

Autistic Minds



10th AGM

CEO & CHAIR REPORTS

12th May 2021

the **power** of **potential**



60% of our staff are autistic

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Acting Chairman & Treasurer's Report



“unprecedented”

With myself holding the Acting Chairman and Treasurer position at Autistic Minds, I have combined the reports.

The word ‘unprecedented’ is undoubtedly the most used description of events by any business or organisation over the last 12 months. However, it is an apt summary of our experiences in 2020 and 2021.

The upheaval society has encountered has not bypassed us. The Autistic Minds Leadership team, staff, and the individuals we support, have all been impacted by the changes we have had to deal with. However, it must be recognised how well everybody in the team coped with the adjustments we had to make.

From working from home, social distancing, and changes in the way we communicate resulted in different ways of ensuring we kept our focus. The whole team pulled together and on behalf of the Board of Trustees I thank everyone for their dedication in keeping the charity running.

The opening of our first publicly accessible community hub in Caerphilly was a major step, especially given the turbulent times we are in. Though it is important to be cognisant of short term challenges we must make difficult choices when looking at our long term future.

The decision to progress with the Hub was the right choice to make and will pay dividends in the years to come.

One unfortunate casualty of the pandemic have been the Live Shows. The exhibitions and workshops run in Cardiff and Llandudno had started to gain momentum and it was clear they had met an important need in providing guidance, advice and signposting. The decision to postpone the events scheduled in 2020 was effectively taken out of our hands but the postponement of the 2021 events, whilst difficult, was the right decision. We hope to bring the Live Shows back in 2022.

Turning to financial matters, like many charities we suffered from the fallout of the pandemic in terms of fund raising. The various lockdowns hampered our ability to undertake face-to-face fundraising and deliver our increasing popular workshops and employment support programmes.



CEO Report

Whilst the past year has not been great on a global scale, here at Autistic Minds we have battled the odds and continued to offer our support and services to the people that need it most at a time when they need it the most.

Our HelpHub has continued offer much needed advice and signposting throughout the pandemic and we saw an increase in its use and a change in the demographic of those using it during the depth of the UK-wide lock down.

Many of our services, including community talks, support groups and our employment programmes migrated online so that they could continue supporting those that required them. Much of the team remain working from home during these challenging times whilst the newly expanded management team have the option of flexibly working from our Head Office in Treforest.

This allows the team to work creatively and collaboratively on the projects, service and supports that we are running. As we look ahead slightly bigger and stronger than we started this year we are very thankful to the support, encouragement and drive that everyone involved with our charity has given us that has enabled us to continue foster the change that is required. A particularly big thank you goes out to all of the autistic community and the key partners that we have worked with over the year.



Background



Our vision is a society where autistic adults have equal access to all available opportunities, support and services, and form an integral part of their communities.



Our mission is to empower and equip autistic adults to advocate for themselves, by improving access to support, education, employment and social opportunities so they can reach their full potential and build a more independent life for themselves.

Autistic Minds is a registered charity (1143855) and was founded in September 2010 (Charity operated as The Autism Directory from Sept 2010 to June 2021) by our CEO Nadine Honeybone in response to the lack of information on services available for autistic children and adults.

We remain firm in our believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to create a better and more independent life for themselves, and with the right support and resources this can be achieved. This is where the most of our energy goes and what we strive to do in every working day. Since its inception in 2010, Autistic Minds has grown to a team of 26 staff (as of May 2021), **60%** of whom are autistic.

Together, our small and unique team delivers a range of charitable ventures and quality national services across Wales. Our projects currently include:

The Autism Directory our flagship online directory of autism related services and products

