

2022 Newsletter

London Autism Group Charity

It Starts With the Will to Make a Difference

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2022 Newsletter



Introduction by our Founder Dr Chris Papadopoulos

Welcome to our charity newsletter. In this update, you will find a wealth of information describing our charity's activities throughout the last year, supporting the autistic and wider autism community.

You may be wondering, who are the London Autism Group Charity? Well, in this newsletter you will find out all about the work that we have been doing in the past year which should give you a clear sense about our values. All of the work we do is aligned to our overall mission which is to promote the social acceptance and inclusion of autistic people and their families, to promote their health and wellbeing, and to reduce the appalling stigma and discrimination that so many people in the autistic and wider autism community so regularly experience.

We are proud that as a small but growing charity with minimal funds, that we have been able to produce real action and meaningful change to people's lives. This is mainly because of our commitment and dedication to what we believe in; that everyone deserves the chance of a happy, prosperous and long life free of discrimination and inequality. There is a still long way to go but, as our charity motto states, '*It Starts With the Will to Make a Difference*', and we certainly have the will.



We aim to bring a wide range of targeted support, to eventually offer help at every stage of an Autistic person's life.

London Autism Group

The 'London Autism Group' is a private Facebook group for anyone living in (or near to) London. We are a very friendly, supportive, sensitive and respectful group.

The group is for anyone whose lives have been influenced by autism in any way. Feel free to post any thoughts, questions or concerns you have so we can support you.

As this is a private group, nothing you post will be posted on your timeline, so only group members can see any posts/ comments you make.

We have over 3000 members from all across London (and surrounding counties), and we get over 60000 views per month on comments that are made.



London Autistic Women's Group

This is a Facebook group run by the London Autism Group Charity for autistic women living in or around London, UK. The purpose of the group is for autistic women to share their experiences and advice with other members of the group, as well as raise any questions or concerns.

You will have the opportunity to post anonymously in this group if you so wish to. Please note that while neurotypical people who may be friends or relatives of autistic people are welcome to join, this group is predominantly a space for adult autistic women.

This group is also an LGBTQ+ friendly space – trans women, trans men and genderqueer individuals are welcome to join. People living in South-East counties outside of London are also welcome to join.

Thank you to our dedicated Admin Volunteers

Thank you to Kiran and Rachel who Admin our Facebook Community Group, for all your dedication and hard work.

Thank you to Tanya for running London Autism Women's Group.

Thank you to Oliver and James for running the monthly Siblings Workshops.

Thank you to Jovana and James for admin of the charity website.

Thank you Dominique for your help in creating our charity posters and support with planning.

Thank you to Hannah for your support in organisation and on Social Media.

Thank you to Kirsty for organising our Befriending Scheme and to all the amazing volunteer Befrienders who support the Autistic Community

Thank you to Gabrielle for your family support





Neurodiversity Consultancy

One part of the work we do is offer consultancy on Autism and Neurodiversity to organisations, employers and educational institutions.

We have been helping companies to support autistic employees appropriately, by both providing educational training activities as well as guidance on enabling them to provide a more relaxing and inclusive work environment. This in turn will help you to get the most out of employees and ensure that they can reach their full potential.

We have also supported Media organisations looking to ensure that their autistic representation is accurate and appropriate.

We also offer guidance to educational institutions on how to support neurodivergent students and to help make schools, colleges and universities autistic friendly.

Improving knowledge in the Police

As part of our consultancy initiative, Charity Trustee James Gordon has done some work for the Metropolitan Police on the topic of accommodations for autistic people who come into contact with the police.

He provided them with an Autistic perspective on the stop and search policy and made suggestions for improving conditions when questioning Autistic people.

Recommendations were also made to improve understanding of why Autism is called an invisible disability and how to approach Autistic people in a non-threatening way.

Collaboration with Enna



We have also worked in collaboration with the Employers Neurodiversity Network, who are a recruitment service specifically for autistic and neurodivergent people. We've promoted them to the Autistic and Autism community to direct interested people to find the wide array of employment opportunities that they offer.



