

Suffolk All-Age Autism Strategy 2024



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Foreword

As Cabinet Members for both Adult Care and Education and SEND, we are delighted to introduce this All-Age Autism Strategy that has been co-produced by so many residents, partners, and services from across Suffolk.

We are especially pleased to see this developed as an all-age strategy encompassing the life journey of people, as this strategy is a part of our work to improve the outcomes for children and young people with SEND, but also to ensure continuity of support and services for autistic people throughout their lives as they move into adulthood.

The new strategy clearly sets out the wishes, needs and ambitions of our autistic community in Suffolk, which is vitally important as we remain convinced that by hearing people's stories, understanding their experiences and better appreciating people's own life goals and aspirations, that partners across all sectors of society can create real and lasting change for people with autism, and foster a wider understanding of autism across our county.

We would like to offer our thanks to everyone who has taken the time to get involved with creating this strategy, and we look forward to seeing that spirit of co-production and inclusiveness continue as we make change happen.

Councillor Beccy Hopfensperger, Cabinet Member for Adult Care

Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Education and SEND



**Councillor Beccy
Hopfensperger**



Councillor Andrew Reid

Introduction

In their 2022 – 2026 Corporate Strategy Suffolk County Council outlined their strategic aim of ensuring autistic people receive the right support and flexible, financially sustainable models of care that offer choice and control and accommodate people's individual needs. Delivering this will involve harnessing the collective resources of the local system, NHS, local authorities, business and voluntary sector partners to shape a truly joined-up health, wellbeing and social care system to improve health and wellbeing and close the gap in outcomes.

This strategy has been co-produced by stakeholders from across the local system and focuses on autistic people and their families/carers. The purpose of the strategy is to bring together evidence to present a picture of the support needs of autistic people and develop a dynamic action plan to start to address these to ensure that all autistic people, their carers, partners, families and allies are supported to live a full, safe, happy and healthy life in Suffolk.

The development of the strategy has identified examples of good practice in Suffolk that should be used as a catalyst for change across the local system. Similarly, the process of getting here has shown the strengths of continued co-production and engagement with residents with lived experience to deliver support services and localities that are autism friendly.



What is autism?

Autism is a processing difference that can have an impact on many areas of a person's life. Autistic people can often experience differences in how they process information, their sensory environment and how they interact with other people. While autistic people share some similar characteristics, they are also all different from each other. This is because autism is considered a spectrum. The autism spectrum is not linear from 'very autistic' to 'not autistic' but varies in every way that one person might vary from another.

Autism is lifelong condition; autistic people are born autistic and autism can be identified at any point in a person's life. You can't see if someone is autistic just by looking at them and some people might not have been diagnosed as autistic when you meet them. Many autistic people also have co-occurring conditions which can make their needs more complex. Autistic people may also have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), anxiety disorders, depression, mental health issues, learning disabilities, physical health conditions and communication difficulties. Officially, autism is considered a disability, but some people do not identify in this way.

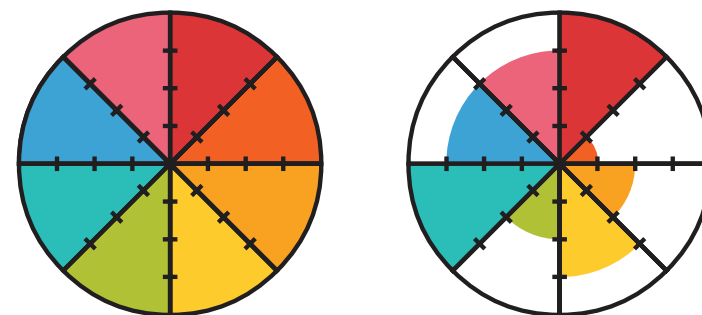
Autism can be viewed as a disability or disabling due to the impact autism and co-occurring conditions can have on daily life. Being autistic is not a bad thing and does not make you less than other people; autistic people have a lot of strengths that balance the challenges and difficulties they may face. Some of these strengths may include: having exceptional attention to detail, having an increased interest in a topic that brings the ability to offer different perspectives to questions.

