



## Welcome to the Dec 21- Jan 22 issue of Surrey News

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Please note: Some of the articles in the front of the newsletter include information for young people and adults.

Every issue of our newsletter lists useful contacts such as SEND Advice Surrey, SOS!SEN, the NAS Education Rights helpline and Mindworks Surrey. See p2.

**Mindworks** <https://www.mindworks-surrey.org/> is the new Children & Young People's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service. The Service's autism partner is the Family Support Service run by NAS professionals (not the volunteer-run Branch).

The expanded service now includes autism training for teachers and educators and will soon offer one-to-one support for parents and carers.

Another new resource is Understanding Autism handouts on the *Autism by Experience* website. The project employs autistic adults, who offer workshops that can be tailored to the needs of the organisation. See page 14 for more details.

Over the autumn, Branch volunteers attended face-to-face events to offer signposting to services. We worked alongside NAS professionals at the *Preparing for Adulthood* event at East Surrey College and at the recent *Action for Carers Fairs*.

For up to date news and information, do sign up to the NAS Surrey Branch email forum <https://nassurreybranch.org/moderated-email-forum/>

With best wishes for a Happy Christmas and New Year from all the committee at NAS Surrey Branch.

Carol Teunon  
Chair (volunteer)  
**NAS Surrey Branch**

**\*\*New email:\*\*** [surrey.branch@nas.org.uk](mailto:surrey.branch@nas.org.uk)

**Website:** <https://NASSurreyBranch.org>

**Facebook:** @NASSurreyBranch

**Donations:** [www.justgiving.com/nassurreybranch](http://www.justgiving.com/nassurreybranch)

## NAS Surrey Branch Contacts

### **Chair:**

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### **Deputy Chair (Adults):**

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### **Website & Newsletter:**

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### **Other Activities & Fundraising:**

Jill Goulding  
Jo Dilworth  
Lisa Mangum  
Rachel Pearson

### **Parents of Girls' Group**

Sally Roberts  
[sallyaroberts@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:sallyaroberts@hotmail.co.uk)

### **Parents of Adults' Group**

Hilary Dyce [hilarydyce@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:hilarydyce@yahoo.co.uk)

### **Parents of Children with PDA Group**

Sara Truman [strumansurrey@gmail.com](mailto:strumansurrey@gmail.com)

### **Spouses and Partners Group**

Sara Truman [strumansurrey@gmail.com](mailto:strumansurrey@gmail.com)

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### **POSTAL ADDRESS**

NAS Surrey Branch  
c/o Walton Charities,  
2 Quintet, Churchfield Road,  
Walton on Thames KT12 2TZ

**No NAS staff or volunteers work here.**

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## Other Useful Contacts

*Unless clearly stated, organisations are not endorsed by NAS Surrey Branch or the NAS.*

**NAS website:** <https://www.autism.org.uk/>  
**NAS membership:** <https://bit.ly/3l84tBW>

### **Education Support**

**NAS Education Rights:** <https://bit.ly/3BTfux6>  
**SEND Advice Surrey:** 01737 737300  
[www.sendadvicesurrey.org.uk](http://www.sendadvicesurrey.org.uk)  
**SOSISEN** charity to support EHCs etc, Tel: 020 8538 3731, Web: [www.sossen.org.uk](http://www.sossen.org.uk)

### **Family Support & Representation**

**Mindworks** [www.mindworks-surrey.org](http://www.mindworks-surrey.org)  
**Portage** – support for children with SEND under 3.5 years <https://bit.ly/3zLW635>  
**Family Voice Surrey** parent representation [www.familyvoicesurrey.org](http://www.familyvoicesurrey.org)  
**Action for Carers** tel: 0303 040 1234  
<https://www.actionforcarers.org.uk/>

### **Parent Programmes**

**NAS Stepping Up For Autism course**  
Email: [Surrey.FamilySupport@nas.org.uk](mailto:Surrey.FamilySupport@nas.org.uk)  
**Pat-P** (under 5s) & **Cygnets** (aged 5-16)  
<https://family.sendteachingschool.co.uk>

### **Activities for children and young people**

**NAS Resource Centre, Godalming:** 01483 521743 [SEResourceCentres@nas.org.uk](mailto:SEResourceCentres@nas.org.uk)  
**interAKtive**, Epsom-based charity for children with ASCs and other difficulties 07876 762178 [www.interaktive.org.uk](http://www.interaktive.org.uk)

### **Adult Services**

**Surrey Adult Social Svcs:** 0300 200 1005  
**NAS Surrey Service** Tel: 01483 861600,  
email: [surrey.service@nas.org.uk](mailto:surrey.service@nas.org.uk)