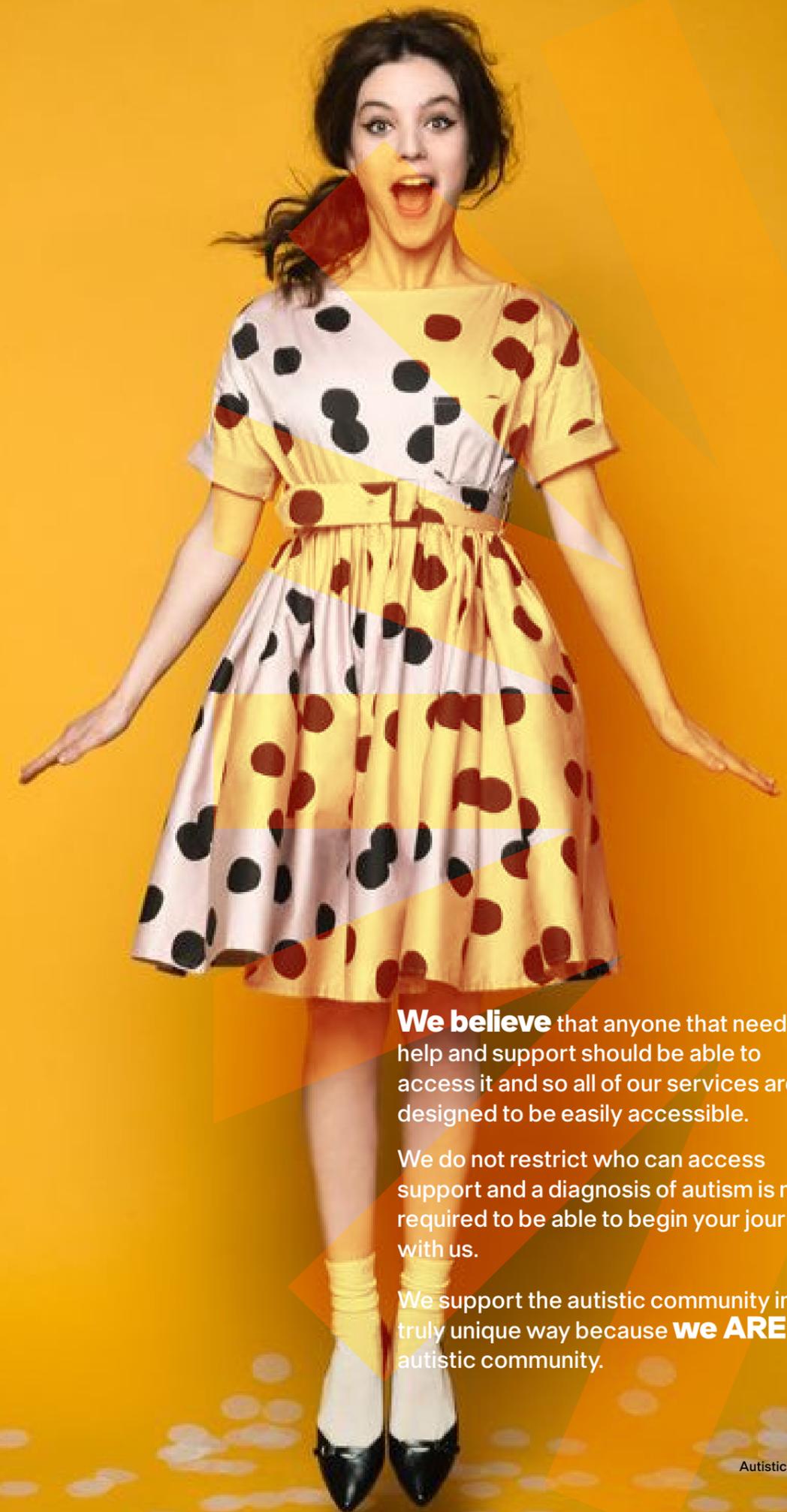
Autistic Minds HelpHub an autism helpline managed by our autistic staff

Autistic Minds Live Shows in Cardiff and Llandudno

Autism Awareness Community Talks

Employment training programmes for autistic adults

The Autistic Minds Caerphilly Community Hub



We believe that anyone that needs help and support should be able to access it and so all of our services are designed to be easily accessible.

We do not restrict who can access support and a diagnosis of autism is not required to be able to begin your journey with us.

We support the autistic community in a truly unique way because **we ARE** the autistic community.

Key Priorities

We use our expertise and lived experience of autism to create powerful solutions and opportunities for the autistic community to build a better future for themselves

Improve access to support services, employment opportunities and the development of independent living skills for autistic adults

Increase opportunities for social interaction and the creation of support networks for autistic individuals, building resilience and independence

Promote and provide equal access to places, support, services and organisations that often remain inaccessible to the autistic community

Provide services at a grass roots level where the individual and autism community receive the most benefit

Promote neurodiversity and its importance in society by celebrating autistic role models

We will work with our stakeholders and partners to:

Provide an empathetic and welcoming ear to listen to and understand the needs of the autistic and autism community

Support those who have recently been diagnosed, are post diagnosis, going through a diagnostic process or those who think they are autistic with signposting, relevant tools and information - wherever they are on their journey

Create a variety of services on a local level where the autistic community can access support otherwise unavailable to them, as well as feel a sense of community and belonging

Deliver excellent, accessible training programmes to equip autistic adults with the skills to gain employment

Enable autistic adults to pursue their passions and ambitions to help support themselves to live an independent life

Ensure that the autistic community and their families are at the heart of everything we do

Activities and Beneficiaries

Activities

Advice & Signposting

HelpHub
Autistic Minds Website
The Autism Directory
Community Hubs
Support Groups