Promoting Autism related services in and around London

The charity also promotes hundreds of other Autism related support organisations in the London and surrounding area by use of the Google Map of Services created by our Trustee James Gordon. It is available on the charity's website and is also recommended by the City of London Family and Young People's Information Service.

James has also designed a Google Map of SEND Schools for London and a Map of Legal firms that have SEND expertise.

All Google Maps are accessible on our website.

Signposting, Problem solving, and Pointing out opportunities

Our website admins are constantly busy answering questions from London residents. Every day we successfully answer many queries concerning Autism from the Public. We have signposted hundreds of carers (and professionals asking for support on their behalf) to appropriate local services. We have found autistic people help and support to solve problems as diverse as Employment Tribunal Advocacy to Mental Health Support.

We have also been able to signpost dozens of autistic people to opportunities that we knew about within the large network of our contacts within the Autism community.





Commissioning Specialist Mental Health Professionals

A big part of what we do is in funding and commissioning Professionals in Mental Health to support Autistic people and Carers that come to us in crisis.

Through our network of expert contacts we can book specialised sessions that support specific areas of Mental Health in unique and effective ways.

Because of our knowledge of Autistic lived experience, we can recognise the problems and direct people to the correct professionals. Many of the professionals we work with are Autistic themselves, and therefore offer specialist support that is in very short supply. Some examples are: i. Supporting Child Mental Health.

- ii. Exploring Late Autistic Diagnosis and Identity.
- iii. Living with trauma, bullying and the effects of crime. iv. Addiction.
- v. Autism Stigma and Self-stigma.

Supporting EHCP applications

In circumstances where a family is in crisis and is not being properly supported by school to apply for EHCP, the Charity can commission expert Advocates on this topic. They can help to explain the process to carers, and to guide them through the often complex and overwhelming steps needed to be taken in order to gain an EHCP for their child.





Expert Support Professionals

When needed, our Charity can draw upon an array of incredible and expert professionals, in order to better support the London Autistic Community. They are:

Dr Chloe Farahar - Mental Health Expert in Autistic Identity and Experience https://aucademy.co.uk/chloe-farahar-phd/

Dr Annette Foster - Mental Health Expert in Autistic Identity and Experience https://aucademy.co.uk/annette-foster/

David Gray-Hammond - Expert on Addiction, Mental Health, and the Autistic Experience https://emergentdivergence.com/

Bobbi Elman - Family Consultant, Trainer, Autistic Community Advocate and EHCP Expert https://www.autismadvocate.co.uk/read-me

Alan Morrison - Expert Consultant By Experience, Education and Autistic Empowerment https://www.linkedin.com/in/alan-morrison-99566310b/

Gabrielle Nwaordu - Department of Psychology, Goldsmiths University. Autistic Community Advocate. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1750946721001392#!

Lola Álvarez Romano - Child, Adolescent and Adult Psychotherapist https://www.linkedin.com/in/lola-%C3%A1lvarez-romano-583bba6a/



The Autism Podcast

The Autism Podcast, delivered by the London Autism Group Charity, is the definitive autism related podcast. The podcast aims to improve our understanding of autism, boost acceptance, reduce autism stigma, and generate impactful, transformative ideas ranging from practical everyday advice to thoughts on policy, practice, and wider sociocultural challenges.



What is SOLACE?

We have a fantastically successful early intervention (at the point of diagnosis) service for parents and family carers, to help them to cope with autism-related stigma. This consists of 8 Weekly group meetings. The first, fourth and eight meetings take place in-person at a locally arranged venue. The other five meetings (meetings 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7) will take place online through free Zoom video conference.



The aim of SOLACE is to help improve your well-being by learning and sharing experiences together in a confidential, safe, supportive and friendly group environment facilitated by a psychologist with experience in SOLACE.

It also aims to develop skills to be able to address and challenge the misunderstandings, stereotypes and misconceptions of autism, and in turn view autism in a positive, hopeful light.

Participants will have the opportunity to share experiences and support each other in a safe and friendly environment.

Our feedback from parents has been universally positive. The parents involved all stayed in touch and have formed their own support network.