### **Employment Support**

**Employability** for people with disabilities including ASCs Tel: 01483 806806  
<https://bit.ly/3f8WXTu>  
**AS Mentoring** specialist mentoring and employment support for autistic people  
<https://asmentoring.co.uk/>

### **Benefits advice**

**For children:** <https://bit.ly/3xblygN>  
**For adults:** <https://bit.ly/3ydoXNg>  
**Cerebra Downloadable DLA guide:**  
<https://bit.ly/3lpEoyh>

## **Mindworks Surrey**

The new Mindworks Surrey Access and Advice service is replacing the existing CAMHS Single Point of Access. Mindworks is an emotional wellbeing and mental health service across Surrey for children, young people, parents and carers, as well as professionals. <https://www.mindworks-surrey.org/>

There is an out-of-hours advice line that provides advice to parents and carers who are struggling with behaviours or difficulties which could be related to autism or ADHD.

Advisers will talk carers through ways of calming down difficult situations and remind families of coping strategies. The line is open from 5.00 pm until 11.00 pm, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Tel: 0300 222 5755.

There are a number of pathways into the Mindworks Surrey service. Signposting is through the Access and Advice Team on 0300 222 5755.

## **The Surrey Wellbeing Partnership**

Surrey Wellbeing Partnership is a group of 13 local and national voluntary sector (not for profit) organisations delivering advice, signposting and support for early intervention. It's designed to play a key role in early support, building resilience and developing relationships with children, young people and families, and to strengthen links with wider community provision

SWP comprises: Barnardo's, The East to West Trust, The Eikon Charity, Emerge, Learning Space, Leatherhead Youth Project, The Matrix Trust, The National Autistic Society, Peer Productions, Relate West Surrey, Step by Step Partnership Ltd, Surrey Care Trust and YMCA East Surrey.

For details go to: <https://surreywellbeing.org/>

## **NAS Family Support**

The support offered by the NAS Family Support service is expanding to include more workshops in addition to the Stepping up for Autism workshops - a series of 8 sessions for parents/carers of newly-diagnosed children.

The Service accepts requests for support from health, social care and education professionals, as well as self-referrals from parents/carers. For further details see: <https://www.mindworks-surrey.org/our-services/neurodevelopmental-services/national-autistic-society>

NAS Family Support also offers family fun days for families that have been referred, as well as one to one support for parents and carers.

They also provide specialist training for teachers and educators.

## **ASSIST**

The professional side of the National Autistic Society are also offering transition support (age 16 – 18) through their Assist Service:

<https://www.mindworks-surrey.org/our-services/neurodevelopmental-services/autism-transition-support>

## **Counselling Service for Parents/carers of Children with Additional Needs and Disabilities**

The Express Counselling Service from the Kingston-based charity Express CIC offers 1-1 counselling sessions to support parents and carers by providing a non-judgemental and confidential space for them to talk about how they feel.

One parent described the Express counselling service as a 'lifeline' over recent months.

Providing this support helps parents/carers manage their feelings and look after their mental well-being. This not only benefits them but their whole family - helping them to support and nurture their children.

They have now added additional sessions on Tuesday mornings to expand their offer. This is offered as a low cost service. If you are interested in this service, please email: [counselling@expresscic.org.uk](mailto:counselling@expresscic.org.uk)

## **Movement for Change**

The Physical Activity Strategy 'Movement for Change' is a high-level plan that supports Surrey's Health & Wellbeing strategy. It encourages a new way of working to help everyone adopt a more active lifestyle, with a particular focus on those who need it most. The goal is to re-integrate movement into everyone's life, tackling sedentary habits and creating environments which make being active easier.

The strategy offers a blueprint which can be used to underpin programmes and actions that will make a difference to people's lives. It's been co-produced with residents, volunteers, community groups and professional across Surrey.

You can watch the launch event for Movement for Change here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fR5\\_X9VkJKA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fR5_X9VkJKA)

## **Action for Carers Checklist and Carers Health Check**

Action for Carers have published a Carers' Checklist, to show what's available for you as a carer in terms of health, legal, social services, etc. Call Action for Carers for a copy: 0303 040 1234, press option 1, or email [CSAdmin@actionforcarers.org.uk](mailto:CSAdmin@actionforcarers.org.uk)

Action for Carers have also partnered with professional health care body, *One You Surrey*, to offer a new Carer Health Check service. Working with Surrey County Council and Surrey Heartlands CCG, they are offering carers 30-minute telephone appointments, for you to discuss your own health and wellbeing needs.

You can call the Helpline team on 0303 040 1234. If you are registered with Action for Carers already, and have a named Carer Support Advisor, simply ask them to refer you.

If you're new to Action for Carers (or don't have an Advisor), just get in touch with their friendly Helpline team on 0303 040 1234 or email [carersupport@actionforcarers.org.uk](mailto:carersupport@actionforcarers.org.uk) and ask for a referral.

