



We are all individuals



This year I've had the chance to travel around the country and see for myself some of the work that we at The National Autistic Society have been doing, and I feel extremely encouraged by the way things are going. It's never fast enough for my liking, of course, and while even one person with autism still has difficulty in finding support, education, employment or simply more acceptance by society as a whole, then I shall go on fighting the cause. But there's no doubt that the various parts of the NAS – whether volunteers, members, or staff – are

increasingly working together at the local level to make a real difference to the lives of the people our Society exists to serve.

Charities are increasingly being assessed, not only by the quality of their services, but also by their ability to campaign effectively for change – a part of our work about which I feel particularly strongly. As well as the high-quality support we provide to children and adults in our schools and care centres, we're getting much better at lobbying and shouting about autism and the needs of those affected – whether it's at national government level, through the media, or through our regional partnerships and activities.

Autism Awareness Week in 2003 highlighted the need for 'inclusion', and this must become much more than a simple label or aspiration. It means changing attitudes, at all levels, to autism and to people on the spectrum, and achieving this will be a key task for the NAS in the future. It is true to say that most people in the UK are now 'aware' of autism (and about time too) but what is needed is better understanding of the condition and what it means for the estimated 535,000 people affected by it.

Another measure of the success of a charity is just how good it is at raising the voluntary funding it needs. Here, again, we're improving fast: we have a very impressive list of corporate donors, for example, and the fantastic news about our three-year partnership with Vodafone UK makes it clear that we're now taken seriously as a major, effective charity.

Inevitably, our successes always make me realise how much still needs to be done, but it's important to recognise just what great strides we've made during the year. With the help of our many friends and partners, the year ahead will bring us even nearer to the day when all those affected by autism are able to lead dignified and satisfying lives.

Jane Asher – President, The National Autistic Society

▼ HRH The Countess of Wessex made her first visit on behalf of The National Autistic Society to The Robert Ogden School, where she was greeted by both pupils and staff. We are delighted to welcome her as our new Patron.



We are all individuals...

The National Autistic Society (NAS) is committed to delivering quality services to make appropriate support available to individuals across the autistic spectrum. This means we work both with more able clients and those with more complex support needs. NAS schools and adult centres provide direct support to over a thousand people. In addition, in partnership with parents and local education authorities (LEAs), we provide solutions to some of the problems of language, social behaviour and learning faced by people with autism.

As autism is a life-long condition, the NAS aims to work with parents and people with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) at each stage of their lives. During the year we trained over 100 practitioners in the DISCO diagnostic and assessment tool. We recognise that – provided appropriate support is made available – autistic students can do well in mainstream education. In support of this aim, we have started work with two LEAs to look at ways in which the Society could operate classes for autistic pupils in mainstream schools. For adults with an ASD, we are developing a range of ‘user-led’ consultative mechanisms so that they can become more involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

