

CHAPTER 10

National Autism Wales Conference 2019



3rd April 2019
Liberty Stadium, Swansea

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National Autism Wales Conference

Cynhadledd Genedlaethol Awtistiaeth Cymru Hyrwyddo Lles Awtistig
National Autism Wales Conference Promoting Autistic Wellbeing

Background and Context

The aim of the first National Autism Wales Conference “Promoting Autistic Wellbeing”, held on 3rd April at the Liberty Stadium Swansea, was to increase the wellbeing of autistic adults who are not necessarily in regular contact with public or third sector services, but for whom an event about wellbeing and increasing their capacity to cope with day-to-day life would be beneficial and positive.



Jules Robertson and Gemma Smith

The Conference was coordinated by the National ASD Development Team, hosted by the Welsh Local Government Association and Public Health Wales.



Emma Durman

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The approach to the Conference was to provide a variety of keynote addresses, workshops, exercises, tools and tips that would all help to promote emotional, physical and/or social wellbeing for autistic people aged 16+ and for those that care for them/their guests.



Amara Tamblin, Gerraint Jones-Griffiths and Cllr Huw David

The Conference was self-funded through a mixture of core sponsors and co-sponsors. The core sponsors included Swansea University, the Swans Community Trust, Ospreys in the Community, the Welsh Local Government Association, and Public Health Wales, while the co-sponsors comprised Hacer Developments, The Autism Directory, and Welsh Government's Social Services and Health Directorate.



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Task and Finish Group

Once a business plan had been agreed by WLGA and PHW and sponsorship secured, the National ASD Development Team established a Conference Task and Finish Group to co-produce the event. The Group comprised of x5 autistic individuals, x5 parent/carer representatives, x5 professionals including the National Autistic Society Cymru, and representatives of the National ASD Development Team.

The Group met every three weeks for two hours in the five months leading to the Conference, and was chaired by the National Strategic Lead for Autism. The Group informed and agreed the title of the Conference, its aims and themes, and the detail of the workshops being offered.

Welcome and Support Team

The Task and Finish Group also provided a fundamental role on the day of the Conference as part of the Welcome and Support Team, which also included core sponsors, staff members of the Integrated Autism Services (6 teams) and the full National ASD Development Team.

The purpose of the Welcome and Support Team was to support delegates and ensure the smooth running of the whole event on the day.



Frances Rees, Gerraint Jones-Griffiths, Sara Harvey, Tracy Hinton, Wendy Thomas and Linda Pilgrim

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There was at least one member of the Team situated in every workshop; others were dispersed across the building to help direct the delegates to the allocated rooms of the workshops, plenary sessions, and breaktime; there were also two members of the Team in the **Sensory Room**, the **Calm Down Room**, and the **Quiet Room** continuously throughout the day, all dependent on a scheduled rota.

The Welcome and Support Team welcomed the delegates on their arrival and, assisted by Public Health Wales, registered delegates, handing out badges with the delegates' names and workshop choices, the Conference Brochure, and communication stickers. The Support Team were recognisable by green sashes.

Description

The Conference had two autistic keynote speakers – Emma Durman (Director, Outside) and Jules Robertson (Actor, most famous for his role in *Holby City*) – as well as autistic co-chairs, Amara Tamblyn (Law Student) and Gerraint Jones-Griffiths (Lead Ambassador, Engage to Change All Wales People First).

In the morning plenary session, the Minister for Health and Social Services, Vaughan Gething AM, also spoke and provided a scene setting to the event, while the afternoon plenary session had Cllr Huw David, Welsh Local Government Association Spokesperson for Health and Social Care, providing insight into the work of the National Autism Team and the planning of the Conference itself.



Vaughan Gething AM

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Furthermore, the Conference gave autistic delegates the option of choosing two workshops in the morning and two workshops in the afternoon from the below list, all of which focus on wellbeing:

Morning Workshops

1 : Autism and Eating – tackling eating difficulties in autism

Dr Jacinta Tan, Consultant Child Psychiatrist,
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

2 : Getting on Well: into middle age and beyond

Cos Michael, Autism & Ageing Consultant

3 : Improving Alcohol Support for People with Autism

Andrew Misell, Director for Wales at Alcohol Change UK and Professor Mark Brosnan,
Bath University

4 : Interpersonal Empowerment: practical tips to improve your relationships

Dr Freya Spicer-White, Principal Clinical Psychologist, North Wales Integrated Autism Service

5 : Thriving at University

Sara Hounsell and Gemma Price, Specialist Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) Practitioner and Advisors, Swansea University

6 : Let's Keep Moving! – physical activity and autism

Ospreys in the Community, Swansea City Community Foundation, and Disability Sport Wales

7 : Gentle Flow Yoga

Huriyah Sisuvie, Yoga Instructor

Afternoon Workshops

8 : An Autistic Guide to Creativity

Rhi Lloyd-Williams, Writer and poet

9 : Autism and Employment

Gareth Tarrant, Operations Manager, The Autism Directory

10 : Skills for Life and Getting Things Done

Lucy Wells, Highly Specialist Occupational Therapist, Cardiff & Vale Integrated Autism Service

11 : Digital Technology – the Pros and Cons

Professor Phil Reed, Department of Psychology, Swansea University

12 : Managing Anxiety including Embracing Safe Stim

Emma Durman, Director, Outside

13 : Let's Keep Moving! – physical activity and autism

Ospreys in the Community, Swansea City Community Foundation, and Disability Sport Wales

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“Being amongst so many autistic people was so lovely and freeing. This was a ground-breaking day of acceptance. Thank you so much! PLEASE DO IT AGAIN!” -
Autistic Delegate

Rhi, your workshop at the #ASD conference today was exceptional. It was a delight to be invited and encouraged to be beautifully ourselves with no agenda other than the joy to be found in creative self expression. You are a wonderful presence and influence.

5:10 PM - 3 Apr 2019

The National ASD Development Team produced an Accessibility Guide, which was endorsed by the Task and Finish Group, and distributed to all registered delegates one week ahead of the Conference.

This document provided the following information to delegates: how to reach the Liberty Stadium; photos of the rooms that will be used for the purposes of the Conference; the existence of a Sensory Room, a Calm Down Room, and a Quiet Room, which will be available continuously all day for everyone; and an explanation on how to use the communication badges that delegates can choose to wear in order to signify the level of interaction they wish to have (which can be changed and amended throughout the day).

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Outcome

Many positive comments were received by the autistic delegates who attended the Conference, their guests, and professionals. For example, **95%** of delegates who had completed the evaluation form agreed that **the Conference had been beneficial to their own autistic wellbeing or understanding of autistic wellbeing.**

These comments, alongside the feedback received from various members of the Welcome and Support Team, the speakers, and the workshop leads, are a testament to the **overarching success** of the Conference.

This was one event among a series planned for various needs and interests.

A website page was created on the ASDinfoWales site one week following the Conference: <https://www.asdinfowales.co.uk/NAWC2019>

Here, the delegates can access the workshops' PowerPoint presentations and handouts; a video of the plenary sessions; the endorsement video clips from various influential individuals in the autistic community (including the autistic speaker, trainer and singer, Dean Beadle, and the autistic content creator and entrepreneur, Katy Gough); and further documents from the day.

Following the Conference, the National ASD Development Team produced a draft Evaluation Report, which will be reviewed and endorsed by the Conference Task and Finish Group. The Team will be using the Evaluation Report to inform future events.