

Welcome to the February - March 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.

Surrey County Council has secured funding for awareness and understanding of autism training in Redhill as part of a pilot scheme to make the town one of the first autism friendly communities in the UK.

A launch event is being planned for **World Autism Acceptance Week (WAAW) from 28 March – 3 April** and we're waiting to hear more details. It is hoped that eventually there will be autism-friendly communities around Surrey. For more details of what is planned for WAAW, see page 10.

NAS professionals are working with other professionals to train school staff through the Mindworks Surrey service. There are also several projects with pupils in schools. See pages 3 & 4 for more details.

The NAS Surrey Branch is excited to be offering a **talk on School Avoidance** by Suzy Rowland from Happy in School on 8 March. See page 3 for more details and how to book through Eventbrite.

Emma Phillpotts is stepping down as Deputy Chair (Children) at the end of February due to work and family commitments. The Branch would like to thank Emma for all her hard work over the years, particularly in representing the branch at meetings with Surrey County Council and health professionals, running the parents of children online support group during lockdown and helping with Branch events.

Carol Teunon
Chair (volunteer)
NAS Surrey Branch

New email: surrey.branch@nas.org.uk

Website: <https://NASSurreyBranch.org>

Facebook: @NASSurreyBranch

Donations: www.justgiving.com/nassurreybranch

NAS Surrey Branch Contacts

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Parents of Adults' Group

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Parents of Children with PDA Group

Sara Truman strumansurrey@gmail.com

Spouses and Partners Group

Sara Truman strumansurrey@gmail.com

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.

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/3l84fBW>

Education Support

NAS Education Rights: <https://bit.ly/3BTfux6>
SEND Advice Surrey: 01737 737300
www.sendadvice.surrey.org.uk

SOS!SEN charity to support EHCPs etc, Tel: 020 8538 3731, Web: www.sossen.org.uk

Family Support & Representation

Mindworks 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

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

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

interAKTive, Epsom-based charity for children with ASCs and other difficulties
07876 762178 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

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/3ydoXNq>

Cerebra Downloadable DLA guide:
<https://bit.ly/3lpEoyh>

Online Talk on School Avoidance, Hosted by NAS Surrey Branch

We're hosting an online talk entitled *School Avoidance: The Truth Behind the Tears – from Barriers to Breakthrough* by Suzy Rowland from Happy in School on Tuesday 8th March from 8pm – 9.30pm.

In this talk, Suzy will discuss current practice and strategies on areas including:

- Balancing your child's emotional and educational needs.
- Strategies to manage child and adolescent anxiety.
- Co-producing your child's support plan with the school.
- How to restore your child and family to positive emotional well-being.

She will examine the stories behind school avoidance, sharing the words of some of the young people and families she's spoken to in writing her forthcoming book. In the last few years (even before COVID), staggering numbers of pupils have been absent from school, not just missing a day here or there, but having long gaps in their education.

The talk is free for Surrey parents. To book a place, please go to:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/school-avoidance-the-truth-behind-the-tears-from-barrier-to-breakthrough-registration-247120894247>

See details of the survey into emotionally-based non school attendance on page 7.

NAS Stepping up for Autism Courses for Parents

As part of the new Mindworks Surrey offer, NAS professionals offer Stepping Up for Autism courses for parents and carers. These are 8 session courses for parents and carers of children and young people who are autistic or have similar needs, and live in Surrey. The sessions include:

- Understanding autism
- Family Wellbeing
- Communication
- Understanding Behaviour
- Sensory Differences
- Supporting Social Skills

A range of dates, times and formats are available with a number of courses running each term. Call 01483 521 744 or email surrey.familysupport@nas.org.uk to book.

Mindworks Neurodevelopmental Service Prototype Project

Mindworks Surrey are working on a project in a small number of schools to test and co-design the prototype of a new neurodevelopmental service model which they believe will reach children and young people who need help earlier. The new approach will focus more on their needs and how best to support them. It will, for the first time, introduce treatment offers into the neurodevelopment service.

