nominated [Queen of Hearts Nursery School](#) in Kettering, Northamptonshire, for valuing her son as an individual and adapting to meet his needs, enabling him to integrate fully and enjoy his time at the Nursery.

Maureen Wells nominated [Fiddlesticks Nursery](#), Lewes in Sussex, which provides excellent support for her son despite having had no previous experience of ASD.

Suzanne Ryan nominated [Theresa McGuinness](#) from Selby in Yorkshire, friend and learning support assistant to Suzanne's 8-year-old son with Asperger syndrome. Theresa helped Suzanne's son write a book about his condition to help other staff understand his needs and behaviour.

Kathryn Devlin nominated [Paget Primary School](#), Birmingham for their supportive, flexible and communicative approach to integrating Kathryn's son into the school, and their determination to make his placement a success.

Mrs Crawford nominated [Common Road Infant and Nursery School](#) in Barnsley, West Yorkshire, for the support they have given to her son with ASD.

Christianne Pollock nominated [Holding the Reins Nursery](#), Plymouth in Devon, for their work to include children with communication difficulties. Staff undertook training in PECS and incorporated a sensory programme into the nursery curriculum.

Melanie Mansfield from Worthing, West Sussex, nominated [Nerissa Keets](#), her son's special needs teacher. Nerissa has built up Adam's confidence and is working beyond the call of duty to ensure that his transition to middle school goes smoothly.

Deborah Schofield nominated [Paula Johnson](#), who is an integration assistant at Little Sutton School, Sutton Coldfield. Paula enabled Deborah's son Ben to integrate successfully into a new school.

Barbara Nicholson nominated [Holy Family Primary School SEN Base](#) in Aberdeen, for their work as team to support her son Scot.

Alan Vayle nominated [Mrs Taylor](#) of Wallop Primary School, Stockbridge, Hampshire, for her professional and caring approach to teaching.

Polly Gurm nominated [Ms Bendix](#) for the support she has provided to her 12-year-old son, Alwin. Ms Bendix works in the library at Alwin's school, Hounslow, Middlesex, and has gone out of her way to help Alwin settle into his first year at secondary school.

Angela Weston nominated [Simon Ball](#), who teaches at Glynne Primary School, Kingswinford, West Midlands, for his willingness to rearrange his class and schedules in order to facilitate the successful inclusion of a severely autistic pupil.

Angela also nominated [Jane Epton](#) of Old Swinford School, Stourbridge, West Midlands, on behalf of a pupil with an autistic spectrum disorder at the school.

Alison Pope nominated [Ann Arnold](#), Headmistress of Dr Rolfe's Montessori School, London, for promoting an inclusive ethos within the school. Alison values Ann's flexibility and her readiness to listen to parents and consider each child's individual needs.



Leisure Link
Geraint Hughes

Featured winner

Geraint Hughes is the manager of Leisure Link, where he has worked for 10 years. Leisure Link provides leisure and social opportunities for anyone with a learning disability over the age of 11. As well as operating during term time, Leisure Link has activities during the Easter (1 week) and summer holidays (3 weeks). Leisure Link liaises with other local holiday schemes providers in order to ensure that there isn't a clash and they can cover as many school/college holidays between them.

Leisure Link's preparation is meticulous, keeping the person's wishes central to any proposed activity. This person-centred planning approach means that they have used Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), digital photographs and also a symbol version of the scheme's evaluation forms and timetable of events to facilitate communication for members. Geraint stated that they always ask the service users, parents and carers what they would like to do. Liz Blackman commented:

"What is striking is the lengths to which Geraint goes to ensure he knows the needs of each individual and the fact that he enlists specialist staff who have the skills and commitment to support those who take part. Leisure and social activities are so enjoyable and this scheme ensures this enjoyment is open to all."

The holiday scheme is open to anybody between 11 and 18 years of age with a disability who lives or attends school in the Stockport area. Some of the activities include skiing, museum trips, indoor climbing and swimming. In addition to this, Leisure Link offers walking groups, skiing groups, social groups and Youth Outdoors.