Community Resources and our response to Covid 19

In response to the coronavirus outbreak, we created a number of support services for the Autism Community. This was to protect and support the good mental health of us all. These turbulent and unpredictable days continue to make our lives, as autistic people and families of autistics, even more difficult.

To this end, we moved forward with a range of support measures, such as a list of useful resources on our website and conducting over 20 Community Live Streams on our Facebook Charity Page, where we have held Q & A sessions, and heard helpful advice from professional guests with backgrounds in the NHS, Mental Health, Special Education, and Autistic Advocacy. These livestreams gained many thousands of views and regular participation from the autistic and wider autism community, and provided a sense of collective unity.



Defending Autistic Rights

Our Charity Lead, Dr Chris Papadopoulos is a prominent figure in the media, speaking out and educating on Public Health issues and Autism Stigma in his role as a Senior University Lecturer on the subjects.

He is passionate about Autistic Rights and has spoken out many times when encountering others encroaching upon those Rights. Here is one example on the dreadful and harmful practice of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA). I have been made aware that the Professional Standards Authority are looking to meet with interested parties regarding UK ABA application to have their register of ABA therapists accredited.

We at the London Autism Group Charity (see londonautismgroupcharity.org) must declare our profound opposition to this.

This is for many reasons. Firstly, there is mounting scientific research evidence that ABA increases the risk of trauma for autistic people, particularly in the long-term (e.g. 08-2017-0016/full/html). Secondly, ABA is in fundamental opposition to neurodiversity and aligns with the medical deficit model of autism. This means that instead of viewing autistic people as neurologically different to neurotypical people (nonautistics), ABA's philosophy is that there is something inherently wrong with the autistic person's neurology, for which there is absolutely no evidence. Therefore, instead of trying to reduce autism stigma that exists in society to leverage the neurological divergence for societal benefit, ABA takes the view that we must force changes upon autistic people and they way that they think, in effect 'treating' them as if they have a disease, and trying to remove their inherent identity. This is of course totally unethical and very harmful, not only to the many autistics (particularly young children) this practice is exposed (without their consent) but also to the wider message it sends to other autistics and their families: "there is something wrong with you, we must change you."

We therefore plead that you do not include ABA therapists on your register. Doing so will validate this harmful and unethical practice, and significantly increase the risks of autism being stigmatised further.

If you wish to contact me about this issue please do.

Dr Chris Papadopoulos Lead of the London Autism Group Charity

Another Year Of Vital Charity Support Work

We have supported many parents, family carers and autistic people who were in crisis, arranging for and allowing them to have much needed professional mental health support.

Our Charity has also funded numerous autistic people who were in need of essential help, in circumstances that were impacting on their well-being.

This year we also supported several young autistic advocates with whatever they needed to become influencers for the Autistic community on social media. We are so happy that they will go on to educate and advocate on behalf of Autistic Rights. We look forward to see all that they achieve in the future.

A special congratulations to young Autistic advocate in the making: 'My Autistic Sparkle!' Well done for having worked so hard and for having such an impact across the world for young Autistic people. Your positivity and feisty nature always make us smile. We are super proud to support you on your journey as a social media influencer.





Neurodiversity Articles

Some of our volunteers have written articles for the charity about the issues that are important to the Autism and Autistic Community. These include experience of Autism diagnosis, Autistic preferences on functioning labels, identity first vs person first language, Autistic Pride and identity.

A big thank you to all who have contributed and made their views known. The articles are available to read on our website.



Befriending Scheme

Our Befriending service goes from strength to strength, providing contact to members of the Autistic community who describe themselves as isolated and cut off, but bursting with the need for human contact and having so much they want to say. Our volunteers have been truly moved by the wonderful exchanges they have had.

We also have had amazing feedback from the Autistic Community.

Zoom Workshops and Community Activities

Throughout the year, we have had several volunteers facilitate online workshops and in person activities for the London Autistic community on behalf of the charity. Each person has brought with them their own specialist knowledge and skills, and used them in order to support the community. Here are some examples of their amazing work to bring enjoyment to some of those who have been among the most isolated and misunderstood in Society.

The feedback we have received has been incredibly encouraging. It shows that these events have had a profound and positive effect upon some people that attended. We are delighted that we can help to combat the anxiety of lockdown and to improve people's mental health.