The project will test the usefulness and efficacy of a new range of tools designed to help schools and communities before they are rolled out across the county. It will be led by Assistant Psychologists and Neurodevelopmental Community Therapists.

Update on Mindworks Surrey Services

Mindworks Surrey <https://www.mindworks-surrey.org/> is an emotional wellbeing and mental health service that supports children and young people across Surrey. Together with partners including NAS professionals they deliver targeted and specialist services, connecting with universal services, to ensure support is available from primary mental health in schools through to urgent needs. Services include:

Autism Training for Schools

This service provides training for schools co-designed and delivered by the National Autistic Society and Learning Space to support schools in their understanding of autism, and offers practical classroom strategies to help support children and young people in their care.

There were three virtual 'surgeries' for schools in the summer term which school staff could join to receive bespoke information and advice regarding children they support. The service is being rolled out with:

- Formal face-to-face training during a twilight session and/or will roll out the virtual 'surgery' offer dependent on need and uptake
- Schools will be contacted directly to arrange bookings with consideration given to geographical spread
- Separate sessions will be offered to primary and secondary schools for both the virtual and face-to-face offer

A child or young person does not need to have a diagnosis of autism for them or their family to access the services; they may instead have social and communication difficulties or autism traits identified by the child, parent or supporting professional.

To find out more, email emma@learningspace.org.uk or surrey.familysupport@nas.org.uk

You can request support through the Access and Advice team on 0300 222 5755.

'Generation Girls' Sexual Health Project

Generation Girls (GG for short) is about educating and empowering autistic girls and girls with learning disabilities regarding consent, sexual health and mental wellbeing.

GG is a 10 week-long project taken into SEND schools across Surrey for students aged 14-19 chosen by the school. The 90-minute sessions use theatre and creative activities to allow the girls to express their emotions and tackle sensitive and challenging topics in a fun and safe way.

The school and facilitators work together to build any specific sessions that the particular group needs. The service is inclusive to non-binary and trans students, although it is a female space. To find out more go to:

<https://www.generationgirlsuk.com/>

There isn't currently a boys' version but it is hoped to develop this in 2022.

Volunteers Urgently Needed

The NAS Surrey Branch serves over 2000 members with a core committee of just 12 volunteers, all of whom have caring responsibilities and/or day-jobs which mean the time they can commit is limited.

Branch email volunteers - Could you spare a few hours each month to help with responding to email enquiries about what the Branch and NAS professionals offer? Training will be offered and model emails provided.

Information Volunteers – We're looking for volunteers to maintain our online Resources <https://nassurreybranch.org/resources/> such as the NAS Surrey Branch school list.

Both roles can mostly be done mostly from home to fit around other commitments.

Support Group Host in Weybridge – see page 9.

Please email Carol Teunon at surrey.branch@nas.org.uk if you are interested in these vacancies and to view the role profiles.

Social Events for Autistic Girls

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+.

They run a Girls' Group on monthly Sundays at St Andrew's School in Woking. Bookings open on 7th February for February's groups for 7 – 10 year olds and older girls. Zoom sessions include Wednesday Club, where new session themes are always guided by the girls' interests and hobbies, and Minecraft and Roblox sessions which offer the girls a valuable chance to connect by sharing tips and building together.

For more details or to book go to <https://www.appeer.org.uk/>

NAS Film Shortlisted For Award

Autistic animator Spencer Cotterell's film, Returning to a Social Group, has been shortlisted in The Film and TV Charity Awards! You can watch the film and vote here: <https://smileymovement.org/organisations/national-autistic-society>

Redhill Autism-Friendly Community Pilot

As part of the Surrey All-Age Autism Strategy, Surrey County Council has secured funding for work on a pilot 'autism friendly town' in Redhill.

To make Redhill more autism-friendly, people such as GP receptionists, library and leisure centre staff will receive autism awareness training. Input was sought from autistic adults who attended a Reference Group. The training will be offered through Autism by Experience and will include both in-person and online training.