Mari Saeki, the project officer of the Family Services Development Project in Greater Manchester, nominated Leisure Link: *"Leisure often seems to be overlooked by services as a luxury. Many people with ASD have difficulty making their own informal networks due to their impairment and the structured environment is vital."*

Leisure Link has a combination of paid staff and volunteers and they are all offered training including autism awareness, which is provided by working in partnership with another local organisation. Funding comes from various sources and has included Children in Need, Stockport Early Years and Stockport Social Services. Although the scheme is 14 years old, Leisure Link continues to apply every year to renew the funding.

Despite recognition from people who enjoy the scheme, parents and professionals, Geraint is extremely modest about Leisure Links' work and refuses to believe either Leisure Link or himself are doing anything that should not be done as a matter of course for any activity-based provision.

Nominated winners

The staff at KIDS nominated [Shirley Pethick](#) for her commitment to developing KIDS services in the Yorkshire and Humber region for over 15 years. Shirley has developed services including summer play schemes, outreach pre-school play sessions and parent support groups. She was the driving force behind KIDS Independent Education Advisory Service, which provides support, information and advice for carers of children with autism and other special needs.

Sally Ann Stoakes nominated [Haltemprice Dolphins' Disabled Swimming Club](#), East Yorkshire. The weekly swimming sessions for disabled adults, children and their families, are enjoyed and valued by many with ASD in the area.

Jennifer Hatch, Manager of Newbury and District Crossroads, Berkshire, nominated [Rachel Smyth](#) who also works for the service. Rachel set up 'Kidz Club', which provides activity schemes during the school holidays for children with ASD. The scheme provides one-to-one support, and children take part in mainstream activities alongside other children their age. Rachel devised the scheme following her experiences as a carer for an autistic child. She initiated fundraising and the club now involves six members of staff.

Rosalind McKinley nominated [Barnardo's Family Link Project](#), Portadown. Donna Smith from the project, helps Rosalind's family and enables her daughter Alison, who has autism, ADHD and Cooks syndrome to be a part of the community.

[British Institute of Brain Injured Children \(BIBIC\)](#) received nominations from Mr and Mrs Iannotti from Prestwick and Mr Blouet from Bristol for the ongoing support BIBIC offered their children. Both families were grateful for the thorough assessment provided, and felt that their children had made remarkable progress under BIBIC's helpful and supportive guidance.

Michael McMullin from Aberdeenshire nominated [Julie Fawns](#) for her efforts to ensure that children with special needs are able to access the services and education they are entitled to. She established PAGES (Parent Advisory Group for Education and Socialisation) to this end and helped Michael successfully challenge the Education Authority regarding provision for his son who has Asperger syndrome.

Caroline Stagg nominated [Di Page](#), Trampoline Coach at Gainsborough Sports Centre, Ipswich, for the support and understanding she has shown Caroline's 3 year old autistic son during her trampolining class.

Mari Saeki nominated the [Thursday Night Club](#) in Manchester because of the opportunities it provides for children with autism to mix socially with other children. The club provides a range of activities in a supportive and inclusive environment.



East Berkshire College

Jenny Ilic

Featured winner

In September 2000 Jenny Ilic started as the Asperger syndrome co-ordinator at East Berkshire College.

She now supports over 90 students on the three main sites of East Berkshire College and is also studying for her Masters degree in Autism at Birmingham University. Jenny covers a variety of subjects during her social skills workshops; these include discussions about body language, bullying, social interaction and anything else the students need to continue their positive college experience.

Liz Blackman commented: *“Further Education is a critical transition period for many students and especially so if they have communication and other problems. They can feel especially vulnerable in a new, less intimate environment. Jenny’s classes are well attended and frequently run over time. She is nominated by a student with autism who wrote very movingly and positively about his own experience. The workshop supports many students to socialise, become more independent, express and solve their problems. They gain great confidence.”*

There is a firm emphasis on fun during the workshops and students can also talk to Jenny individually in her office during the day. There are 2 rooms in her office, including a quiet place for students, a video player and computer.