Support and celebrate

Employment Programmes
LIVE Shows
Social Groups
Wall of Inspiration

Inform and Influence

Autism Awareness
Community Talks
Company training packages
Partnerships
Social media campaigns

Autistic Adults

Parents & carers

Autistic Adults

Parents & Carers

Companies/businesses

Professionals – HCP, HR, D&I

Wider Public

Beneficiaries



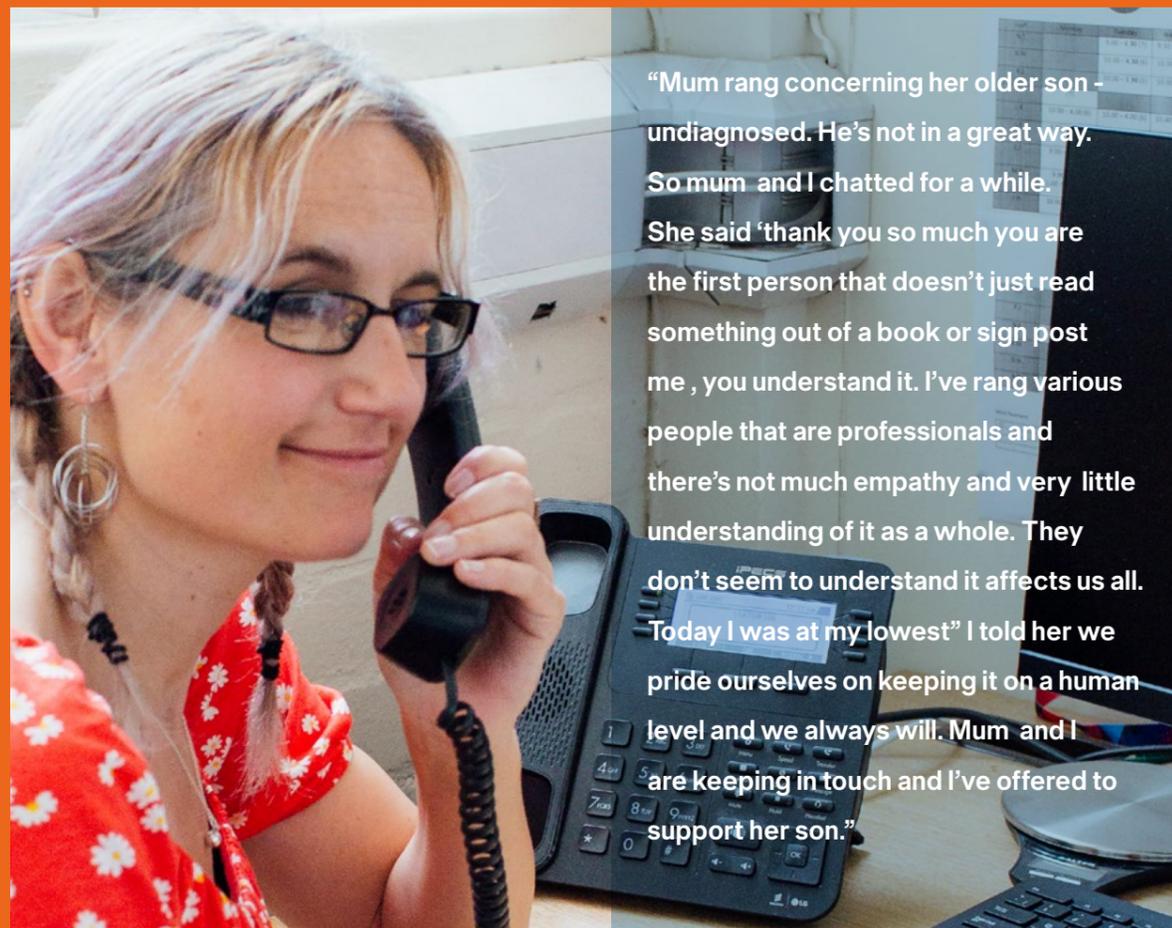
About Autism

The challenges:

There are many challenges within the autism community.

UK surveys suggest that the average waiting time between raising concerns with a health professional and receiving a diagnosis is **3.6 years for children** and **over 2 years for adults**. The lack of help and support is reflected in data from phone calls to our help line run by our autistic staff, many of our callers feel alone and isolated, with no one to turn to.

Our **HelpHub Services Manager Louise**, is autistic and provides vital support to the autism community. Some of her feedback is below:



This is not an isolated case and such interactions take place daily to our phone line.