## NAS Education Petition

The NAS recently published the results of a survey of over 4000 parents, carers, autistic children and young people. See <https://tinyurl.com/2j36p645>

The findings were:

- A quarter (26%) of parents **waited over three years** to receive support for their child
- Three quarters (74%) said their child's school place did not fully meet their needs – **this has almost doubled since the last report in 2017**
- Only one in four parents are satisfied with the special educational needs support their child is receiving
- **Less than half of autistic children are happy in school**
- 44% feel their child's special educational needs are not being met in general
- Seven in ten autistic children and young people said school would be better if **more teachers understood autism**.

The NAS says that this is completely unacceptable. It's not fair that parents are being left exhausted by a system that is broken and too often forces them into costly and gruelling legal action. It is not fair that children's futures are under threat, because their school does not have the resources to support them.

The charity is calling for the Government to identify the councils and schools where autistic children are struggling, and give them enough resources to provide support. You can add your name to the petition here: <https://tinyurl.com/y7hbmw>

## Kane FM Mind Waves

Based at Surrey University in Guildford, Kane FM is a community radio station mostly run by volunteers. It is a registered Arts Award Centre and enables young people with special needs to gain a qualification, as well as improving their prospects of gaining employment or further education. They offer a basic introduction to radio, plus digital DJing and transferable skills for young people aged 14+.

For more information contact Jenniann Davies, Kane Youth Projects Manager email: [jenniann@kanefm.com](mailto:jenniann@kanefm.com) or call her on 07970 238004.

## Personalised learning software for neurodiverse learners

COGS is a social enterprise committed to improving educational outcomes for neurodiverse children and young people. They are developing personalised home learning software designed specifically for neurodiversity, for young people between 11 and 15. They are looking for parents to co-design the product with them and test it out for free. How it works:

- Neurocognitive games assess each learner's unique strengths and needs
- Cogs recommends learning experiences and content based on learner's neurocognitive profile
- Recommendations become more personalised the more the learner interacts with the app

COGS are looking to talk with parents of neurodiverse children to understand the different strategies they use for educating their kids at home. If you'd like to get involved, email: [hello@cogs-ai.com](mailto:hello@cogs-ai.com) or phone: 07812 927688.

## **Family Information Service Directory**

The Family Information Service is a searchable directory to find information about childcare, groups, organisations and services for families in your area.

Type 'autism' into the keywords box to find out about local services.

<https://familyinformationdirectory.surreycc.gov.uk/>

## **New School Places for Children with Special Educational Needs**

Surrey County Council has created 220 new specialist school places in special schools and specialist centres in mainstream primary and secondary schools, plus an additional 70 temporary places.

*If you are worried about a child not reaching their learning or development milestones, there is a single point of access helpline. The Learners' Single Point of Access (L-SPA) is open from 9am to 5pm, Monday and Friday all year except bank holidays on 0300 200 1015. The L-SPA gives you direct access to information and advice from a multi-disciplinary team of professionals from education, health and social care.*

<https://www.surreylocaloffer.org.uk/kb5/surrey/localoffer/advice.page?id=GgEgUY0DBCK>

## **Manor Mead Primary School**

Surrey County Council and The Federation of Manor Mead and Walton Leigh Schools are proposing that Manor Mead School will expand by 60 places, from 83 places to 143 places.

It is also proposed that the school will change from a single designation of Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) to become 'dual designation' of Severe Learning Difficulties and Autism. This 60-place expansion will be provided on a satellite site at Christchurch Road, Virginia Water.

You can submit your views on the proposals by 14<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

[https://www.surreysays.co.uk/csf/manor-mead-school/consult\\_view/](https://www.surreysays.co.uk/csf/manor-mead-school/consult_view/)

## **Autism-Specific Free Schools**

In addition to Fox Grove School, which opened in September 2021, Surrey is also funding Betchwood Vale Academy which is scheduled to open in September 2023. There is a consultation on a third new special free school in West Surrey, providing up to 200 places to be opened from September 2024. Cabinet has approved a capital budget of approximately £24 million to achieve this.

You can view the consultation here: <https://www.surreysays.co.uk/csf/proposed-new-asc-special-free-school-west-surrey/>



## **Family Voice Surrey Events in December and January**

Family Voice Surrey (FVS) provides a forum to share knowledge and empowerment to improve opportunities for families with children or young adults up to the age of 25 who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and chronic illnesses, including mental health conditions.

### **Dads Chat - 7.30pm Monday 6th December**

FVS are holding an online event just for Dads with guest speaker Dr Mark Brown of Special Help for Special Needs. Mark will be sharing invaluable advice, and you will be able to share experiences and meet other Dads and male parent carers. Mark has over 30 years' experience working with neurodiverse people and has been working with children with additional needs since 2000.