It is obvious when talking to Jenny that she enjoys her job and working with the students. She is also keen to pass on her knowledge to others and regularly speaks to her fellow college lecturers, disability officers and outside agencies, such as the police, about the triad of impairments associated with ASD. Jenny is also in contact with the NAS employment agency, Prospects, and has started a supported employment scheme with the Berkshire Autistic Society.

Jenny was nominated by one of her students who stated that before he started college he had been very timid and refused to travel by public transport on his own. Since his sessions with Jenny his independence has grown to such an extent that he is preparing to go to university and perhaps live on campus. He concluded: *“I am very grateful for knowing Jenny.”*

The pleasure and genuine enthusiasm shown by both Jenny and her students should be tremendously encouraging to anybody involved in mainstream education. By creating an Asperger syndrome co-ordinator East Berkshire College has also shown the foresight needed to help students with Asperger syndrome learn life skills as well as academic subjects at a mainstream college.

Nominated winners

Clive Polkinghorne nominated [Tigger Pritchard](#), a teacher at Truro College, Cornwall, for his work to re-engage a 16-year-old pupil with ASD returning to education after a lapse of one year. Tigger is currently establishing a specific course for autistic students at Truro College.

Elfreeda Rathbone Sutton Youth Club in the West Midlands nominated its leader and founder [Glyn Cooksey](#) who has been running the club for some 20 years. The club was set up by parents of students at a local Special School, in order to establish a social life for students outside the school. Young people aged over 16 have since been referred to the club by GPs, social services and teachers, and there are now 53 members. The club organises residential holidays, social evenings and events, and raises funds through membership fees and a range of activities.

Esther Fletcher nominated the [1st Denbigh Guides](#) in Denbighshire. Esther's autistic daughter, Sarah, was keen to become a Guide, but had unfortunately been rejected by two local groups before Denbigh Guides welcomed her. Esther felt that Sarah was always encouraged to play an active role in the group. If it hadn't been for the Denbigh Guides she would have missed out on a valuable experience, which included going on many camping holidays and completing many challenges to gain her Baden Powell Award alongside her mainstream peers.

Steve Clarke nominated [Glascoed Social Club](#), in Gwent, for its supportive and inclusive attitude towards people with ASD. The Social Club is used by a small group of people with ASD for a social evening on a regular basis. The staff have been supportive and worked with the group to help them overcome problems and integrate effectively.

Mrs Jowler nominated [Rural Support Services](#) in Huntly, Aberdeenshire. Sally Saunders from the service provides dedicated support to Mrs Jowler and her daughter Sophie, helping Sophie to become involved in the local community, building her confidence and helping her to meet people and make friends.

Andrew Edwards from Wrexham nominated [NEW! Cefn Druids Football Club](#) for the way they have helped him 'overcome my autism'. The club is semi-professional, and allows Andrew to train with them twice a week, treating him as an equal. He feels that this has had a positive impact on his behaviour and greatly increased his quality of life. He thinks the squad demonstrates that "you do not have to be qualified to deal with an autistic person, just caring and thoughtful."

Conclusion

The Autism Inclusion Awards were established to celebrate the many individuals and organisations around the UK who help people with autistic spectrum disorders to take a full part in the life of their communities. The featured and nominated winners all demonstrate that meaningful inclusion can be achieved, with positive outcomes for people with ASD, their families, peers and the community as a whole. Through their actions, the legal entitlements to inclusion created by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 have been made real for many families.

A universal community experience?

Sadly, the positive experiences highlighted in this report are not universal for people with autistic spectrum disorders and their families. A large proportion of the nominations relate to the inclusion of people with autistic spectrum disorders in play, leisure and social activities.

However, many nominees felt that access to social activities was often seen to be an extra, additional need instead of a vital component in the lives of all people. In a recent survey by the NAS fewer than half of the respondents (49%) felt that there were appropriate play and leisure facilities in their local area for the person they care for to use. For young people aged 16-24, this figure fell to 43%¹.

