



# Coventry and Warwickshire Autism Strategy Winter Newsletter



## New Autism Strategy Must Deliver Change for Autistic People

### What is this about?

Over the recent months, the national government, led by The House of Lords Committee, looked at a law called the **Autism Act 2009**. This law says the Government must have a plan (called an **autism strategy**) that details the approach to improving the lives of autistic people. The current Strategy ends in **July 2026**, so a new one is needed.



### What did the Committee find?

- The Autism Act was important, but **real change has not happened**.
- Autistic people still face big problems in health, education, and work.
- Many decisions about autistic people are made **without asking them**. This must change.

### What needs to happen now?

The Government must:

- Make a **new autism strategy** ready for July 2026.
- Set **clear goals** and say who is responsible for making them happen.
- Involve **autistic people and their parents and carers** in every step.

**The following priorities were identified which will underpin the new national Autism Strategy:**

1. Improving public understanding and acceptance of autism, and accessibility of services under equality law.
2. Identification, improved assessment pathways and provision of needs led support
3. Reducing health inequalities and building strong support in the community
4. Improving access to and support in education and transitions to adulthood
5. Support more autistic people to find employment and to stay at work
6. Improve support for autistic people in the criminal and youth justice systems

### **What will happen next?**

The government will develop a new national strategy before July 2026.



In Coventry and Warwickshire, an Autism and ADHD Transformation Plan will replace the current local Strategy as of 2026. We will ensure that the above priorities are reflected in our local Plan.

To find out more about the work of the Committee, or to read their reports (including a summary version or an easy read version) please visit the following website: [New autism strategy must deliver change for autistic people - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

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## **The Inclusive Autism Research Participation Framework for Recruiting Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Communities to Research**

The Inclusive Autism Research Participation Framework was developed through a collaboration between the **University of Warwick** and **Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust**. The project aimed to strengthen the **Participatory Research (PR)** skills of academic researchers and community leads involved in autism research—such as those working in the NHS and charities—so they could better recruit culturally and ethnically diverse **Experts by Experience (EbE)** and participants for their studies.



Although PR seeks to address underrepresentation in research, certain communities remain underrepresented in autism studies, particularly culturally and ethnically diverse autistic individuals and their families (Maye et al., 2022).

To tackle this challenge, the team co-developed a framework designed to support researchers in recruiting culturally and ethnically diverse EbE groups for the research in autism and beyond. This was achieved by conducting **four focus groups** with autistic individuals and families from **Black and South Asian communities** (including Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim groups), which are among the most underrepresented in autism research.

### **Key Insights: How Autism Is Discussed**

The focus groups explored the question: “*How do we talk about autism?*” Several themes emerged:

- **Misunderstandings and lack of awareness** within the wider community.
- The importance—and complexity—of **support from immediate family or partners**.
- **Varied experiences of inclusion** in cultural and religious spaces.



- The significance of **early years settings** (nurseries and schools) in starting the autism journey.
- **Parent advocacy** and a strong desire to contribute to change.

### **What Makes Research Participation Easier?**

Participants also shared what facilitates involvement in research, leading to three key themes:

- **Motivations for participation**, such as the desire to contribute and learn.
- **Factors that ease participation**, including safe and culturally sensitive spaces, the role of Experts by Experience, shared lived experiences, and community connections.
- **Benefits of participation**, encompassing what participants both received and shared.

Using these findings, the project produced **guidance for researchers** on recruiting culturally and ethnically diverse participants.

### **Key Recommendations**

- Community-Centred Recruitment
- Provision of safe and Culturally Sensitive Spaces
- Flexible and Accessible Communication
- Plan Sustainable Project Outcomes and Impact
- Empowerment Through Participation
- Importance of Inclusive Design and Ethics
- Expect the Unexpected

For further detail on the project, feedback from the Experts by Experience on their experience of co-designing the research and the insights from autistic people and families of autistic people in participating in the research, please visit the website:

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/psych/research/autism/warwick-participatory-research-project/>

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supportedemployment@warwickshire.gov.uk



## WARWICKSHIRE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

### WHO DO WE SUPPORT?



- If you have a learning disability and/or autism (no diagnosis necessary!)
- You are over 18
- Are not in education
- Can travel to your local library
- Live in Warwickshire
- You can already be in employment

### WHAT DO WE DO?

- Tailor your skills and enhance your CV
- Build confidence and independence
- Industry tours with local employers
- Job Club and workshops
- Employability skills with 1-2-1 support
- In-work support



### MAKE A REFERRAL

If you know someone who could benefit from our service, make a referral using the QR code.