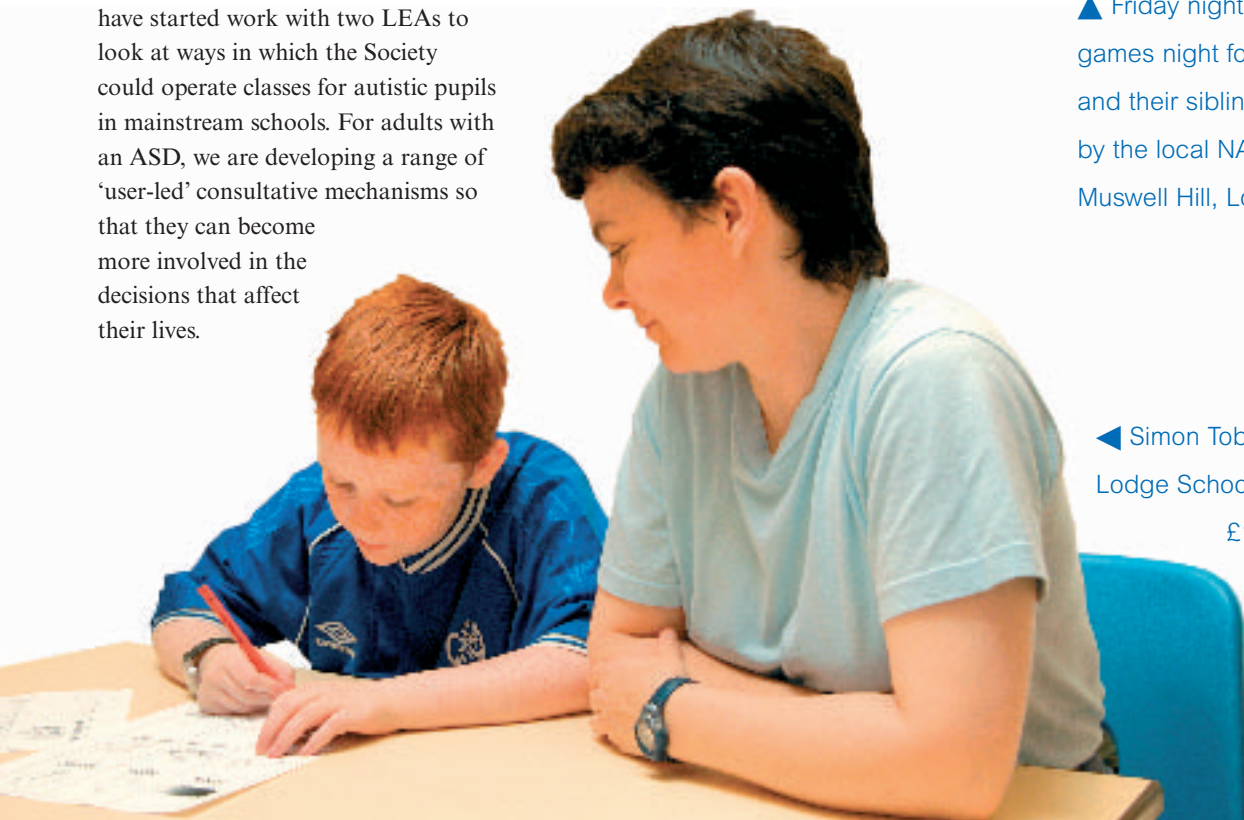
Social groups, play schemes, out-of-school clubs and our volunteer-led Befriending programme all address the needs of autistic people to enjoy meaningful leisure activities, while our supported employment scheme, Prospects, helps individuals manage the transition into employment.



▲ Enjoying a game of snooker at the NAS Robert Ogden School.



▲ Friday night is computer and games night for autistic youngsters and their siblings at their club, run by the local NAS branch in Muswell Hill, London.



◀ Simon Tobin, of NAS Radlett Lodge School, helped raise over £100 by successfully completing a sponsored silence!



◀ Waterskiing with NAS Croydon Service.

▼ Learning new skills at NAS Somerset Court.



◀ Artist David Downes is a remarkable example of how the characteristics of autism and a special talent can sometimes go together. Having developed his artistic skills through many years of hard work, David came to Prospects, our specialist employment consultancy, in 2003. Working closely with David, Prospects was able to provide practical vocational advice and counselling – hopefully setting David on the path to appropriate recognition for his skills and abilities.

With only 6% of autistic people currently in paid employment, securing job opportunities for people with an ASD will continue to be a priority for the NAS. We will be developing our supported employment services and campaigning to ensure that employers understand the benefits of employing people with autism.

Making the connection...

The Society's work is about making connections – with people with an ASD; with the volunteers and members who support us; and with the individual and corporate donors whose generosity underpins so many of our activities. Among the more energetic activities of NAS supporters in the past year have been a gruelling trek on the Inca Trail in Peru, taking part in the Flora London Marathon, and completing the Ten Tors Challenge in Dartmoor. In some cases the main aim has been to raise much-needed funds to support the work of the NAS, in others it has been more about personal development or a combination of the two.



▲ Two-way communication: Seurat's 'Bathers at Asnières' comes to life in this production by students at NAS Sybil Elgar School. The performance introduced students to the art of the Impressionists and enabled them to convey to their audience their understanding of the mood of the painting.