Autism Spectrum

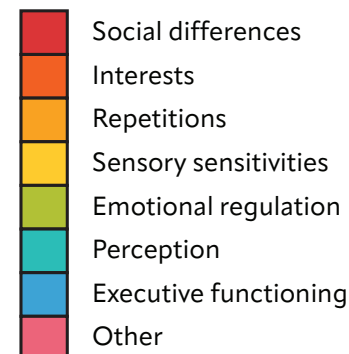
The Autism Spectrum is NOT linear



The Autism Spectrum looks more like:



Terms like "high functioning", "low functioning" and asperger" are harmful and outdated



Source: Include Autism toolkit:
<https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/what-we-do/connecting-young-people/youth-led-toolkits/include-autism>

SCAN ME:



Vision and priorities

Many people now feel that terms such as autism and ADHD are disproportionately influenced by what's known as the 'medical model', which conceptualises cognitive differences in terms of deficits or disease. This has led to a growing movement that focuses on the strengths of neurodivergent people rather than deficits. Autistic strengths can include:



Visual Skills

Visual learning and detailed focus



Enterprise

In-depth knowledge, high level skills



Deep focus

Concentration and responsiveness to structure



Attention to detail

Thorough and accurate



Memory

Excellent recall and memory



Critical thinking

May question normative behaviour



Creativity

Unique way of thinking, novel solutions to problems



Organisational skills

Learn by looking/doing and self-evaluate



Tenacity and resilience

Strength & determination, self-motivated



Integrity

Trustworthy and honest



Analytical

Problem solve, identify patterns



Kindness

Kind to others and acceptance of difference

Vision and priorities

Vision

All autistic people in Suffolk, their parents, friends and carers are able to live fulfilling and rewarding lives in a county that accepts and understands them. They will be able to access and depend on public services that treat them as individuals and are able to make reasonable adjustments to meet their needs. They should expect to play an equal part in the local community, get the right support at the right time throughout their lives and develop their skills and independence and work to their full potential.

Priorities

The evidence base and action plan for this strategy is set out across 6 key priority areas in line with the National All-Age Autism Strategy:

| | |
|--|---|
| Improving acceptance, awareness and understanding of autism within society | Building the right support in the community and supporting people in inpatient care |
| Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people with a focus on needs lead by diagnostic pathways | Improving autistic children and young people's access to education, and supporting positive transitions into adulthood |
| Supporting more autistic people into employment | Improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems |



SCAN ME:



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It's not rocket science

1. Improving acceptance, awareness and understanding of autism within society

This section of the strategy will outline how the Partnership will work to raise awareness and understanding of autism in Suffolk. We know from national data that whilst the picture is improving there is still a lot of work to do to develop the understanding of autism within society and we have heard from residents locally that community and support services are not always able to adapt appropriately to meet the needs of autistic residents. The themes covered within this section will apply to almost every other area outlined within this strategy.



What do we know from data?

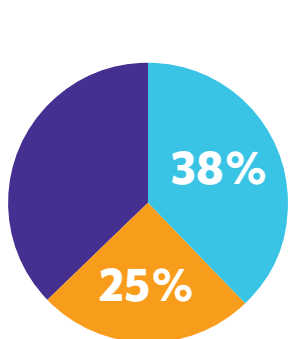
In 2021 the National Autism Society estimated that 99.5% of the public are now aware of autism and this is a welcome improvement since the introduction of the Autism Act in 2009.