The Autism Research Trust also found that:



45% of autistic adults had experienced a period of life where they didn’t have enough **money** to meet **basic needs**



90% have **anxiety, depression** and **social isolation**



Only 16% of autistic adults are currently in full time employment



Research suggests that autistic people have the **lowest** employment rates of all disability groups in the UK at **22%** (includes all forms of employment)



Three times as many boys as girls are diagnosed autistic. It’s increasingly believed that girls may be better at **masking** their difficulties

Lockdown has brought even more challenges to the autistic community:



9 in 10 autistic people worried about their **mental health** during lockdown; **85%** said their anxiety levels got worse



Autistic people were **7 times** more likely to be chronically **lonely** than the general population*; and **6 times** more likely to have **low life satisfaction**** (comparisons using ONS data)

About The Autism Directory

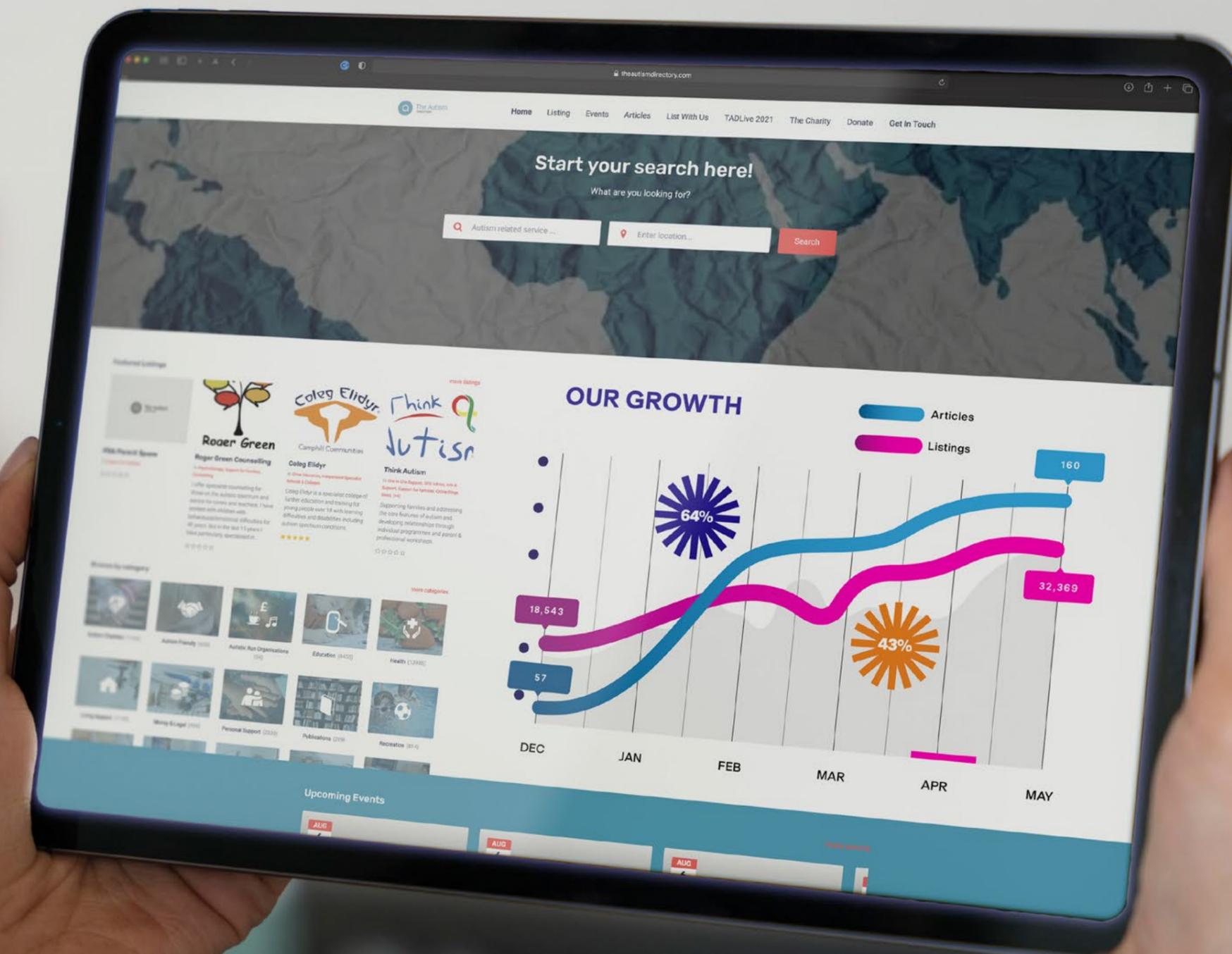
The Autism Directory website is the original charitable service conceptualised during the charity's formation over 10 years ago. In that time, it has grown to be one of the largest autism specific directories in the world.