Mark will be happy to answer any questions you have with regards to your child's ADHD/autistic world. Whatever the question from puberty, online life, behaviour or school issues, Mark will be able to advise you and offer practical strategies with which to navigate your child's world and help them thrive. If you have any specific areas you wish to cover, please advise your questions beforehand to [waverley@familyvoicesurrey.org](mailto:waverley@familyvoicesurrey.org) for joining details and to book your place.

### **School Anxiety Chat - 11 am Wednesday 8th December**

This is a group for parents of children who struggle with attending school or college. In addition to regular Zoom catch-ups on the second Wednesday of each month there is a WhatsApp group for day-to-day chat.

Email [reigatebanstead@familyvoicesurrey.org](mailto:reigatebanstead@familyvoicesurrey.org) for details.

### **Safer Gaming for children with additional needs 7.00 pm Monday 24th January**

Online gaming is hugely popular and has many benefits for children and young people with SEND as long as they know how to keep safe. Family Voice Surrey is hosting a free Safer Online Gaming workshop for parents and carers delivered by experts TechSafe. Improve your digital resilience and join Family Voice Surrey Co-ordinators Sara and Emily (Waverley and Runnymede) and book your place on this interactive Zoom workshop by emailing [waverley@familyvoicesurrey.org](mailto:waverley@familyvoicesurrey.org)

Keep an eye on the Family Voice Surrey events website for further events in 2022: <https://www.familyvoicesurrey.org/single-post/autumn-and-winter-events-for-your-diary>

## **Coping with Caring - Action for Carers Event**

Action for Carers is running an online session on caring for an adult with autism, with a focus on autism and anxiety. It is from 7:00pm - 8:30pm Tue, 7th December.

Marie-Anne McKee, a psychotherapist and Director of Space 2 B You, will be leading online sessions for carers of adults on the Autistic Spectrum to share skills and support.

You need to be registered as a carer to attend. For details go to <https://www.actionforcarers.org.uk/event/coping-with-caring-caring-for-an-adult-with-autism-aged-18-years-and-over-autism-and-anxiety-2/>

## NAS SURREY BRANCH CALENDAR Dec 2021 – Feb 2022

Support group meetings are held either face-to-face or over Zoom. These dates are provisional, dependant on Covid or other unexpected events. **Please always contact the host by email for confirmation that the meeting is going ahead.**

### **Zoom Support Group for Parents/Carers of Autistic Children in Surrey**

Zoom support group meeting monthly, alternating Wednesday mornings and Monday evenings. Your child does not need a diagnosis for you to attend.

For Zoom links for these meetings, contact Emma Phillpotts at

[support@nassurreybranch.org](mailto:support@nassurreybranch.org)

Monday 13<sup>th</sup> December 8.00 pm

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> January 10.00 am

Monday 21<sup>st</sup> February 8.00 pm

### **LOCAL SUPPORT GROUPS**

In-person support groups run by parent-volunteers for parents / carers of autistic children in Surrey. Your child does not need a diagnosis for you to attend.

#### **Ashted – The Leg of Mutton and Cauliflower, 48, The Street, Ashted KT21 1AZ**

Contact: Tarah Basu [tarahbasu@googlemail.com](mailto:tarahbasu@googlemail.com)

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> January 10.00 am – 12.00 pm

Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> February 7.30 – 9.30 pm (**note the earlier start time**)

#### **Frensham \*New Venue\* Squires Garden Centre, The Reeds Road, Frensham GU10 3BP**

Contacts: Bonnie Noyce [jbnoyce@yahoo.com](mailto:jbnoyce@yahoo.com)

Christine Malik [christinemalik@btinternet.com](mailto:christinemalik@btinternet.com)

Monday 17<sup>th</sup> January from 9.15 – 11.00am

Monday 7<sup>th</sup> February from 9.15 – 11.00am

#### **Guildford**

Contact: Sara Truman [strumansurrey@gmail.com](mailto:strumansurrey@gmail.com)

Fri 10<sup>th</sup> Dec 10.00 a.m. – 12.00 noon **Caffe Nero, 66 North Street, Guildford GU1 4AH**

Mon 10<sup>th</sup> Jan 7.30 – 9.30 pm **The White House, 8 High Street, Guildford GU2 4AJ**

Fri 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 10.00 a.m. – 12.00 noon **Caffe Nero, 66 North Street, Guildford GU1 4AH**

#### **Hinchley Wood – via Zoom**

Contact: Emily Gorvy email: [emily.gorvy@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:emily.gorvy@hotmail.co.uk)

Friday 14<sup>th</sup> January 9.30 – 10.30 am

#### **Leatherhead The Penny Black, 5 North Street, Leatherhead KT22 7AX**

Contact: Carol Teunon [carol.teunon@nas-volunteers.org.uk](mailto:carol.teunon@nas-volunteers.org.uk)

Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> December 8.00 – 9.30 pm

Due to lack of interest this group will not meet in January and February. It may restart in March if there is more interest.