@WarwickshireSupportedEmploymentService



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## Your journey into work with WARWICKSHIRE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

### Referral

We will be in touch  
within 2 weeks of  
receiving a referral

### Welcome meeting

Meet your Journey  
Guide and plan your  
journey with WSES

### Preparation

We work together  
to get you ready  
for work



### Get out there!

Take part in our Job Club,  
industry tours and resources  
to build skills and confidence

### In-Work Support

Our Employment Support  
Advisor is on hand to ensure  
a smooth transition into  
employment



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## Praise for inclusive employment service launched in Warwickshire two years ago

By Jana Buxbaumova on April 1st, 2025 in News

A new service, which was launched to support people with autism and/or learning difficulties into work, has received independent quality assurance for its work as it marks its second anniversary.

**Warwickshire County Council's Supported Employment Service (WSES)** was set-up as part of its long-standing commitment to inclusive employment in Warwickshire.

BASE, which is a national membership charity that promotes the principles and delivery of high-quality supported employment services, has completed a Supported Employment Quality Framework Model Fidelity external assessment, which resulted in WSES achieving an excellent score of 72.98% in its first independent assessment, leading to receiving accreditation in the field of supported employment.

WSES is successfully meeting its employment targets, with achievements in both job placements and retention support.

An impressive 92% of job seekers who have gained employment have remained in their roles, showcasing the service's impact and success.

Over 500 people have been referred to the service over the last two years including 312 referrals in the last 12 months.

A total of 217 people have been supported to gain or sustain employment and in 2024, WSES supported people with 253 interviews which resulted in 59 people starting a job. The BASE assessment emphasised several key strengths of the service including thriving employer partnerships with 23 industry tours, bridging the gap between job seekers and roles available with local employers.

The independent assessors also commended WSES's team in breaking down employment barriers by splitting jobs to create tailored roles to match the abilities of job seekers; securing exceptional feedback about its service and the support provided by their Journey Guides and Employment Advisors; and its vital role within Warwickshire County Council's Fair Chance Employer Programme by collaborating with partners to promote and improve inclusive recruitment practices throughout the region.



Nerise Oldfield-Thompson, Director of Business Development and Quality at BASE and Inclusive Trading, said: “It is wonderful to see an organisation embedding continuous improvement into their service provision.

“We received a warm welcome and it was clear that the team is very dedicated and passionate about their work. They demonstrate key competencies and have achieved excellent outcomes, especially for such a young service.”

Charlotte Rainbow, Team Manager at WSES, said the initiative is making a real difference for Warwickshire residents who face additional barriers to employment as its second anniversary approaches.

Achieving accredited status has been a significant accomplishment for the team,” she said. “Their dedication to inclusivity and commitment to supporting our customers has been instrumental in attaining a score that truly reflects the passion and hard work invested in developing our service.

“We hope that more individuals with learning disabilities and/or autism will see our customers thriving in paid roles in their own communities and will be inspired to pursue similar opportunities, as we believe it is challenging to aspire to be something that you cannot see.”

David Ayton-Hill, Warwickshire County Council’s Director of Economy & Place, added: “We hear from employers that the primary barrier to inclusive recruitment is the fear of making mistakes.”

“Services such as WSES are here to provide expertise, so employers do not have to navigate this alone. Achieving accreditation will hopefully reassure employers that we are leaders in the field of inclusive recruitment, and they might think of us when they next consider advertising a vacancy.”