The website is designed so that all autism friendly events, groups and services can be found in one virtual place to make the process of finding those essential services quicker and easier for those who need them. The Directory currently list entries under **15 categories**, including Education, Therapies, Grants and Funding, Living Support, Personal Support and many more.

The amount of listings on the Directory has grown significantly and currently contains **over 32,000** individual listings. This is in no small part due to the **autistic team** who enter listings and manage the operations on a daily basis. The directory team have been working tirelessly on adding listings and **43%** of the total growth has been in the 16 months alone growing from **18,543 listings** in December 2019 to **32,369** in May 2021.

There has been a **64% increase** in the number of articles on the Directory; growing from **57** in December 2019 to **160** in May 2021. This is largely due to a dedicated staff member taking responsibility for articles.

However although the website is helpful to those who need it, we recognise that it is not perfect. Our own audit and **feedback** from users have lead us to want to make some significant changes to the site including closer scrutiny of the quality of services listed and an **update** to the **user interface** to ensure that the search function is as good as it can be. These changes should allow The Autism Directory to offer a **better**, more **streamlined** service in the future.

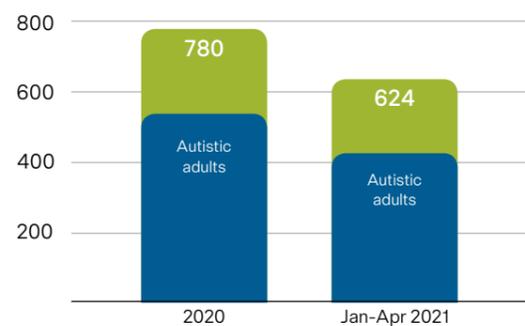


About the Autistic Minds HelpHub

The Autistic Minds **HelpHub** is a unique service we provide to autism communities across the UK. Anyone in need of support can contact us by phone, email or via social media to get **personal** and **confidential** help and information on a wide range of issues including diagnosis, employment, education, benefits or anything else that they may feel they need support with. Some people call just for a chat with our fantastic team who have a wealth of **lived autistic experience** and can truly understand the challenges and the support available.

As well as being available to the whole of the local autism community, we are fortunate to be able to internally **refer** individuals that need support from some of our other programmes and services and with our team of experienced staff we can offer advice and information on a whole range of topics and experiences.

In 2020, our small team of Help hub staff spent **over 780 hours** supporting **callers**, and to date in 2021 that time has increased to an average of **over 78 hours** a month. A high volume of calls that are received (**69%**) are from autistic adults and many of these do not know who to talk to and struggle with anxiety and isolation. Just by knowing that they can talk to an **understanding** person in confidence and that they can reach out whenever they need to, can make the world of **difference** to some people. For those that need face-to-face support, we also hold **one-to-one** meetings to help discuss any issues that they may be having and support and signpost where necessary.

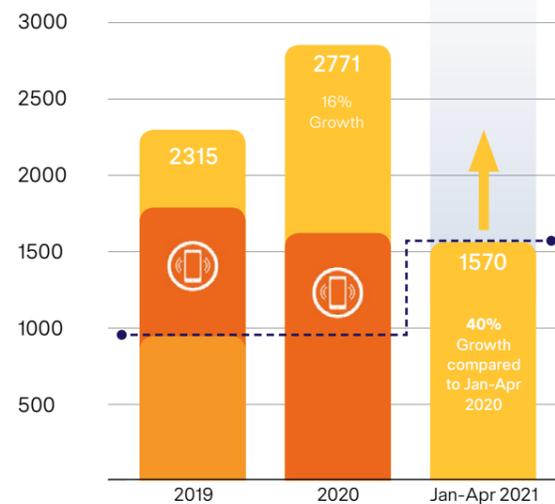


Just **over 4%** of our callers told us that were referred from outside agencies so thank you to the local Job Centres and the Department for Work and Pensions, Remploy, the local Primary Mental Health Teams, Careers Wales, and the Housing Association who have all referred individuals to our helpline, helping them to get some much-needed support.

Being a small team, we can't do everything, and we **recognise** that there are things require **external** experts. Some of our top external referrals goes out to housing, legal professionals, education and diagnosis, respectively.

In 2019, the Help Hub had its 4th consecutive record year with **over 2,315 engagements** from the public, with 1,797 of these being phone calls. In 2020 we smashed that number with **2,771 engagements**, 1608 of those through phone. This was a **16% growth**, making it 10 consecutive years of helping more people that need it. With 4 months into 2021 we've had **1,570 engagements** already which is another **40% growth** in Jan to Apr from last year.