#### **Woking – Edwins Garden Centre, Egley Road, Mayford, Woking GU22 0NH**

Contact Sarah Norris [sarah4ian@ntlworld.com](mailto:sarah4ian@ntlworld.com)

Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> January 10.00 am – 12.00 noon

Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 10.00 am – 12.00 noon

Godalming and Lower Kingswood groups may start in spring 2022. A group in Weybridge could resume if there was sufficient interest.



## **SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS**

### **Parents of Adults Group**

*Face-to-face meetings in West and East Surrey alternate with Zoom meetings.  
Contact hosts for venues/links.*

Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2.30 pm **Zoom** Contact Hilary Dyce  
[hilarydyce@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:hilarydyce@yahoo.co.uk)

Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> December 7.30 pm **Zoom** Contact Sara Truman  
[strumansurrey@gmail.com](mailto:strumansurrey@gmail.com)

Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> January 7.30 pm Guildford Contact Sara Truman  
[strumansurrey@gmail.com](mailto:strumansurrey@gmail.com)

Monday 17<sup>th</sup> January 7.30 pm Redhill Contact Sara Truman  
[strumansurrey@gmail.com](mailto:strumansurrey@gmail.com)

Friday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2.30 pm **Zoom** Contact Hilary Dyce  
[hilarydyce@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:hilarydyce@yahoo.co.uk)

Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> February 7.30 pm **Zoom** Contact Sara Truman  
[strumansurrey@gmail.com](mailto:strumansurrey@gmail.com)

### **Parents of Girls Group – Woking and Guildford**

Contact Sally Roberts [sallyaroberts@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:sallyaroberts@hotmail.co.uk)

*A group for parents of girls that meets approximately once a month during term-time.*

*Woking venue: Twelve Thirty Café, Christ Church, Jubilee Square, Woking GU21 6YG*

*Guildford venue: Costa Coffee, Spectrum Leisure Centre, Parkway, Guildford GU1 1UP*

Monday 13<sup>th</sup> December 10.00 am Guildford

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> January 10.00 am Woking

Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> February 10.00am Guildford

### **Spouses and Partners Group, Guildford**

Contact Sara Truman [strumansurrey@gmail.com](mailto:strumansurrey@gmail.com)

*Evening meetings for the partners of people on the spectrum (no diagnosis necessary).*

*Venue: Guildford Institute, Ward Street, Guildford GU1 4LH*

Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> January 8.00 – 9.30 p.m.

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 8.00 – 9.30 p.m.

### **Parents of children and young people with Pathological Demand Avoidance**

This group meets over Zoom. To receive the Zoom link contact Sara Truman  
[strumansurrey@gmail.com](mailto:strumansurrey@gmail.com)

Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> January 8.00 pm

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> February 8.00 pm

**The Parents of Housebound Autistic People support group has stopped meeting.**

For up to date news and information about our events, and those organised by other local organisations, do sign up to the NAS Surrey Branch email forum <https://nassurreybranch.org/moderated-email-forum/>

## **Relaxed Performance of A Christmas Carol at The Old Vic**

The Old Vic is putting on a relaxed performance of A Christmas Carol at **1pm on Saturday 11 December**. Please visit the Old Vic website for more information about what to expect on the day. <https://www.oldvictheatre.com/your-visit/access/upcoming-access-performances/relaxed-performances> To access a special ticket rate of £20, enter the promo code **RELAXED** when you reach the seating plan. *The show is recommended for audiences aged 8+.*

## **Dick Whittington Panto Across Surrey**

Head2head theatre is putting on multi-sensory performances of the panto Dick Whittington, including two locations in Surrey. Performances are at 11.15am and 2.00pm:

- Sunday 5th December / Manor Mead School, Laleham, Surrey
- Sunday 12th December / The Dawnay, Great Bookham, Surrey

To book go to <https://www.h2hsensorytheatre.com/whats-on-2021/>

## **Appeer – Connecting neurodiverse girls and women**

Appeer is a community interest company set up to benefit autistic girls and women and their families, primarily in Surrey and borders. They run activities both on-line and in person for younger girls aged 7-12 and teenage girls aged 13-18+ and are planning an Autistic Women's Group in the new year.

They aim to provide a facilitated space for parents and carers to connect whilst the girls access their activities independently.