A launch event is planned for World Autism Acceptance Week (28 March – 3 April). Keep a look out for further details, which will be published on the NAS Surrey Branch Online forum (you can sign up here if you're not already a member <https://nassurreybranch.org/moderated-email-forum/>).

Gamers Lounge Events in Guildford

Gamers Lounge is a series of retro computer games events at The Boileroom in Guildford. Whilst not autism specific, many attendees, both adults and children, are autistic and the organisers do all they can to help everyone enjoy the sessions.

The next events are on:

- Saturday 5th February
- Saturday 5th March
- Saturday 2nd April

There are two sessions on each day: 12noon - 2pm, and 2pm - 4pm. Tickets are £5 plus booking fee from <https://www.experienceguildford.co.uk/event/gamers-lounge-at-the-boileroom/> Accompanying carers don't need to pay if they're not playing.

There's a range of retro consoles to choose from, including Sega Megadrive, SNES, NES, Playstation 2 and Dreamcast with a choice of hundreds of games. Capacity is 20 people per session. You can also bring along your Nintendo Switch if you wish.

Hygiene protocols are in place, and consoles are cleaned between use. People are advised to wear masks unless exempt.

If you have a child/young person who's interested, but uncertain about coming for the first time please get in touch with Andrew Smith who runs the event with any queries. You're also welcome to drop in on the day to have a look around without committing to a ticket.

Please note that children cannot be left unattended at Gamers Lounge. Families who are not gaming are welcome to stay in the venue, and also use the covered garden area where you can get hot/cold drinks, food and ice cream.

Feedback from families who came to the September event included *"Our 8 y/o daughter (and Dad!) really loved it. Go Retro!! - A super, safe space"*
For more information, or to plan your visit please contact Andrew Smith by email Andrew.smith38410@gmail.com or phone 07885 723243.

FVS Emotionally-based School Non-attendance Survey

There are an increasing number of children and young people who experience school anxiety. Family Voice Surrey are keen to reach out to those families to get a better understanding of the scale and impact this has on families. Their hope is to feed this true lived experience into the work that is currently happening around emotionally based school non-attendance within the local authority and health. They have designed a survey to gather some initial information, to begin to get a clearer picture of the scale of the problem, and will then aim to gather first hand stories from families to highlight the true and real impact this has.

Please complete the survey if your child or young person is experiencing any kind of school based anxiety - do share with others who may also be experiencing this. Family Voice Surrey are aware that some families have more than one child experiencing school anxiety. If this is the case, please complete a separate survey for each child.

To complete the survey, go to: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/HVTG77R>

If you have problems clicking on any links, you may need to paste them into your browser

National Consultation on School Attendance

The Government have opened a consultation on school attendance and are proposing to bring in a variety of measures to improve attendance across the country.

There appears to be very little in the consultation around special educational needs and disability, and we know that for many of our children and young people school attendance can be challenging, for many reasons. We would therefore urge you to fill in the consultation to ensure that families with children and young people with additional needs have their voice heard. The consultation closes on 28th February.

The consultation with the proposed measures is here: <https://bit.ly/32HeWxm>
The online form to complete the consultation is here: <https://bit.ly/3ga82E4>

UP! The Orchestra of Unlimited Potential

The UP! Orchestra is a free inclusive orchestra for experienced musicians, complete beginners, and anyone in between, which is designed to be accessible for young people aged 13+ of all backgrounds including those with special educational needs. They are holding two open rehearsals for new members on Saturdays 12th Feb and 26th March from 10.00 am to 12.00 noon in Leatherhead.

The team of professional musicians who lead the orchestra are experienced in supporting young people in mainstream settings as well as those who have mental health, disability, behavioural or other needs and young people from diverse cultural backgrounds. There are no specific entry requirements and no auditions, although the ensemble is not currently suitable for young people with profound and multiple or severe learning disabilities.

Surrey Arts also run an online inclusive after school music club on Tuesdays from 5.00 to 6.00 pm for young people age 9 – 19 who attend special schools. It is called Together At Home. For information about either project email surreyarts@surreycc.gov.uk

Family Voice Surrey Events in February and March

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 & disabilities (SEND) and chronic illnesses, including mental health conditions.