We will continue to grow our unique **HelpHub** as well as foster the fantastic **relationships** that we have with our referring partners to ensure that everybody that requires support gets it when they **need** it.



About Autistic Minds Live

One of the most tiring yet joyful and successful events of our calendar are the LIVE shows. Providing the public with **free** face-to-face access to the services, resources and provisions that are there to help autistic children and adults, their families and the professionals that support them.

Each event is a full day **packed** with exhibitors **showcasing** their products and services; seminars on topics that matter; and the opportunity to meet with other individuals, families and professionals.

The **seminars** cover a wide range of important topics and include professionals working within the autism community and also personal talks from the public and our staff about their lives, growing up and the issues that they have faced. The tickets for these events are free to the public, which helps to makes our shows accessible to all.

Unfortunately, with the Coronavirus putting a stop to public gatherings across the globe, we had to reschedule our planned shows in both **Cardiff** and **Llandudno** which will now be held in **2022**.

With this being the case we can only reflect on our 2019 flagship show in Cardiff City Stadium which had over 3,000 registered ticket holders, with 70 exhibitors, and 15 talks and seminars.

Our shows truly are the highlight of our calendar and we very much look forward to **welcoming** back all of our visitors, stands and sponsors for next year. And, although times are still uncertain, at the time of writing, both our Llandudno and Cardiff shows are currently going ahead in 2022 and we have some fantastic **exhibitors** and **speakers** planned.



About the Employment Programme

For many autistic adults, entering employment can be a daunting prospect. Schools and colleges do not always equip their students with the job seeking, securing and retaining skills that they often require and this is particularly true for many autistic learners whom may find it more difficult to pick up these “softer” personal skills needed.

Therefore, Autistic Minds launched its **Flagship Employment Programme** to help neurodiverse adults get closer to employment. Working in close partnership with the Department for Work and Pension (DWP) and local **Job Centres** across south Wales, we run courses that enable those neurodiverse individuals seeking work an opportunity to better **understand** the world of employment and more importantly better understand themselves. We also work closely with job **coaches** by providing advice and training, to help identify individuals that may benefit from the course but may not have a formal diagnosis. The personal **outcomes** for those attending the course are often life changing and not only where employment is concerned.

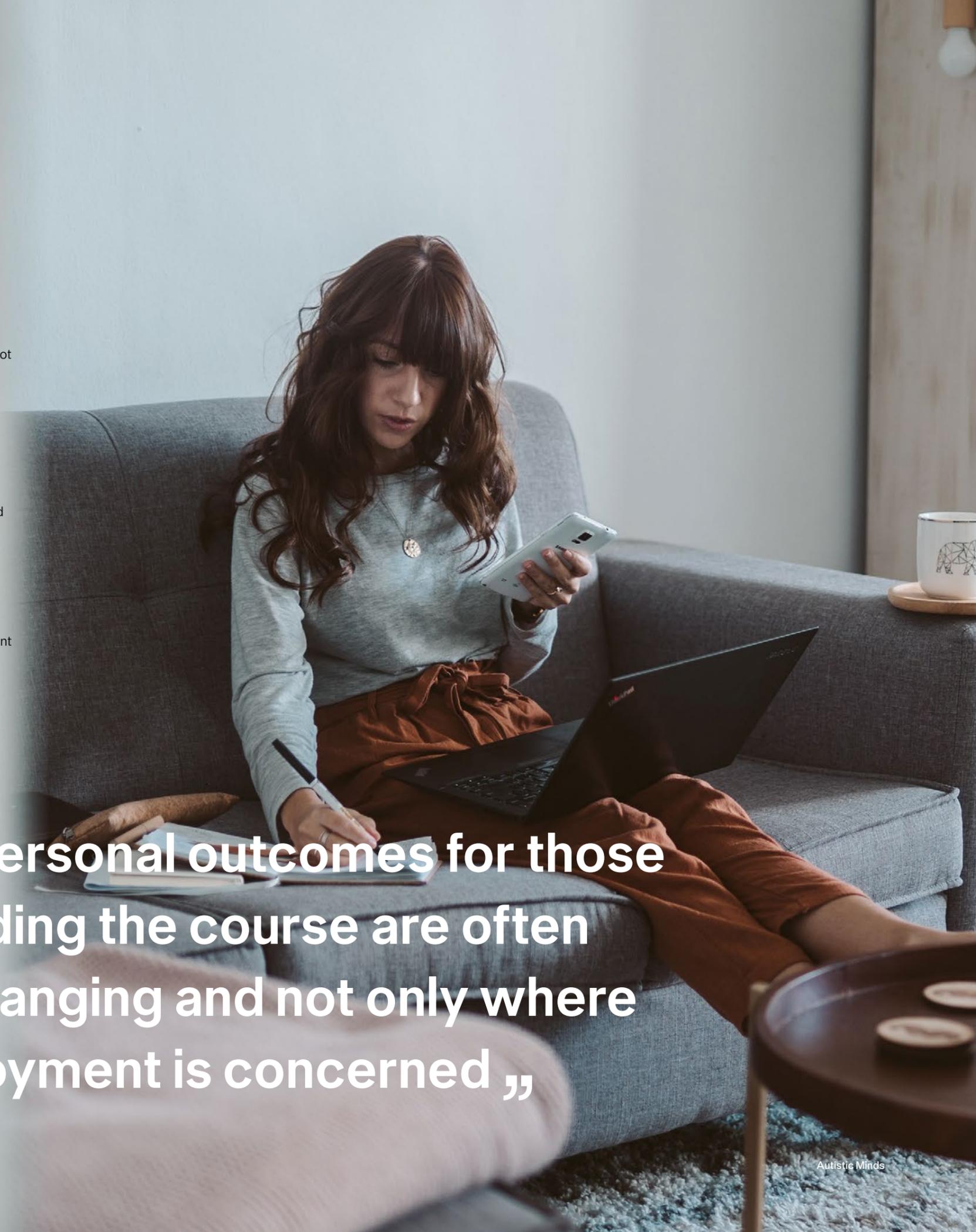
Many embark on a **journey** of self-discovery and access help and support with other areas of their lives. Over the preceding years we have gathered a great deal of information regarding the participants experiences and needs and continue to **adapt** and tailor the course, identifying any gaps and adjusting accordingly.