Throughout the UK, the NAS focuses on the specific needs of individuals, with the common aim of enabling them to participate more fully in everyday life. We're helped in this task by enthusiastic volunteers, supporters and members who freely give their time to run parent-support programmes, publish newsletters, lobby decision-makers, organise outings and leisure activities, as well as raise funds through carol concerts, local branch activities, quiz nights, and sponsored sports activities.

We've also benefited from the generous support of our corporate supporters, both new and longstanding. Some of the highlights include:

- We're the 2004 Charity of the Year for Magnet Ltd whose staff have been fantastic in their support of the NAS, raising over £47,000 through raffles, dress-down days, coffee mornings and trade barbecues.
- House of Fraser chose the NAS to be the beneficiary charity of a percentage of Fraser Baby Bear sales at Christmas 2003.

- Property consultancy firm Stevens Scanlan decided to celebrate its 150th anniversary by adopting the NAS as their Charity of the Year for 2004.

Thanks to the support of partners such as these we have continued to expand the scope of our services to people with autism and their families. Our *help!* programme, for example, which provides parents with post-diagnostic information and advice, assisted 290 families last year – up from 170 the year before – with further expansion planned over the coming year. 171 professionals were trained in our EarlyBird™ early intervention programme during the year and the new EarlyBird Plus™ programme was piloted with parents. Calls to our Autism Helpline, now relaunched with better facilities, continue to grow – last year we took over 29,000. Our volunteer-led Befriending programme also had an excellent year, and aims to double the number of local volunteering schemes over the next two years. Expansion of the NAS at the local level is also reflected in the number of organisations working with us in the regional planning process, which has nearly doubled in the last 18 months. Throughout the UK, the NAS is recognised as the essential focus of work aimed at ensuring a better life for everyone with autism.



▲ Andean trekkers, led by Lady Astor, reach their goal – Machu Picchu, Peru. They raised over £300,000 towards the support of NAS adult services, including Prospects.



► Some of Vodafone's 'Autism Ambassadors' at the official launch of the link-up between Vodafone UK and the NAS.

When Vodafone UK decided to launch a cause-related partnership with a major charity, they didn't rush in to making a decision. Over 18 months of work went into identifying the right partnership. Both Vodafone UK and the NAS have a shared interest in communications, and just before the end of the financial year it was announced that Vodafone UK and the NAS had agreed to work together over the next three years to support several key Society projects including:

- expanding the *help!* programme
- accelerating the development and launch of PARIS – the Public Autism Resource & Information System
- raising awareness so that more people support the NAS.

We're delighted that Vodafone has chosen to link up with the NAS in a unique partnership that will deliver huge benefits to people with autism, particularly in areas where the NAS has been weak in the past.

The Vodafone UK Foundation, a registered charity, has also chosen to support the NAS over the next three years. This will enable us to expand our Parent-to-Parent and Befriending schemes into new areas of the country and to develop our Social Groups network.



▲ December 2003 saw the second annual 'Stars Shine for Autism' Christmas carol concert at St Paul's Church, Knightsbridge, in London. A glittering cast of stars performed, including NAS President Jane Asher, Stephen Fry, Dame Diana Rigg, Zoe Wanamaker, Robert Bathurst and Lynda Bellingham. The Bach Choir and acclaimed mezzo-soprano Christine Cairns also entertained the audience. Our thanks to France Telecom for sponsoring this event, which raised £20,000.



▼ The Vodafone team gets ready to 'Go Wild' at the NAS's Captains of Industry Challenge. Teams from 12 high-profile companies took part in various mental, physical and creative challenges, including wine tasting and Caribbean dancing, in a special fundraising event. The overall winners were the Royal Bank of Scotland Group.



Advice, support, and action...

As the leading voice for people with autism throughout the UK, the Society works in partnership with other organisations in responding to relevant government consultations and legislative initiatives. We continue to work closely with parliamentarians in London and the devolved institutions, providing the Secretariat to the Westminster All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism (APPGA) and to the equivalent cross-party groups in Edinburgh and Cardiff.