Further information is available at <https://skillshub.warwickshire.gov.uk/supportive-employers-1/warwickshire-supported-employment-service>

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## Melissa's Story



'Without WSES, I wouldn't be where I am now'



**Melissa joined WSES with a Level 2 qualification as an Early Years Practitioner, struggling to succeed in interviews. All it took was a local primary school to offer a work trial instead of a formal interview for her to show her strengths- and she got the job!**

Ask us about how we supported Melissa's work trial including job-coaching and subsidised salaries



## Jordan's journey towards support and employment

Tailored support and interventions from Warwickshire's Supported Employment Service (WSES) can transform lives.

As shown by the impact the service has made to Jordan, supporting him to grow in confidence and move closer to employment.

Warwickshire Supported Employment Service is designed to support Warwickshire's young people and adults with autism and/or learning disabilities with an aspiration for paid work. Through WSES, Jordan was referred to WorkWell - an initiative to support individuals across Coventry and Warwickshire with mental health or health-related barriers to find or retain employment – and was supported by journey guide, James.

Working with James, Jordan created a person-centred action plan detailing the steps he will take to help reach his goal of employment and was referred and signposted to a range of services based on his individual needs.

Jordan was referred to Talking Therapies to help build his confidence, along with Sycamore Counselling and CASS to help him move towards work. Together, this allowed Jordan to make an informed choice to engage with the support, with his journey guide supporting him every step of the way.



Jordan working with Lee at Boxing Clever

To help build Jordan's confidence alongside promoting a healthy lifestyle, James supported Jordan to attend Boxing Clever in Nuneaton where they offer a supportive environment for individuals with complex needs, disabilities, and challenging home lives.

Lee, the founder of Boxing Clever, said:

*"Our goal is to create a safe and encouraging space where everyone can thrive and develop skills that will help them in their personal and professional lives. Jordan has done really well and that's down to his commitment and enthusiasm, we've just given him the platform. It's been a pleasure watching his confidence and drive grow."*

Jordan added: *"I've received a range of support through James at WorkWell and the WSES team. From therapy and counselling through to Boxing Clever, they've all helped to build my confidence and learn new skills that will help me in my journey towards employment."*

Following the guidance from James through the WorkWell programme, Jordan has built a solid foundation of mental health support and confidence building activities to prepare him to engage in job searching. Once at this stage, James re-engaged the WSES team to support Jordan towards employment.



David Ayton- Hill, Director of Economy and Place, said:

***“Jordan's journey is a testament to the power of comprehensive support and tailored interventions. With continued guidance and encouragement, Jordan is on a promising path towards improved mental health and meaningful employment.***

***“The WorkWell programme has shown the benefits of connecting individuals with their local communities and ensuring that complicated referrals and assessments do not create a barrier to vital services being accessed.”***

Jordan's WSES journey guide, Jodie Kilworth, added:

***“Jordan's growth in confidence and positivity has been remarkable, thanks to the personalised support from James and WorkWell. The seamless referrals and communication within the Skills Hub have greatly benefited him. Jordan has actively participated in various activities, including a team-building workshop, an Industry Tour, and a job interview. The future looks promising as he continues his journey towards paid employment.”***

To find out more about WorkWell, visit [Coventry and Warwickshire WorkWell programme – Warwickshire Skills Hub](#)

To find out more about WSES, visit [Warwickshire Supported Employment Service – Warwickshire Skills Hub](#)

Boxing Clever information page: <https://www.facebook.com/boxingcleveracademy123>

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Below is a link to a recruitment film for a local social enterprise called Nuneaton Signs, which was set up by the local authority in 1982 as a sheltered workshop and has been recently nominated and shortlisted for a BASE award by WSES:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hchpB952QTk&t=5s>

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Below is a link to a video about the local company, Lisi Aerospace (winner of social value award nominated by WSES via BASE in 2024), and the inclusive industry tour they gave to members of the WSES to allow them to gain insight into working in the commercial aviation sector:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVOISVQOdm8>

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## **Preparing for Christmas – tips for the festive season**

With Christmas on its way, the National Autistic Society have put together some autism-friendly tips for the festive season.