However further research by the All Party Group on Autism in 2019 indicates that this increase in awareness is not translating into an improved experience for autistic people:

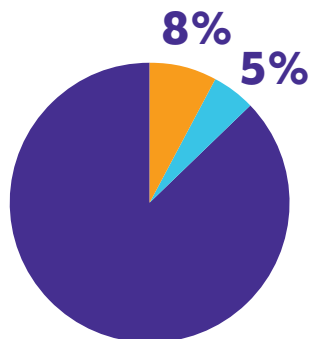
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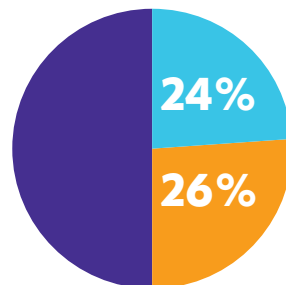
SCAN ME:



Just 38% of autistic adults and **25%** of families nationally are aware of the Autism Act.



Just 8% of autistic adults and **5%** of families nationally feel that health and care services have improved in their area since the Autism Act.



Just 24% of autistic adults and **26%** of families nationally feel that public understanding of autism has improved since the Autism Act was passed.

“

I think that there has been a lot of progress. I try and talk about it as openly as possible to people because I'm trying to breakdown the stigma of autism and neurodivergence, but I think there's a **growing gap between how willing people are to talk about it and explore it and the support that's there for people when they are willing to talk about it and explore it.**

Suffolk Resident

Awareness and understanding are not the same thing and to make a difference to autistic people's lives it is better public understanding of autism that we need to see.



What do we know from data?

“““

There's the things that we'll all be aware of... you know the classic asking what your special talent is, you know, like Rain Man. That type of lack of understanding.

Suffolk Resident

Residents have overwhelmingly told us that their lived experience is unique to them and there needs to be more scope for people to be treated as individuals by community services and support services:

“““

..You can have all the awareness in the world but if people aren't prepared to put it into actual practise and actually understand it, then it's just tick box."

Suffolk Resident

They feel that the support on offer is not flexible enough to meet their needs:

“““

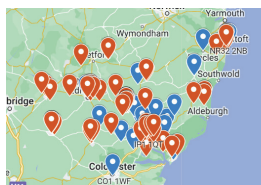
It's just basically you need a car, so I know this is something that the County are aware of the transport issues

Suffolk Resident

We have heard about particular challenges with transport in more rural parts of Suffolk:

Examples of good practice

Below we highlight some examples of good practice already underway in Suffolk – these examples provide a snapshot of the good work and do not cover everything happening across the county:



Welcoming Places Map

SCAN ME:



The SEND Young Person's Network has [developed a map](#) based on young people's feedback in Suffolk showing recommended activities for young people. This helps young people to identify places which have helped others to feel better and less anxious. Using young people's feedback they have also developed a wide range of resources including a simple video showing the characteristics of an ideal children's worker and links to peer support groups and other local provision.



Quiet Hours

Local libraries offer quiet hours for those who need quiet space. They are open to anyone who wants to sit and read or take time out to relax in a calm environment. And it is not just libraries – we know that many businesses also offer quiet hours where lights are dimmed and noise are turned down. This includes Tesco in Norfolk and Suffolk.

“““

We were trying to break it down and just find out what they could say to employers or people at the swimming pool or something to say this would help us feel more welcomed and it's not rocket science and maybe the strategy needs to be based around that about just accepting individuals.

Young people's inclusion lead

“““

I don't think that the support has changed in line with the awareness of what people should be doing. Small reasonable adjustments.

Suffolk Resident

“““

There is no one-size-fits-all accessible environment. An environment that is ideal for one neurodivergent person may be intolerable for another. Rather than fitting a single stereotype, spaces should be designed to create choice, meet a range of needs, and minimise harm

[Autistica Inclusive Spaces Plan \(2024\)](#)

SCAN ME:



“““

Healthcare that works for us

2. Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people with a focus on a needs lead diagnostic pathways

This section of the strategy will outline how the Partnership will work to address health and care inequalities. The partnership recognises that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others, it is imperative to ensure that to the greatest extent possible health and care inequalities are tackled robustly and with a view to the best possible practice.



What do we know from national and local data?

The National Autism Strategy recognises the health and care inequalities that autistic people face throughout their lives. It recognises that the key to improving outcomes for autistic people begins with timely identification and diagnosis, which are primary drivers in improving services across both the health and care sectors.