▲ More than 300 parliamentarians and over 100 organisations have signed up to the aims of the APPGA Manifesto, launched during Autism Awareness Week 2003. Setting out the APPGA's vision for the next ten years, the manifesto looks at a range of issues including diagnosis, medical care and social support. With the manifesto a year old, the NAS published a report on its progress and will continue to track both our own performance and that of governmental and other bodies against its targets.

In one example of our success in lobbying on behalf of people with autism, the Home Office accepted our concerns about guidance on parenting orders and contracts. This led to the orders and contracts including a new section on disability, mental health and special educational needs which better emphasised the needs of parents of children with an ASD.

As the only national organisation representing people with an ASD, the Society is regularly called on to give information and evidence to government consultations, whether nationally, regionally or locally. In Scotland, for example, we were the only disability organisation asked to give oral evidence to the Communities Committee of the Scottish Parliament on the *Anti-social Behaviour (Scotland) Bill*. There we were able to express our concerns that (as with the equivalent legislation in England and Wales), there was inadequate definition of anti-social behaviour.



▲ Contributors David Potter, Su Thomas, Pippa Clare, (l-r, top) Virginia Bovell and Tony Charman at the launch of the *Mapping Autism Research* report in the Houses of Parliament. In addition to launching its Manifesto, the APPGA hosted the launches of several reports on autism during the year.



◀ The NAS campaigns to encourage people to think about the ways in which inclusion can work for people with an ASD. In 2003 our Inclusion Awards highlighted and rewarded good practice from around the UK. Five 'featured winners' were selected for their ongoing commitment to autism, innovative ways of working with people with autism and their families, and positive ways in which people's lives have been changed as a result of their work. Seen left at our annual NAS Leadership Dinner is featured winner Marlyn Campbell from the Highlands of Scotland (centre) receiving her award from NAS President Jane Asher and APPGA Chair Liz Blackman MP.

At the NAS, we are rightly proud of our ability to provide high-quality information and advice. This can range from:

- guidance for people newly diagnosed with an ASD
- detailed advice on entitlements
- advocacy support for parents appealing to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Tribunals
- factsheets from our Information Centre
- information from our website – which last year had more than one million visitors.

Thanks to the generous support of leading law firm Clifford Chance, over 1,200 families have been helped by our Advocacy for Education Service. We are delighted to say that a new alliance with Leeds-based law firm Addleshaw Goddard now enables us to provide a better service for families going to Special Education Needs Tribunals in the north of England.

However, we are not resting on our laurels. We have worked hard to improve the scope of the service we provide.

Here are just some of the improvements we've made:

- Autism Helpline was relaunched with a new local-rate number – 0845 070 4004
- One number for all callers – whether parents, students or researchers
- Improved access for deaf or hard-of-hearing callers – minicom number 0845 070 4003 is now a local-rate number
- Language Line support for callers whose first language is not English
- The NAS website has been redesigned to ensure better access and with a new, easily remembered address – www.autism.org.uk
- New email newsletter service
- Regular 'Websearch' feature in *Communication*, providing details of useful online resources.





The National Autistic Society

Senior Management Team 2004

Vernon Beauchamp: Chief Executive Officer

Amanda Ball: from May 2004 Acting Director – Marketing and Fundraising
(Samantha Jeffrey: Director – Marketing and Fundraising on maternity leave from May 2004)

Eileen Hopkins: Director – Development

Alison Hunter: Director – Human Resources

Neil McConachie: Director – Services

Stuart Notholt: Director – Policy and Public Affairs

Nick Rogers: from January 2004 Director – Finance
(Breege Burke: Director – Finance left January 2004)

The front cover picture of this Annual Review was produced at an NAS adult service.

We would like to thank all of the companies, charitable trusts and foundations which have supported us during the year.

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The Scottish Executive
The Vodafone UK Foundation
The Watercress Line
Via Fossa
Vodafone Group plc
Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Welsh Assembly Government
Woolworths plc



As part of our commitment to clarity in our communications, The National Autistic Society has become a corporate member of the Plain Language Commission. The symbol above shows that this document has successfully passed through the Commission's rigorous checking procedure.



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