Appeer host a popular on-line "Wednesday Club" where younger girls chose themes for a fun Zoom session. Following on from the success of an in-person Girls' Group which has taken place on monthly Sundays since July, they are offering a programme for teenage, autistic girls starting with four Sunday sessions in Guildford where teens will be able to access archery, low ropes and other outward-bound activities in a low pressure, fully supported environment.

To find out more or book on to one of the upcoming sessions please see the Appeer website: <https://www.appeer.org.uk/>

## **MEETING REPORT**

NAS Surrey Branch were delighted to host an evening webinar on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> November with **Dr Chloe Farahar about 'Fostering a Positive Autistic Identity for Wellbeing'**.

Chloe has a PhD in Social Psychology and is currently a staff member at the University of Kent. She founded Aucademy.co.uk, an online platform for autistic educators educating on autistic experience.

She began by exploring what autism and the autistic experience are and described how the terminology used to describe autism in the DSMV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5) such as 'impairment', 'restricted' and 'symptoms' is

### **Meeting Report / Cont'd**

negative and medicalised. Diagnosis often comes at a time of difficulty for the autistic person so these words reinforce negative associations.

She looked at how society understands the autistic spectrum as a linear continuum, ranging from 'low' to 'high', when in fact the autistic community would describe it as a collection of strengths and challenges with three key similarities: differences in experience of the sensory world; differences in communication and differences in thinking, socialising and moving.

Chloe discussed the wealth of positive features of autism including integrity, creativity, developing novel approaches, being methodical, expertise, attention to detail and having excellent observational skills. She described the language of autistic culture with terminology such as 'autistic person', demonstrating how terms like 'a person with autism/on the spectrum' is wrong and akin to saying, 'a person with femaleness/maleness', rather than 'a female/male/non-binary/trans person.

She broke down common assumptions about what an autistic person 'looks' like, pointing out that they are not all white, male, maths savants like Rain Man (the Dustin Hoffman film), but a diverse community of people - women, non-binary, men, trans people, black, indigenous and people of colour - who are engaged in a wide range of occupations, interests and disciplines.

She discussed how to approach the autistic experience, demonstrating how the 'culture of autism', which views it as a disorder, a problem or impairment, negatively impacts autistic wellbeing. She argued that developing an 'autistic culture' of community, which focuses on creating spaces and environments where autistic language, customs and identity are celebrated and embraced will enhance autistic wellbeing.

She used a quote by Alexander Den Heijer to illustrate her point, "When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower". Chloe stated that there is evidence to show what is important for autistic wellbeing is autistic friendship and community, which improve self-esteem and reduce loneliness.

She added that there is starting to be a focus on peer support and understanding the autistic self. This includes connecting and sharing with others, being accepted and encouraged to be your authentic self and being part of a positive narrative about autistic identity.

Chloe summarised her inspiring and positive talk by saying:

- To be autistic is to process our environment and social interactions differently to those who are not autistic
- This can create challenges when the environment and those around us are not suitable for the way we process
- This does not make us disordered, or broken, just neurodivergent, which can bring with it strengths
- There are many ways we can manage our differences so that we don't get (as) distressed
- Ultimately, the environment needs to adapt
- Until then, we can find one another and become part of the autistic community.

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## RESEARCH REQUESTS

### **Research on wellbeing of people with learning disabilities**

University College London (UCL) are undertaking some research on the wellbeing and self-esteem of people with learning disabilities.

They are looking for people who are over 16 years old with a learning disability to complete a questionnaire around this. You will need to meet via video call with a researcher to answer the questions. You will be given a £10 voucher as a token of appreciation.

If you would like to get involved or for more information, please contact Maya Patel: [maya.patel.12@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:maya.patel.12@ucl.ac.uk)

### **Executive Functions from infancy into Early Childhood**

The University of Oxford BabyLab want to understand more about the early development of children who have a brother, sister or parent with autism or ADHD. In particular, they are interested in the development of 'Executive Functions' - those skills that allow us to solve problems, resist temptation, and organise our lives. They will be using this data to investigate how to empower parents to support the development of Executive Functions.

It's open to parents of children who are less than 2.5 years old and have an immediate family member (e.g. mum, dad, or sibling) who is autistic or has ADHD (confirmed or suspected).

This is an online study. The whole questionnaire takes 30-40 minutes, but you can do it across a two-week period. The researchers may also invite you to take part in follow-up questionnaires, so they can understand how your child's skills grow over time.

To thank you for taking the time to complete the study, you will be sent a £10 Amazon voucher after you have completed the first 2 questionnaires, and another £10 voucher for every questionnaire you complete after that. To find out more, and register to take part visit <https://tinyurl.com/oxfordbabyminds>

If you have any questions, email the researcher on [alexandra.hendry@psy.ox.ac.uk](mailto:alexandra.hendry@psy.ox.ac.uk)

## INFORMATION FOR ADULTS, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES

### **Advocacy for People in Autism, LD or Mental Health Hospitals**

An NHS England funded project is currently reviewing advocacy for autistic people and people with learning disabilities in hospital settings and would like your views. It is exploring family carers' experiences, both acting as an advocate for their relatives and also of advocacy that is provided to their relatives.