Christmas is a time of joy and celebration, but it can be difficult for some autistic people. With input from autistic people, they've compiled a list of autism-friendly tips for the festive period. With good planning and clear communication, these tips will hopefully help you to have an enjoyable Christmas.



## Preparing



Many autistic people can find any kind of change difficult. Planning and preparation is key in making Christmas as enjoyable as possible.

- Think about ways you can enjoy the festive season that work for you – don't feel pressured into doing things just because that's what other people do.
- Wherever possible, plan your Christmas in advance with your family, friends and any support services.
- Make sure all plans are shared and you know what you will be doing and when, and who else will be there.
- If it is helpful, use visual aids such as calendars, lists and schedules to help plan your Christmas.
- Think about and plan around sensory differences that could cause you distress or discomfort. Consider ear defenders etc for times of potential sensory overload.
- Create or find a quiet space where you can take a break if you get overwhelmed. You may want this to be a completely Christmas-free area, particularly around the main days of Christmas or at key times when there may be additional stress.
- Don't just plan for Christmas Day. Plan for the whole festive break, and give yourself quiet days to recoup if needed.
- Don't spend money you don't have on Christmas gifts you can't afford.
- Make sure you budget for buying Christmas gifts.
- If you're visiting family and friends, tell them about anything that could help make your visit as stress-free as possible. For instance, turning off Christmas lights, letting you know in advance what the food will be, sharing plans for activities and having a quiet space to escape to.

**"Christmas scents and candles can be super overwhelming sensory-wise so could be avoided when decorating. Flashing fairy lights can be overwhelming."**



## Schedules



Many autistic people have a strong need for [routine](#). If schedule and routine is important to you, you might want to:

- Keep your daily schedule the same as possible, including on Christmas Day.
- Gradually introduce Christmas activities into your daily schedule. For instance, you could put up a few decorations on one day and more on another, plan a short Christmas shopping trip or decorate the tree, then switch on the tree lights on another day.
- Keep a copy of your schedule with you. Share it with other people if that would help them understand what you need to do, and if anything changes, change it on your schedule so you've got a new plan.

## Decorations

Many autistic people will have [differing sensory needs](#); decorations for some are great whereas others may struggle and find them really overwhelming. You could:

- Plan the most suitable decorations for you and your home, including where best to have them and how many, if any.
- Consider decorating gradually, for example, you could put the Christmas tree in position, decorate it the next day, then put up other decorations even later.
- Create Christmas-free areas of the home without decorations.

**"I put my cards up and treasure those for the kind thoughts behind them, but otherwise have no other decorations."**



## Presents

Presents can also be overwhelming: the number of them, the wrapping and unwrapping them; the unclear expectations about how to respond after receiving a present. You could try telling family and friends what your preference is in advance, including:

- The number of presents – make a list of presents you would like to receive and share this with your family and friends. This also removes any element of surprise, if you find that difficult.
- Explaining whether you want presents to be wrapped or not.

**"Last year my son chose his own main present, and checked it was right when it arrived, then it was wrapped. He felt better knowing his present was right, and it wouldn't be a surprise, so started the day calm."**



To access the article online, please click on this link: [Tips](#)



# Independent national review of Mental Health, ADHD and Autism Services

The UK government has launched an **independent review** to address the growing challenges in mental health, ADHD, and autism services across England. This initiative reflects a pressing need to understand rising prevalence rates, improve access to care, and develop sustainable solutions for individuals and families living with these conditions.



## Why This Review Matters

Over the past decade, awareness of mental health, ADHD, and autism has grown significantly. However, demand for NHS support has surged, revealing gaps in timely, tailored care. Current services often fail to meet population needs, leading to adverse impacts on individuals, communities, and the economy.

Key statistics highlight the urgency:

- **1 in 5 people** in England have a common mental health condition.
- Around **3–5% of the global population will have ADHD**.
- Around **1% of adults in England** may be autistic.

The review will examine:

- **Trends and drivers** behind rising prevalence.
- The role of **clinical practice**, cultural factors, and medicalisation.
- **Prevention strategies**, resilience-building, and early intervention.
- **Models of support** beyond traditional NHS pathways, ensuring people receive the right care at the right time.