Community Cafe drop-in, social support and activities

We are delighted to announce the start of The London Autism Group Charity's drop-in-for-achat & community café.

This happens at 1pm-3pm every 2nd Sunday of the month at the fantastic venue of St Andrew's Church Hall in Southgate. Our Charity Volunteers will be there with tea, coffee, biscuits and some sensory toys and we would love for you to pop in for a chat. In the coming months there will be many opportunities for Community activities for young and old, educative events, Autistic expert speakers and more.

Siblings Support Group

Our brilliant volunteer Oliver has provided his own insights in running our Siblings support group, as he has an autistic brother. By sharing the story of his own family, he was able to engage those who attended the zoom, and to demonstrate that he could empathise with their own experiences.

Oliver is very patient and compassionate. He has been amazing as a member of the charity's befriending service.





Monthly siblings zoom support

Monthly Zoom support group starting on Tuesday 2nd March, 7:30pm - 8:30pm UK time.

This private support group is for siblings of autistic people to share experiences, connect and get advice and support. It is a very friendly and open group!

It is facilitated by charity volunteer Oliver, who himself has an autistic brother.



In the News

Charity volunteer Tracy Clements did this interview with the Express Newspaper, where she talks about her Autistic discovery and late diagnosis. Tracy discusses her ability to mask and the exhausting toll that this takes, as well as the struggle of personal and professional relationships for Autistic people.

h<u>ttps://www.express.co.uk/life-</u> style/health/1530947/Autism-symptoms-what-iswomen-late-diagnosis



In this interview with the BBC, Charity Lead Dr Chris Papadopoulos talks about the attitudes of different cultural communities to Autism and the impact that this can have on families seeking diagnosis and support. He also points out differences in the waiting times for certain communities.

Chris is concerned that some communities' perceptions of autism help to foster stigma, secrecy and isolation.

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-54691739



In the News

Charity volunteer Kirsty Lavender-Newns spoke to the Telegraph Newspaper (with the support of charity Trustee Emma Lazenby), to educate their readers on her life before she was diagnosed Autistic at the age of 21, the experience, and how her life has changed since.

'On my 21st birthday, I was diagnosed as autistic -it came as a huge relief. '

https://www.telegraph.co.uk/authors/k/kf-kj/kirstylavender-newns/



The Joy of Horses

We were delighted to offer a limited opportunity to spend one-to-one time with a lovely horse at a farm in Bromley. This idea was brought to us by our volunteer Apolline, whose passion is for looking after horses.It proved a hugely popular and very rewarding activity. Our thanks to Apolline for all her hard work. We can report that over 20 individuals and families participated, and benefitted in being close with a beautiful animal and helping to feed and groom them. This was very beneficial to the Mental Health and well being of everyone who attended.



The Joy of Horses

Come on down to the farm for some individual sessions up close with a gorgeous and friendly horse. For those with a love of animals or a particular interest in horses. Our wonderful volunteer Apolline will show you this animal's routine of arooming. feeding and roaming tree on the farm.



cated in Bromley.

Sessions will last between 1 and 2 hours. Mondays at 11am-12pm and 2pm-3pm Tuesdays at 2pm-3pm and 3pm-4pm Fridays at 11am-12pm and 2pm-3pm





Another online event our Charity arranged, was for Autistic Youtuber and digital creator Savan Gandecha (from SavanFilms -

https://www.youtube.com/c/SavanFilms/ and

https://www.instagram.com/savvyabouta utism/) to provide a free introductory workshop into producing YouTube videos.

This was a very popular event and was attended by Autistic people of all ages.

After the long months of being at home under lockdown our Charity did this livestream to support families, and to help their children in their transition back to school.

Our guest, primary school teacher Emma Gilbody gave parents some very useful strategies.

Topics included routines, coping with change and children's resilience.





Thank you to our wonderful volunteer Tracy Clements for all of the help you have given to the Charity throughout the year. Thank you especially for representing us and speaking so eloquently on everything Autism and Neurodiversity to Dulwich Village CoE Infants' School for Neurodiversity Week.