School Anxiety Chat 11.00 am Wednesday 9th February

Do you have a child or young person who struggles with attending school or college? If so you may like to join this friendly support group. There is a WhatsApp group for day-to-day chat and regular Zoom catch-ups, currently on the second Wednesday of each month at 11am. Email reigatebanstead@familyvoicesurrey.org for joining details.

Restrictive Food Intake Group 10.00 am Tuesday 22nd February

This is a group for those with children who suffer with Restrictive food intake for whatever reason - ARFID, ASD, Allergies, poor swallow etc. Email elmsbridge@familyvoicesurrey.org for Zoom login details.

Keep an eye on the FVS website for details of their other events:

<https://www.familyvoicesurrey.org/single-post/autumn-and-winter-events-for-your-diary>

If you have problems clicking on any links, you may need to paste them into your browser

NAS SURREY BRANCH CALENDAR February – April 2022

NAS Surrey Branch Support group meetings are held either face-to-face or over Zoom.

NB These dates are provisional, dependant on COVID restrictions in place on the date of the meeting or other unexpected events. Please contact the host by email so that they know numbers and 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, email support@nassurreybranch.org

Monday 21st February 8.00 pm
Wednesday 16th March 10.00 am
Monday 25th April 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.

Ashtead – The Leg of Mutton and Cauliflower, 48, The Street, Ashtead KT21 1AZ

Contact: Tarah Basu tarahbasu@googlemail.com

Wednesday 9th February 7.30 – 9.30 pm (**note the earlier start time**)
Wednesday 23rd March 10.00 am – 12.00 pm
Wednesday 20th April 8.00 pm (**please note the slightly later start time**)

Frensham - Squires Garden Centre, The Reeds Road, Frensham GU10 3BP

Contact: Christine Malik christinemalik@btinternet.com

Monday 7th March 9.15 – 11.00 am
Monday 25th April 9.15 – 11.00 am

Guildford

Contact: Sara Truman strumansurrey@gmail.com

Fri 11th Feb 10.00 a.m. – 12.00 noon **Caffe Nero, 66 North Street, Guildford GU1 4AH**
Mon 28th March 7.30 – 9.30 pm **The White House, 8 High Street, Guildford GU2 4AJ**
Fri 22nd April 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

Friday 11th March 9.30 – 10.30 am

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

Contact Sarah Norris sarah4ian@ntlworld.com

Wednesday 2nd February 1.00 – 2:30 pm
Wednesday 2nd March 1.00 – 2:30 pm **Please note the change of time.**
There won't be a meeting in April.

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.*

Friday 4th February 2.30 pm **Zoom** Contact Hilary Dyce hilarydyce@yahoo.co.uk

Thursday 17th February 7.30 pm **Zoom** Contact Sara Truman

strumansurrey@gmail.com

Wednesday 2nd March Woking Contact Hilary Dyce hilarydyce@yahoo.co.uk

Thursday 17th March 7.30 pm Leatherhead Contact Sara Truman

strumansurrey@gmail.com

Thurs 7th April 2.30 pm **Zoom** Contact Hilary Dyce hilarydyce@yahoo.co.uk

Tues 19th April 7.30 pm **Zoom** Contact Sara Truman strumansurrey@gmail.com

Parents of Girls Group – Woking and Guildford

Contact Sally Roberts 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

Tuesday 8th February 10.00am – 12.00 pm Guildford

Friday 18th March 10.00am – 12.00 pm Woking

Thursday 21st April 10.00am – 12.00 pm Guildford

Spouses and Partners Group, Guildford

Contact Sara Truman strumansurrey@gmail.com

Meetings for the partners of people on the spectrum (no diagnosis necessary).

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

Wednesday 23rd February 8.00 – 9.30 p.m.

Wednesday 30th March 8.00 – 9.30 p.m.

Wednesday 27th April 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

Thursday 24th February 8.00 pm

Thursday 31st March 8.00 pm

Thursday 28th April 8.00 pm

Can you help run a new support group in Weybridge?