You can contribute to this survey if you are the family carer of someone with learning disabilities or autism who is over 18 and who is currently, or has ever been, an in-patient in a mental health, learning disability or autism specialist hospital:

To complete the survey for parents of over-18s, go to: <https://bit.ly/3G8brye>

## Job Opportunity with Surrey Choices

We've been told about an opportunity particularly suited to an autistic young person under the Kickstart scheme - a government scheme to provide job opportunities for 16-24 year olds in receipt of Universal Credit.

The contracts run for a period of 6 months at 25 hours a week and are paid at minimum wage. Employees are also entitled to participate in workplace employee benefit schemes (shopping discounts, for example)

Surrey Choices have created genuine roles that provide valuable work experience and skills training to help young people progress their careers. One of these roles is particularly suitable for an autistic person:

**Engagement and Inclusion Officer** (expert by experience) – Advocating for the rights of autistic people in Surrey and providing training to help raise awareness

The successful candidate will be confident in presenting to individual and larger groups and should be open about their own experiences of the barriers autistic people may face when job seeking. They also need to be able to support others to tell their stories, gather case studies and work with marketing and communication teams to develop positive stories to help employers and autistic people understand what adjustments might be needed for successful employment outcomes.

Whilst this role is open to all, it would be particularly suitable for an autistic young person or an expert by experience who will be able to advocate on behalf of others and be a positive role model to enable more autistic people to move closer to employment. It would be home-based, but would involve travel across Surrey to attend events, training, networking and meetings.

Support from a mentor and advice from Surrey Choices employment support specialists would be available.

Applicants must be on Universal Credit, aged 16-24, and need to speak to their job coach at the JobCentre to get a referral to Surrey Choices to apply for the role. For more information, call Christina Earl at Surrey Choices on 07860 918218 or email [christina.earl@surreychoices.com](mailto:christina.earl@surreychoices.com)

## Time to Change Mental Health Campaign

Time to Change Surrey is a campaign and programme to raise awareness and reduce stigma around mental health. Many people with autism experience issues with anxiety and depression and other mental health problems.

Time to Change Surrey reaches out to businesses, colleges and communities, to people from different backgrounds, race, cultures and faith and across the diversity and equality spectrum. It is commissioned by Surrey County Council Public Health and delivered by three established and respected not for profit organisations in the county: Mary Frances Trust, Catalyst and Acting Out Productions.

For more details see: [www.surreycc.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/adults/mental-health/time-to-change](http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/adults/mental-health/time-to-change)

## **'Autism by Experience' Training Workshops**

Mike Leat, who used to run the young adults social group for the NAS in Redhill and who currently supports the Gamer's Lounge events at The Boileroom in Guildford is developing autism training workshops with a number of autistic adults.

Called 'Autism by Experience', the group has also put together handouts with detail and comments directly from autistic people for the following groups:

- Retail, hospitality and community staff
- Health service staff
- Emergency service staff
- Support workers and personal assistants
- Social work teams
- Employers, job coaches and autistic employees

### **Workshops**

*Autism by Experience* offers online workshops via Zoom to help people develop their understanding of autism. Up to four members of the team present each workshop, sharing their lived experiences, combined with up-to-date research.

Topics include:

- The autism spectrum and diagnosis
- Common strengths of autistic people
- Sensory differences
- Communication differences
- Social interaction and social rules
- Routines, uncertainty and change
- Anxiety and overwhelm
- Approaches to support and useful strategies
- Reasonable adjustments

They tailor each workshop for health staff, emergency service staff, retail & hospitality staff, employers, community service staff, support workers and social work teams. They can also provide workshops for autistic adults, friends and family.

<https://www.autismbyexperience.co.uk/>

## **Direct Payments for social services**

Surrey Coalition of Disabled People are working with Surrey County Council to find out how well Direct Payments are working. They would like to talk to people who have a direct payment; people who do not have direct payments but may get one in the future, and family and carers of someone with a direct payment. You can get involved in a few different ways:

- 1) Have a chat with one of the team
- 2) Join a group session to work together with an artist to create a picture of how Direct Payments are now, and how we might like them to be in the future.
- 3) Share your views on a 'Jam Board'
- 4) Complete a quick survey – Surrey Coalition will send you the link.

Please contact Yasmin Broome [Yasmin.Broome@surreycoalition.org.uk](mailto:Yasmin.Broome@surreycoalition.org.uk) if you would like to get involved.