As Autistic young people emerged from lockdown and had to begin the often difficult transition back into school, our Trustee James Gordon was asked to write some advice for a SEND school teacher to relay to their class. The article can now be read on the charity's website, with other articles from Autistic writers.





London Autism Research Advisory Group

This is a branch of the charity created by our founder Dr Chris Papadopoulos.

This is dedicated to promoting, supporting and creating ethically sound research that actually helps to improve the quality of autistic people's lives. This is in direct contrast and opposition to many research projects, that have their origins in the medical model of Autism, and aim to eliminate Autism and therefore Autistic people too.

Our charity listens to the views of Autistic people and respects their views. These voices of experience tell us of the long term psychological harm that some so called therapies can do. This mirrors the results of many large studies. Thus we obviously oppose such therapies and any research that is based on the misconception that autism is a disease to be cured. Autism is a neurological difference and a neurotype i.e. a type of mind that is different to the majority of neurotypical minds. Therefore, we believe that difference and diversity is something to be celebrated and to be embraced.

Over the course of the last year, London Autism Group Charity has given support to important research papers from Academics, who also seek to improve and enrich the lives of autistic people, and to find new ways to better support their needs.

Statement in support of the Boycott Spectrum 10K Campaign

We support only ethical research, not involving eugenics. Research must respect the Autistic Advocacy Community and be led by them. While we support the pursuit of ethical research, we strongly condemn Spectrum 10K for engaging in nothing short of eugenics. Results must genuinely improve the lives of Autistic people and guarantee the well-being of their future generations. To clarify, a wellbeing as defined by the Autistic community themselves, and not a vision imposed upon the community by non-Autistic people. We fully support the campaign to Boycott Spectrum 10k, which fails in this regard and call for its cancellation.

To learn more about the Campaign and to read a detailed explanation of the objections Autistic people have, please go to the link below. Our heart-felt thanks go to the fantastic Autistic Advocates who researched and wrote the Boycott S10K Campaign statement. Please support the Boycott Spectrum10K Campaign by going to the link below and signing the petition.

https://aucademy.co.uk/2021/09/03/boycott-spectrum-10k-please-sign/

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Frequently asked questions and how to access support

- We seek to support Autistic people and their carers whenever they need help the most. In this regard we have contacted people in the Autism Community whenever we have witnessed them in distress. There are many ways in which we can offer support.
- We are commissioned to support autistic people and carers in London and the surrounding Counties. If you're inquiring about support services, then please let us know which ones you're interested in. You can see a list of our activities on our website here: https://www.londonautismgroupcharity.org/what-we-do
- For general questions and advice then we recommend you join our Facebook community group for London. There is also a wealth of useful information on our website, accessible via the 'What we do' menu option.
- Our mental health and Befriending services are carried out by text, telephone and zoom. There are also some zoom workshops based on popular subjects and interest.
- Our Befriending services support the mental health of autistic people and family carers. Volunteers providing this service will have had some training in mental health, but will not necessarily be mental health professionals. They will provide a safe space to for people to explore their emotions, how they are feeling, their wellbeing and mental health.
- Our Befriending service involves you being paired with one of our charity volunteers who will happily make contact with you first via whatsapp and, if you wish, 1-1 conversations over Zoom.
- Our Charity's Community Cafe drop-in-for-a-chat events at Southgate North London also provide a chance for in-person support for all members of the Autism Community.
- If you feel that you need a different kind of support, then we are always open to finding ways to help you access it. We would need to know the individual's situation, needs and requirements. We will then assess how we might help and we may ask to speak directly over the telephone or zoom to discuss your needs.

Ways in which you can help

Donate

If you can afford to donate something, then we will be forever grateful. As you can see by reading this news letter, we manage to do a lot of good work for the Autistic and Autism Community.

By making a contribution, you will be enabling us to carry on with the important task of achieving our ultimate goal: providing support at every stage in an autistic person's life.

You can do this straight away by going to:

https://donorbox.org/london-autism-group-charity-donations

Sign up to volunteer on our website

All of our work comes from people donating their time and effort to help others. We do not take a salary. Everything donated to the charity is used to help the next person that needs

help. So we are always on the lookout for new volunteers to join our team.