In **2020** the **courses** continued to be a huge success and following a short break during the national lockdown have now successfully migrated to an **online platform**. As many of you reading this may have experienced, this new video call lifestyle that many have adopted can have both positive and negative effects, but our learners are getting the same level of support and information simply in a different format.

We supported **350 adults** in total and, including some contracts that carried over from 2019, **190 adults** from 2019-2020 through the employment programme from across the 8 areas of Newport, Neath Port Talbot, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Porthcawl, Caerphilly, Bridgend, Blackwood, Maesteg, and Bargoed. So far in 2021 we have supported 47 starters in RCT and Neath Port Talbot with a 96% completion rate to date.

We would like to take this opportunity to **thank** the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Job Centre Plus (JCP) **staff** who have helped make this happen. The JCP staff in particular have been fantastic at referring those who may benefit from the course and huge thanks goes out to them however we would also like to thank the Nation Autism Team; The Salvation Army; Communities for work; and Careers Wales for also helping to direct those in need to our course.

We hope to continue to grow the number of Employment programmes that are delivered and with the creation of our **Hub** in **Caerphilly** we are also seeking funding to be able to run these courses independent of the Job Centres and therefore further reduce any barriers that might exist and help a wider demographic.



“The personal outcomes for those attending the course are often life changing and not only where employment is concerned”

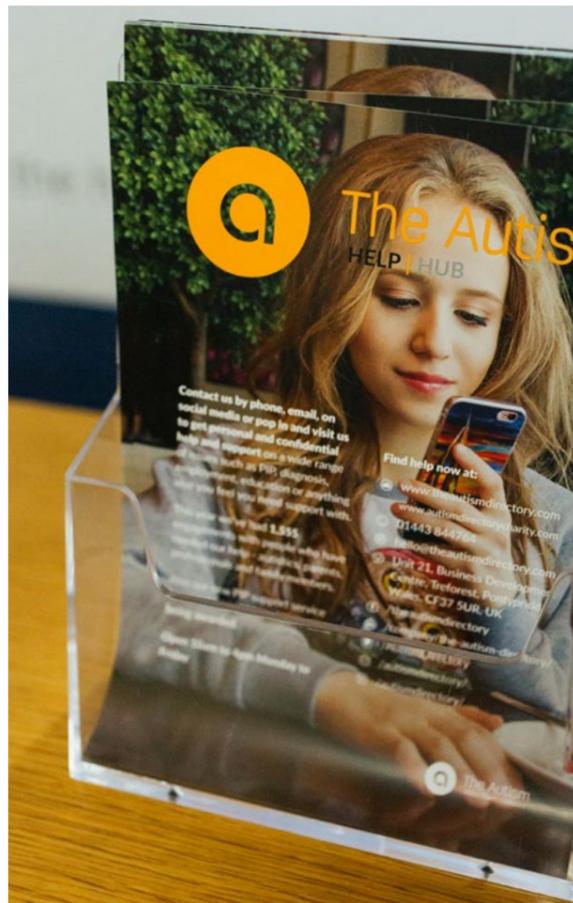
The Caerphilly Community Hub

Autistic Minds – Caerphilly Community Hub

The Caerphilly Community Hub is our **first** Autistic Minds Hub and along with our head office in Treforest it is our second “**footprint**” on the ground and hopefully the start of something fantastic to come

Again, with everything that is going on with regards to the **pandemic**, we are careful about the types of service & the way in which we are delivering them. We are currently offering **virtual** adult social groups & parent support groups, & when we can open fully we will be offering art groups & workshops as well as volunteering **opportunities** and employment support **drop ins**.