The SENCO of St James' school in Weybridge would like the Branch to run a parent support group, but we need volunteer/s willing to run it from approx. 10 – 11.30am once every half term. You don't need experience in running support groups, you would need to be willing to share your own experiences with other parents of newly diagnosed children. You will need to complete the NAS volunteer application process.

The NAS Surrey Branch are always looking for hosts to run parent support groups in new areas. Please contact surrey.branch@nas.org.uk for further details.

If you have problems clicking on any links, you may need to paste them into your browser

Action for Carers Surrey Events

Consultation on carer experiences: Autism, ARFID and eating disorders 7.30-8.30 pm 2nd February and 1 –2 pm 4th February

If you support someone who has autism or ARFID and have not been able to access support for an eating disorder, you can share your experiences with Tom Moore, Commissioner for Autism and Maria Young, the *Giving Carers a Voice* Co-ordinator at ACS. To book go to: <https://bit.ly/3lQT55U>

Coping with Caring: caring for an adult with Autism 7.00 -8.30 pm 9th February

Led by Marie-Anne McKee, psychotherapist and Director of Space 2BYou the workshop will be on autism and tools for carers. To book go to: <https://bit.ly/32lNsaF>

The events below may not yet be bookable: please check the website for details
<https://www.actionforcarers.org.uk/events/>

Next Steps and Transition 10am –12pm 24th February

This session will be led by Lisa Woodruff-Truscott, Carer Practice Adviser and Louise Hayes, Senior Operations Manager, Surrey Choices. Find out how the Transition team at Surrey County Council can support young people aged 14-25 with disabilities and their families on their journey into adulthood after education and into employment.

Autism: Support with Teenage Relationships 12.30 – 2pm 23rd March

Dr Mark Brown, Special Needs Consultant, Special Help 4 Special Needs will look at issues around teenage relationships, including family, peers and teachers and give practical tips for managing this difficult issue. For parent / carers of autistic teens.

'All Aboard Club' in Woking and Sutton

All Aboard Club is a train-themed group which runs play sessions for autistic and ADHD children. Activities are designed and run by people with lived experience of autism / ADHD who understand children's challenges and their special interests.

Inclusive play sessions take place at St Nicholas Community Hall in Sutton and at the 7th Woking Scout Hut in Woking. There are also monthly sessions at the London Museum of Water & Steam, Brentford on Sunday afternoons with the first two sessions on February 13th and March 13th 3.00 – 4.30 pm.

For details of dates and times see: <https://www.allaboardclub.com/play-sessions/>

World Autism Acceptance Week and NAS 60 Year Celebration

In 2022, the NAS will be celebrating World Autism Acceptance Week (WAAW) between 28th March and 3rd April – this is the new name for what used to be known as World Autism Awareness Week. The NAS was founded sixty years ago in 1962 by a group of parents, and now runs 116 volunteer-led branches and seven specialist schools across the UK. It also has an award-winning website with a community hub of information and advice and runs many services for autistic adults.

Find out how you can get involved in World Autism Acceptance Week 2022 and help to change attitudes and raise funds to transform lives here: <https://bit.ly/3ALLUJM>

There's a short video about some of the major milestones the NAS has achieved here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8SMRG9nSxE>

If you have problems clicking on any links, you may need to paste them into your browser

NAS Online Mental Health Conference

NAS is hosting a one-day online mental health conference on 10th March focusing on the issues impacting the mental health of autistic people, and exploring strategies for effective support. Key topics include:

- Autism, trauma and PTSD
- Autistic people with learning disabilities: ensuring the right support
- Autistic fatigue and burnout
- Self-harm and suicidal behaviour
- Autism and alexithymia
- Making psychological therapies work for autistic people

Tickets for autistic people and their families or carers to attend the live event are £65 + VAT or there is on-demand access after the event for £30 + VAT. For further details of the whole day's programme see: <https://bit.ly/3KV3MWX>

Curly Hair Project webinars

The Curly Hair Project (CHP) is a social enterprise that supports autistic people and those around them. Founder Alis Rowe uses animated films, comic strips and diagrams to make books, webinars and e-courses interesting and easy to understand.