It is therefore encouraging that a number of winners were mainstream groups, who welcomed people with ASD into their activities. This demonstrates how inclusion can be achieved, and how it can often be achieved quite easily where there is awareness and a willingness to support and understand.

As has been highlighted throughout the report, in order for people with ASD to be more active within their community there needs to be awareness training in mainstream settings, increased contact with local autistic societies for their guidance as well as input from both children and adults with ASD about what they want to do.

The NAS would like to thank all those who took part in highlighting these examples of good practice, and in particular Liz Blackman MP for her enthusiasm for the project through selecting our featured winners.

The NAS has recently urged the government to implement a National Strategy for Adults with autism which would include provision for leisure activities. This strategy would then help to create more opportunities for inclusion and present more examples of the good practice offered in this report.

Unfortunately, in the NAS survey only 58% of respondents felt that the person they care for was able to access mainstream play and leisure facilities. This is reflected in the higher number of nominations for groups run specifically to enable young people with ASD to take part in leisure activities. The work of these groups is equally important in ensuring a wide range of provision is available to meet the wide range of needs across the autistic spectrum.

Working together – benefits for all

A large number of nominations were also received for staff in mainstream schools who have welcomed children with ASD into their classes. In many cases this involved teachers and specialist support staff working together effectively. Nominations in this category reflected that friendship and peer support is central to successful inclusion in schools. Many initiatives involved developing understanding of autism throughout the school, engaging both pupils and staff. Schemes such as peer tutoring had a direct impact on inclusion in the playground, and changes in the curriculum were enjoyed by all children when a nursery school introduced a sensory programme to benefit an autistic child. Although mainstream education may not be the answer for some, these awards show that where inclusion is meaningful, there are benefits for the whole school.

Lifelong need

Adults as well as children with autistic spectrum disorders are likely to need support to achieve meaningful inclusion. An autistic spectrum disorder is a lifelong condition. The nominations received for befrienders, Further Education college bases and social groups clearly demonstrate that people with autistic spectrum disorders benefit from lifelong support.

The NAS hopes that the winners shown here will inspire others to emulate their achievements and create communities which value people with autistic spectrum disorders and adapt to their needs.

¹ Broach et al (2003) *Autism: Rights in Reality*, London: NAS

“The winners of the NAS Autism Inclusion Awards demonstrate how social inclusion can be made a reality for people with autistic spectrum disorders. We need to mainstream these examples of good practice, and I hope that highlighting the work of our winners will encourage others to follow their lead... It is clear that all of those nominated are very much appreciated for the valuable contribution they make to the lives of people with autism, their families and their communities.”

Liz Blackman MP

Chair, All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism (APPGA)

The National Autistic Society (NAS) was founded in 1962 by a group of parents who were later joined by people with a professional interest in autism. Today, the Society has become the UK’s foremost charity for people with autism and Asperger syndrome, and for their parents and carers. The NAS leads national and international initiatives providing a strong voice for autism. The organisation works in many areas to help people with an autistic spectrum disorder live their lives with as much independence as possible.

The NAS

- runs schools and adult centres
- supports local authorities in the development of their own specialist services
- maintains a library available to parents and researchers by appointment
- publishes a range of books and leaflets
- runs the Autism Helpline for parents and carers and people with autistic spectrum disorders
- organises conferences and training programmes
- offers specialist diagnosis and assessment services
- supports local groups and families around the country
- organises parent workshops
- encourages research into the causes of autism
- offers advice and advocacy for special educational needs
- raises awareness and creates a better understanding of autism
- organises volunteering schemes
- provides information and consultancy to professionals and organisations working in the field of autism
- offers an accreditation programme for autism-specific education and care services
- runs Prospects, a supported employment service, for adults with autistic spectrum disorders
- campaigns to improve services for autism in Westminster, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly.

The National Autistic Society

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