This will also be a base for our **HelpHub** to expand and where we can hold more one to one **meetings** and a drop in service for help, advice, diagnosis and benefits support. So far in 2021 and despite lockdown we are seeing **150 engagements a month**, and so we hope that as the pressures and restrictions of the pandemic begin to ease our hub will be able to offer a safe space for people to come to with more and more services available to the local **community**.



Autism Awareness Community Talks

Our 2020 Community Talks have been a real **success** and after moving to the new digital norm we have now delivered **online** community talks to **local** and **national** organisations including **Penarth Town Council**; **Western Bay Integrated Autism Service**; Parent, Childcare and Employment (PaCE); the **Chinese Association in Wales**; **Race Equality First**; **British Transport Police** and most recently the **Welsh Rugby Union**.

We are **currently** in talks with **The Nationwide**, **The Principality**, **Cardiff Bus**, **The Dragons** and **St David's Shopping Centre** on a range of differing partnership opportunities, and we plan to continue delivering our community talks online, strengthening the relationships that we have with both local community and national organisations.

Fundraising

Many charities have suffered due to the inability to collect **donations** in person and we too have seen a significant **drop** in these donations. We therefore chose to focus more on **digital** fundraising and **grants** that are available to us.

Grant funding in 2020 was key for our survival through the pandemic and we were **successful** in raising **over £148k**, and a **further £34k** so far in 2021. Our huge thanks goes to the **Moondance Foundation**, **Waterloo Foundation**, **Edward Gostling**, **Community Foundation Wales**, the **National Lottery**, **The People's Postcode Lottery**, **WCVA** and local **RCT** and **Caerphilly Councils**.

Marketing

Our marketing, and more specifically **social media**, is the way in which we share our story with the **public** and through various platforms including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn we share the work that we do, **amazing stories** of the autistic people with whom we work with and anything that may be relative to our community.

Throughout 2020 it became more apparent that marketing ourselves and sharing what we do digitally is **fundamental** to our **growth** and the development of working relationships and **partnerships**. Now with a renewed focus on marketing following the rebrand to **Autistic Minds**, our brand story is now a true reflection of everything that we do. This will enable us to reach more people and therefore help and assist more people in need.

Aired in July 2020 we produced a national television campaign advert for **SC4** to help raise awareness and fundraising. The advert was then subsequently reworked and made public across social media including Facebook, Twitter and the charity's YouTube channel.

As part of our brand development and digital presence we are looking forward to **updating** all of our websites and content to help ensure that we are sending out a **consistent** message across our platforms.

2021 & Beyond - The Strategic Plan

We now look forward to what the next year will bring for Autistic Minds. We certainly have some grand plans in the works and with our expanding and talented team we hope to make some significant progress and help more people on their autistic journey than ever before.

Objectives for 2021 and beyond:

To be financially stable with sufficient reserves to cover 6 months of operations

To grow the charity organically; revenues, provision and staff

To be the “go to” people for Autism Expertise

To grow and deliver key services that are most needed

To have a strong marketable brand

To be in the top 3 google search for ‘autism’

To have a high percentage of staff with autism related experience

To be in the top 100 employers to work for



Specifically our plans include

Launching Autistic Minds as a household name in the charity sector

Expanding the HelpHub and developing new Help Services

Further developing the service provision out of the Caerphilly Hub into a full timetable of activities, social groups and services

Opening up further Community Hubs – potentially Pontypridd and Merthyr to begin with

Rolling the Employment Program out across SE Wales, then West and North Wales

Developing new employment support services for those further away from the job market

Focus on quality assurance of the Directory content and improving its functionality

Launching new enterprises in the areas we have community hubs

Increasing employment opportunities for autistic adults across all Depts, Hubs and Enterprises

Developing key partnerships with well known organisations

Developing and delivering a new Independent Living Skills service

Our longer term plans include:

Skills Training Centre

Community Homes scheme

Residential Supported Living

Day Services

We are at an exciting milestone in our history and with the dedication of the whole team I look forward to building on all that we have achieved so far to become known as the charity leading the way for the autistic community.



Nadine Honeybone Founder & CEO

Autistic Minds



the power of potential



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