The webinars show what it is like to be autistic, from the inside, and can be helpful for autistic adults and parents of autistic children. Most last for an hour and you can watch recordings for 3 days afterwards. Upcoming topics include:

- What is it like to be autistic? Monday 7th February 8 - 9pm
- A Day in the Reception Class animation and discussion Fri 11th February 8 - 9pm
- Developing Resilience Monday 14th February 8 – 9pm
- Autism in the Workplace Wednesday 16th February 8 – 9.30pm
- Understanding Masking Thursday 17th February 8 – 9pm
- Eating and Autism Monday 21st February 8 – 9pm
- Sensory Processing and Autism Thursday 24th February 8 – 9pm
- Emotions and Autism Monday 7th March 8 – 9pm

NAS Surrey Branch members can get 10% off webinars, e-courses and books with the code NASSURREY. For a list of events and to book go to <https://bit.ly/3L7jGOr>

Jeremy Hunt MP Meeting with Parents of SEN Children – January 2022

The MP for South West Surrey, Jeremy Hunt, met online with parents of children with special educational needs in his constituency to learn more about the issues they have getting their child's educational needs met.

To gather views of parents, a local parent has set up a survey for parent / carers living in the South West Surrey constituency which you can complete here: <https://bit.ly/3u8liQE>

There are plans for Jeremy Hunt to hold a meeting with parents and representatives from Surrey County Council to discuss the issues. It is hoped that this will take place in early March and that parents from across Surrey may be able to join that meeting.

We will put further details on the Branch's email forum when we get them. (If you're not a member, you can join here: <https://nassurreybranch.org/moderated-email-forum/>)

If you have problems clicking on any links, you may need to paste them into your browser

Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training in Learning Disability & Autism

The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training programme is designed to ensure staff working in health and social care receive learning disability and autism training at the right level for their role.

The training is named after Oliver McGowan, an autistic teenager whose death shone a light on the need for health and social care staff to have better training. Oliver's parents, Paula and Tom McGowan believe his death could have been prevented if the doctors and nurses had been trained to understand how to make reasonable adjustments for him.

Following a trial period, an interim report has been published by the Independent Evaluator National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi)

<https://www.ndti.org.uk/projects/evaluation-of-the-oliver-mcgowan-mandatory-training-in-learning-disability-and-autism>

The aim was to trial a range of forms of training, evaluate it and produce a standardised training package suitable for roll out as mandatory training. National Autistic Society and the Royal Mencap Society participated in the trial phase, as well as various consortia.

The evaluation team for the trial was made up of people with evaluation expertise, expertise in workforce development, people who are autistic and others who have learning disabilities. The report describes the progress so far and shares some of the early insights at this early stage of the trial.

The mandatory training will ensure staff working in health and social care receive learning disability and autism training, at the right level for their role. The goal is for staff to have a better understanding of people's needs to provide better services and improved health and wellbeing outcomes.

The training will draw on existing best practice, the expertise of autistic people, people with a learning disability and family carers as well as subject matter experts.

The Learning Disabilities Mortality Review (LeDeR) Programme has consistently shown that people with a learning disability have a lower life expectancy and are more likely to have preventable, treatable and avoidable medical causes of death compared to the general population.

In 2017 the LeDeR Programme's annual report recommended that *“Mandatory learning disability awareness training should be provided to all staff, and be delivered in conjunction with people with a learning disability and their families.”* Every subsequent LeDeR annual report has made further reference to training needs.

Further information on the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training can be found on the Health Education England website.

<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/learning-disability/oliver-mcgowan-mandatory-training-learning-disability-autism>

A recording of the Stakeholder event that was held at the beginning of December is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HstbiFIHpF4>

INFORMATION FOR ADULTS, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES

Autism Partnership Board Reference Group

This Reference Group is for autistic adults living in Surrey, who do not have a Surrey County Council Adult Social Care package. The group meets every other month and alternates between afternoon and evening meetings.