Epilepsy

Between **15%** and **40%** of people with epilepsy are autistic, compared to just 1% of the general population. Autistic people with epilepsy face a higher risk of early death than autistic people without epilepsy and non-autistic people with epilepsy.

Eating disorders



Approximately **1 in 5 women** with anorexia in eating disorder services are autistic

Children and Young People's Mental Health



7 in 10 autistic children have a mental health condition.
4 in 10 autistic children have more than one.

Suicide Rates

Ongoing research suggests that up to **11%** of people who die by suicide in the UK may be autistic, even though only **1%** of the population has an autism diagnosis.

Adult's Mental Health



8 in 10

autistic adults have a mental health condition.

Diagnosis

Receiving a timely autism diagnosis can be vital in getting the right support. Many local areas are struggling to meet the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommended 13 week wait time between referral and first assessment.

Available data shows that Suffolk is following a national trend of increased referrals for diagnosis and support and increases in people waiting 13 weeks or more for a diagnosis.

“““

[we need to work on] improving the understanding amongst professionals around the connection between autism and mental health and particularly anxiety and particularly for example, OCD.

Suffolk Resident

Health Screening

Autistic people are less likely to access healthcare screenings including cancer screening. The lowest figures are for the cervical smear test which is **50% lower** than neurotypical individuals. Figures for Suffolk are broadly comparable with the whole of England, but this remains an issue to address.

Source: [Suffolk All Age Autism Strategy Needs Assessment, 2023](#)

SCAN ME:



Examples of good practice

On this page, we highlight some examples of good practice already underway in Suffolk – these examples provide a snapshot of the good work and do not cover everything happening across the County:



Norfolk and Suffolk Recovery College

The [NSFT Recovery College](#) provides free educational workshops and courses for anyone over the age of 16 in Norfolk and Suffolk. Courses are designed to support people to invest in their own wellbeing, find empowerment on their mental health journey and become experts in their own recovery.

SCAN ME:



All the courses cover a variety of topics and follow a personal recovery approach which encourages:

- Self-knowledge and acceptance
- An understanding of the principles of recovery
- Learning and applying new skills and strategies
- Leading a meaningful life with or without symptoms

The aim is to empower people to take control of their own lives and become experts in their own recovery - people choose their own courses to attend.

Recovery College is a safe space to learn among other people who have experienced mental health challenges, supporters and members of staff.

Transforming Care Navigators Service

The Transforming Care Navigators will join a child or young person's (CYP) current care team to support them and their family. A Navigator will work with CYP to get to know their needs and identify what they might need help and support with.

To be eligible for Navigator support CP must be aged 25 or under and have a diagnosis of a Learning Disability, Autism, or both. Navigator support will be prioritised to those young people currently in a specialist hospital and those identified as at risk of hospital admission.

Transforming Care Navigators Service in Suffolk



Suffolk and partners have a team of [Transforming Care Navigators](#) who have experience of working with children and young people with learning disabilities and autism. They listen to children, young people and their families, promoting their voice and help them remain healthy and safe at home and in their community.

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A Navigator will work with children and families to get to know what is important to them and to understand what they might need support with. A Navigator will make sure children are listened to and involved in decisions about their care and treatment. Navigators keep children at the centre of decision making so that decisions will be made with them, not for them.

“““

I am not disabled by my autism

3. Supporting more autistic people into employment

This section of the strategy will outline how the Partnership will work to support more autistic people into employment. We know that there are low levels of employment for autistic people and that this can be because autistic people find it harder to access support into employment, and recruitment processes are not well set up for them. The Partnership is committed to addressing barriers to employment for autistic people in Suffolk and ensuring that more autistic people can get into work, and stay in work.



What do we know from data?



Nationally we know that only **29%** (roughly **3 in 10**) of working age autistic people were in employment in the year ending June 2021.