We believe in harnessing people's skills, so whatever you want to do,

we will find a way to put your time to good use. Find out more on our website.

https://www.londonautismgroupcharity.org/volunteering

Promote the charity

Connect with us on social media. Share our posts. Spread the word. Tell your family, friends and work colleagues about us. Also share our details with your family GP, pediatrician and your child's school.









2022 London Autism Group Charity Newsletter



Fundraising

There are many ways in which people have supported us over the last year. Here are some examples:

- Some have held fundraisers for their birthdays on social media.
- Others have done physical challenges.
- Marathon Runners can earn the charity extra funds by supporting our charity on the crowdfunder app: https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/marathon-fundraising
- The <u>crowdfunder app</u> also allows supporters to convert nectar points into donations.
- Companies have donated SEND related products for us to give to the Community.
- In return for our supporting them, some people have given back by offering their services to the charity and the community we support.
- Many have supported us by using Amazon Smile, a free service by which Amazon will give a small donation to our charity with each purchase made. https://smile.amazon.co.uk/
- Support the charity when you shop online with over 6,000 retailers for FREE to raise donations by using easyfundraising.

https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/support-a-good-cause/step-1/?char=264883

These generous contributions have enabled us to support a growing number of people in an increasing number of ways.

We give our sincere and humble thanks to all of those who have given a donation (whatever the amount), it allows us to make such a difference to people's lives in so many ways.



A Special Thank You

Our heartfelt thanks go out to the following people (and to their organizations) for their amazing fundraising and generous donations to the charity.

Bethany Lumborg, Teacher of Biology of Mayfield School and charity volunteer

Tanya Easter, Senco of Dulwich Village CoE Infants' School

Dr Chloe Farahar of Kent University and Educative platform Aucademy

Emma Dalmayne of Autistic Inclusive Meets

Tracy Clements charity volunteer and Fundraiser.

A huge thank you also to all of the individual donors from the community.

Thank you to those who support the charity through using the Easy Fundraising App which contributes free donations to the charity while you shop.

Thank you to those that use the Crowdfunding App which converts Nectar points into donations.

Thank you to those that shop online using Amazon Smiles, which also gives a donation to the charity.

Our thanks also to Hertfordshire County Council for awarding our Charity a Locality Budget Scheme grant towards the costs of our supporting the Mental Health of people in crisis from the local Autistic Community.

Thank you to Compare the Market for the gift of a new Laptop which has been very useful for our Admin volunteers.

Autistic Pride: Upcoming Event Organised by the Amazing Autistic Inclusive Meets

Autistic Inclusive Meets Pride and Craft Fair

London Autism Group Charity are all very excited to be coming to this year's AIM Pride and Craft Fair!

We would like the London Autistic Community to know that we are here for you when you need us.

Come and find our table to have a chat, learn more about us and enjoy the day.

We are a unique Charity serving the Autistic Community of London and surrounding Counties in the UK.

The Charity is led by Autistic people and kind, compassionate allies.

We leverage the insight of lived-experience to support Autistic people at every stage of their lives.

We offer both Mental Health and Material Support to Autistic people and Carers. So please come by, say hello and celebrate Pride with us on what will surely be another brilliant Pride day to remember!

Event details

On July 30th 1-4pm Woolwich Common Youth Club, 144 Nightingale Place, Woolwich SE18 4HE

Autistic speakers, poets and singers.

Come and buy from the stalls with art, clothing, books and jewellery, all autistic made.

For more details of the event please see the AIM Facebook page here:

https://www.facebook.com/events/259927042959693

Coming Soon



London Autism Group Charity are pleased to announce that we have launched a Greek and Greek Cypriot arm of the charity. We are delighted to have Ellie Kolatsi and Sophia Christophi from the local Community on board.

Ellie is a Parent Participation Assistant and Parent Champion at The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and families.

Sophia is an Autistic Advocate and Researcher, who educates using her lived experience and extensive academic knowledge.

They will both be helping us to engage and support this vibrant Community in enhancing their understanding of Autism and Neurodiversity.

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Thank you for reading

www.londonautismgroupcharity.org