Members can take part in the Reference Group by talking in the meetings, writing in the chat, or by email outside the meeting. Meetings currently take place over Zoom and you can choose whether to have your camera on. The meetings are chaired by Tom Moore, County Autism Lead, and members are updated on progress with the All-Age Autism Strategy and asked for their views. Feedback from the group is then shared at the Surrey Autism Partnership Board.

The next two meetings will be on **14th March at 2.00 pm** and **16th May at 7.00 pm**
For further details contact: Imogen Osborne, Engagement and Partnership Officer on 07929 863582 or email: imogen.osborne@surreycc.gov.uk

New NAS Online Branches for Autistic People

The NAS's new online branches offer an opportunity to meet like-minded people, make friends, or try a new hobby or interest and get to know fellow autistic people online from the comfort of your own home.

The online branches are free to join and all autistic people are welcome, but under 16-year-olds must be supervised by an adult, and people that need more support must bring their support carer with them. Online branches currently running are:

- Arts and Crafts
- Book Club
- Running
- Employment
LGBTQ+

For further details go to: <https://bit.ly/3ubToV1> Or, you could even 'branch out' by setting up your very own online group.

Health Inequalities Task Group – Have Your Say

Surrey County Council's Adults and Health Select Committee is looking into the issue of health inequalities, defined as: "avoidable, unfair and systematic differences in health between different groups of people".

As part of their work, a Task Group will be meeting with representatives from the NAS to hear about the inequalities experienced by autistic people. These might be caused by health staff not understanding autism or not making reasonable adjustments, or autistic people being unable to access services or attend health appointments for reasons connected to their autism, or other things.

We would like to hear from members who have examples of when they or their autistic family member has had a poor experience with health services which they feel might not have happened for someone who was not autistic. If you have any examples you are willing to share, please email surrey.branch@nas.org.uk

Connected By Autism Online Conference

Jessica Kingsley Publishers are hosting a 3-day online conference on the theme of gender, sexuality and relationships from 22nd to 24th- March, with recordings available for the following 30 days. Tickets are £20 per day or £45 for all 3 days' talks but you can use the discount code EARLYDAY1, EARLYDAY2 or EARLYDAY3 to get £5 off each day ticket, or code EARLYBIRD to get £10 off the bundle of all three days until 22nd Feb. You can see full details and buy your tickets here: <https://bit.ly/3AKtFEI>

Pilot Young Adult Safe Haven in Guildford

Autism is not a mental health condition, but many autistic people also have mental health conditions. The mental health charities Catalyst and Oakleaf are working together on a six-month pilot to deliver a Young Adult Safe Haven where young adults (18–25-year-olds) can talk openly and confidentially about their feelings and emotions with peers and young adult mental health support workers.

The Young Adult Safe Haven is open from 5pm – 9pm, 7 days a week, 365 days a year and is located next door to the existing adult Safe Haven (provided by Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, Catalyst and Oakleaf). It is in Guildford at Oakleaf's premises: 101 Walnut Tree Close, Guildford, Surrey GU1 4UQ

This is a new pilot service and will initially run as a 6-month trial to May with the potential to extend and become a permanent fixture. Mental health support workers can provide emotional and wellbeing support for young adults but will not provide crisis support. If people present in crisis, they will be signposted to the existing Safe Haven next door. For more information, visit the Catalyst website:

<https://www.catalystsupport.org.uk/young-adult-safe-haven/>

Carers' Health Checks – In Person or By Phone

New Carers' Health Checks are available through a partnership between Action for Carers and a professional health care body, *One You Surrey*. In addition to 30-minute phone appointments, you can now discuss your health and wellbeing needs in-person at multiple locations across Surrey

- Leatherhead Institute Wed 2 February
- Soper Hall, Caterham Mon 21 February
- The Maybury Centre, Woking Tues 22 February
- Astolat, Guildford Thurs 24 February
- Ashford Community Centre Mon 28 February
- Hersham Day Centre, Elmbridge Mon 7 March
- St Mary's, Camberley Mon 14 March
- Horley Baptist Church Mon 14 March