## New Service for Carers of People Using Mental Health Services

Autism is not a mental health condition, but many autistic people also have mental health conditions.

Surrey County Council in partnership with the NHS are developing a new service for carers of people using Mental Health services as a result of feedback received during the development of the Carers Strategy.

Details of the service will be developed with stakeholders, including family carers and people who use mental health services. It's anticipated that it will initially be piloted over two/three years to inform a longer-term approach and will aim to:

- Support carers of people with mental ill health with a whole family approach
- Establish carer friendly environments within Mental Health acute settings
- Ensure that Mental Health Community Services use Carers Friendly practice

They are looking for carers who would like to be involved in developing the model of service. Virtual discussions will start in December to inform the approach taken - choose either: **20th December 12.00 – 1.30pm** or **22nd December 6pm -7.30pm**

If you are the family carer of someone who uses mental health services\*, and are interested in participating or want more information, contact Jo Neville-Rye [jo.nevillerye@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:jo.nevillerye@surreycc.gov.uk)

\*NB this is for family carers of people who use **mental health services**, not autism or learning disability services - though the person may also use autism/LD services).

## Opportunities To Develop Employment Skills

**Leonard Cheshire - Can Do Programme** is a skills development activity based programme for young people aged 16-35 with additional needs. It is free, all training and expenses are covered, and additional support can be provided. 'CanDoers' have been involved in preparing food and packages for homeless people, campaigned and taken part in activities from sailing to boxercise. For details call 020 7112 1489 – option 1, email: [innovation@leonardcheshire.org](mailto:innovation@leonardcheshire.org) or Facebook CanDoers

**Richmond Fellowship** has employment services to support individuals to regain meaningful employment, training, education or volunteering opportunities that are right for them. If an individual is already employed, the Richmond Fellowship team can help them to manage and retain current employment. They also help people in communicating with employers to make reasonable adjustments and provide the support needed to better manage mental wellbeing at work.  
<https://www.richmondfellowship.org.uk/about-us-new/contact-us/>

### YMCA East Surrey

YMCA East Surrey have a range of employment and training opportunities:

**LifeWorks Inclusive Activities** are designed to build life skills for young adults with disabilities. Sessions include sports, lifeskills, cooking club and art and run from 9.30 am – 2 pm. Cost £45 per session. <https://www.ymcaeast Surrey.org.uk/children/disability-activities/lifeworks/>



**Employment** YMCA are looking for fun, inclusive play and youth workers to work within their Disability Services team with children 5-11 and 12-18. Activities vary session to session and as a playworker you will be able to use your initiative to start games and activities for children on a 1:1 basis, as well as working well within team led activities. <https://www.ymcaeast Surrey.org.uk/get-involved/work-for-us/meet-the-team/>

**Volunteering** with YMCA East Surrey is a great way to share and learn new skills, as well as build new friendships. You can apply through their volunteer portal. <https://app.betterimpact.com/Application?OrganizationGuid=12b15800-75e0-45d9-b9de-ed0a8e799a33&ApplicationFormNumber=1>

### **Bloomin' Arts**

Based in Lingfield, Bloomin' Arts offers opportunities for people with learning disabilities to enjoy, develop skills, perform and work in the arts. For details go to <https://bloominarts.org.uk/> or contact: [info@bloominarts.org.uk](mailto:info@bloominarts.org.uk)

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## **About NAS Surrey Branch**

NAS Surrey Branch is a volunteer-run, support group for the parents of autistic children and adults, and the partners of people with autism, and is part of the National Autistic Society. It's FREE to join (although a small donation is appreciated) and we have around 2,000 members in and around Surrey.

We host an active online forum and produce this email newsletter every two months. To join for free, go to [nassurreybranch.org](http://nassurreybranch.org) or email [surrey.branch@nas.org.uk](mailto:surrey.branch@nas.org.uk) to request a membership form.

*If you are a member of the National Autistic Society at national level, you can nominate us to receive part of your subscription by emailing [supportercare@nas.org.uk](mailto:supportercare@nas.org.uk).*

**We are part of the National Autistic Society (NAS).** The NAS works for autistic people and runs a wide range of services such as schools, clubs and adult centres. It has over 20,000 members and 100 branches and works in partnership with more than 50 local autism societies.

The NAS exists **to transform lives** by being a trusted source of support and practical advice for autistic people and their families at key stages in life and **change attitudes** by working with businesses, policymakers, autism professionals and the public to reduce isolation and open up opportunities in society as a whole.

**National Autistic Society, 393 City Rd, London EC1V 1NG [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk).  
Registered charity, number 269425. Company limited by guarantee number 1205298.**

**The NAS Surrey Branch is part of the National Autistic Society - Registered charity, number 269425. Company limited by guarantee number 1205298.**

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