Separate chapters will focus on **children and young people** and **adults**, acknowledging their distinct needs.

## Key Areas of Investigation

- **Diagnosis and medicalisation:** How diagnostic pathways have evolved, the value of diagnosis, and associated risks.



- **Medication and treatment outcomes:** Long-term impacts of pharmacological interventions.
- **Inequalities:** Disparities in access and experience across different groups.
- **International comparisons:** Learning from global approaches to prevalence and diagnosis.

The review is chaired by **Professor Peter Fonagy**, supported by **Professor Sir Simon Wessely** and **Professor Gillian Baird**. An advisory group of academics, clinicians, charities, and people with lived experience will guide the process.

Within **3–6 months**, the review will deliver a report to the Department of Health and Social Care, offering evidence-based recommendations to:

- Respond to rising demand.
- Improve inclusivity and accessibility.
- Support the government's **10-Year Health Plan**, shifting focus from hospital to community care and from sickness to prevention.

The review will actively involve:

- People with lived experience.
- Parents and carers.
- Under-represented groups.
- Clinical and academic experts.

For more information, visit: [Independent review into mental health conditions, ADHD and autism: terms of reference - GOV.UK](#)

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## Community Autism Support Service

Coventry and Warwickshire Community Autism Support Service (CASS) provides support for autistic individuals, their families and professionals in the form of targeted interventions, education and social groups.

Stay in touch with CASS news and events by signing up to their newsletter.

Scroll to the bottom of our website to sign up: <https://casspartnership.org.uk/>

**Did you know that CASS provide a Teenage Autism Support Programme (TASP) for parents of autistic teenagers?**

TASP is a FREE four-week course which consists of 4 three-hour sessions for parents and carers of autistic teenagers, or those awaiting a diagnosis. Topics include understanding autism, the teenage brain, girls and masking, self-awareness and identity, school, transitions and relationships.

The course is delivered by two qualified Act for Autism trainers, combining professional expertise with lived experience to provide practical insights and support.

Book your place here: [Education - Community Autism Support Service CASS](#)

Below is feedback from a parent who has recently attended TASP and which shows how helpful it was for them:

*'I attended the 4-week TASP course in September. I have a teenage daughter who has autism and ADHD diagnosis.*

*I'm reaching out to say the biggest thank you to you. The course has completely changed our lives and I am so incredibly grateful. Your incredible knowledge and insight, combined with your affirmative approach has empowered me to change my parenting for the better. It just 'clicked' and it's all been getting better from here.*



*When I think about where we were 6 months ago compared to where we are now, the contrast is remarkable. My daughter has also started ADHD meds in this time, which I think has also somewhat helped with the regulation, but, I am putting our progress down to a solid combination of both that and the learnings I took from your course.*

*For so long, I sought the answers in her and tried to change her. Accepting that she is the way she is and that she will flourish when she is allowed to be herself has been so powerful. The other big one has been managing my own regulation. I cannot describe how life changing this has been for her and I. I listen to my body and practise calmness, and the process of modelling this around my child has been profoundly positive. Upset doesn't turn into meltdowns and life is much more harmonious.*

*You are doing such a fantastic thing and I just had to come back and tell you so! You empowered me to change my parenting and see my daughter's world in a new light and this perspective has totally changed our lives.*

*Thanks a million.*

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COVENTRY & WARWICKSHIRE  
Maternity and Neonatal  
Voices Partnership  
Working in Partnership to Improve Maternity & Neonatal Services

## Do you identify as being neurodivergent?

**Would you like to help shape the future of maternity care and support for those who are neurodivergent?**

**Have you or your partner got experience of maternity care since 2022? Or, are you hoping to need maternity care in the next year or so?**

**We're holding a series of focus groups both online and in person, daytime and evening, to get feedback about maternity 'passports' and we would love your input.**



**9 Dec, 10 Dec, 18 Dec  
12 Jan, 14 Jan**

Scan for more info and to register



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[IntegratedLDACCommissioningTeam@Warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:IntegratedLDACCommissioningTeam@Warwickshire.gov.uk)