Face-to-face appointments are open to you if you:

- Are aged between 40 and 74 years old
- Have not had a health check in the last five years or being supported by a GP for ongoing physical health issues
- Are not on medication for a long term health issues e.g., stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure or kidney disease

Get in touch with Action for Carers to book your appointment - call 0303 040 1234, press option 1, or email CSAdmin@actionforcarers.org.uk

Online Seminar About Wills and Trusts for Vulnerable People

Renaissance Legal are a firm of solicitors based in Brighton who specialise in advising families and carers of disabled or vulnerable people, helping them plan for the future with wills, trusts, Powers of Attorney, Court of Protection applications and inheritance tax planning.

On Weds 16th March they are holding a free online seminar about wills and trusts, from 10.00 am to 11.00 am

For more details and to book a place, go to:

<https://www.renaissancelegal.co.uk/events/>

Research Into Sertraline For Autistic Adults Experiencing Anxiety

Autism is not a mental health condition, but many autistic people also have mental health conditions. A research study is taking place to find out whether the medication sertraline is an effective treatment for anxiety in adults with a diagnosis of autism. Surrey & Borders Partnership NHS Trust is one of the organisations involved in the study.

Anxiety is common in autistic adults and many find it to be very disabling. Medications like sertraline are commonly prescribed for anxiety in autistic adults but whether they work, and what their side effects are in the autistic population is not well known.

Although such medications are well studied in the non-autistic population, those research findings may not apply to autistic adults. It is important that any medication prescribed to autistic adults is based on research evidence.

The research study is called STRATA - *SerTRaline for AnxieTy in adults with a diagnosis of Autism* – and it is a randomised controlled trial. It has been designed by experienced researchers and clinicians with the help of an advisory group of 5 autistic adults. Participants must be:

- aged 18 years or over and have a diagnosis of autism
- experience anxiety for which they are willing to try treatment with medication
- be able to complete online or paper-based questionnaires about things such as their anxiety, other symptoms, and healthcare usage
- be able to provide informed consent to take part

Participants would receive either sertraline or a placebo (inactive) medicine for up to one year, and would be contacted regularly and asked to complete questionnaires about their symptoms during the course of the study.

A separate study will also be taking place with carers to explore how the treatment of the autistic person has affected them. Individuals can still take part in STRATA if they do not have a carer, do not wish for their carer to be involved, or their carer does not wish to take part.

For more information about the research and how to express an interest in taking part, go to www.bristol.ac.uk/strata or contact Maria Del Piccolo tel: 07717 850506 email strata@sabp.nhs.uk

NAS Adult Services In Godalming

This is a summary of services run by NAS professionals in Surrey – you can find out more on the main NAS website.

Day services in Godalming

Personalised services for more able adults with autism who have funding. Weekdays - from breakfast clubs to evening groups, plus weekend activities. Courses on skills such as travel training, job-seeking, money, cookery, etc. <https://bit.ly/3GecDjh>

Personalised services for adults with autism & learning disabilities who have funding. <https://bit.ly/3ocd9I9>

Residential services in Godalming

Stonepit Close is a residential service in Godalming, Surrey, for autistic adults in two houses designed specifically for autistic people where staff are highly trained. Funding from the authority via a community care assessment or needs assessment would need to be in place to fund residential services. <https://bit.ly/3o74O8Q>

Contact Melissa Lawson Referral Development Manager on 07887 594628 or email: Melissa.lawson@nas.org.uk

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 run an active email forum and produce this email newsletter every two months. We also host talks on a variety of topics, parent and partner support groups online and across Surrey, and annual Children's events. To join for free, go to nassurreybranch.org or email surrey.branch@nas.org.uk to request a membership form.

If you are a member of National Autistic Society at national level, you can nominate us to receive part of your subscription by emailing supportercare@nas.org.uk.

We are part of the National Autistic Society which works for autistic people and runs services such as schools, clubs and adult centres. It has over 20,000 members, over 100 local 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. Registered charity, number 269425. Company limited by guarantee number 1205298.

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