Employment is lower for autistic people than for all people with a disability **54%** and much lower than for people without a disability **82%**

Local residents told us about their experiences of accessing, maintaining and progressing in employment, and local employers told us about how they support autistic employees:

“““

One of the questions we specifically asked is “we’re going to expect you to attend meetings and they could be face to face. How does that make you feel? What adjustments could we make to help you attend those meetings?” [The response] was just fantastic as they just reeled off all this stuff that we were then able to take and build into our working practise

Suffolk Employer

“““

I kind of had to choose self-employment. I was only diagnosed this year so I’ve spent 25 years of my career ending up having to do my own thing because I couldn’t fit into the “traditional” work environment.

Suffolk resident

“““

I feel like there’s a big group of people who are sort of stuck in in between. There’s very little support from social care and it’s very, very difficult to get any sort of paid important employment.

Suffolk resident

Multiple factors contribute to the low level of employment for autistic people, including:



Recruitment processes not being well set up for autistic people.



Difficulty accessing support that is needed to find employment or whilst working.

Employer assumptions: **31%** employers believe that autistic people would require too much support.

“““

It does feel like a lot of job applications are almost written from a neurotypical perspective.

Suffolk resident

Sources: 1. [The Autism Act, Ten Years On, 2019](#)

2. [Hayward, S. M., McVilly, K. R. & Stokes, M. A. Challenges for females with high functioning autism in the workplace: a systematic review, 2018](#)

SCAN ME:



SCAN ME:



Examples of good practice

Below we highlight some examples of good practice already underway in Suffolk – these examples provide a snapshot of the good work and do not cover everything happening across the county:

Autism Accreditation

All job centres in Suffolk are working towards autism accreditation. This is to make sure that spaces are as friendly as they can be for autistic people. Job Centre Plus has been carrying out awareness training with staff, using presentations drawn up by neurodivergent staff and they are also introducing a leaflet that will be available from each job centre that can be sent out to someone who has autism before they come into the job centre for their first appointment. The leaflet includes pictures of what the job centre looks like, and a map showing where the nearest bus station and car parks are to try and help make things a bit easier.



Skills promotion

Suffolk Rural, a campus of Suffolk New College, are extremely passionate around employment opportunities for their students and wanting to promote their skills and qualities to potential employers. They even produced a song about one of their peer's experiences working in childcare, along with a [video](#) highlighting what makes them a fantastic employee.



SCAN ME:



Supported employment scheme for autistic people

Ace Anglia Limited is a people-led, advocacy organisation, committed to providing employment opportunities for autistic people. Ace created a supported employment scheme in 2018 with two people on fixed term contracts. Ace now employ six autistic people on permanent employment contracts. Over the next six months, Ace anticipate employing at least four more people to be part of the Oliver McGowan training trios, tasked to deliver training to all of Health and Social Care in Suffolk.

Ace has established different ways of supporting autistic employees and has created a one-page 'how to support me' profile for each person. Ace uses easy read and other accessible formats (led by the employee) for all aspects of employment on the scheme, from the application process, the interview stage, the induction process, and all other relevant documents.

The supported employment scheme aims to develop skills for future employment. This is achieved by training and supporting employees to deliver workshops, to participate in meetings, attend skills-based admin days, co-chair meetings and to take active roles in films and seminars.



“““

There are more needs than just not being able to wash or dress yourself

4. Building the right support in the community and supporting people in inpatient care

This section of the strategy will outline how the Partnership will tackle challenges that autistic people in Suffolk face in accessing the right health and social care support in the community and in inpatient facilities. Nationally autistic people are overrepresented in inpatient care and mental health facilities. We know that autistic people find it harder to access healthcare and that their needs are not always understood in health and care settings. Autistic people in Suffolk have told us that there is not enough specialist support and that professionals aren't always able to tailor support to meet the needs of autistic people.



What do we know from data?

Autistic people face greater barriers to accessing healthcare than the general population. Based on national data we can see:



Sensory sensitivity can cause difficulty in tolerating unfamiliar clinical settings, examinations and procedures.



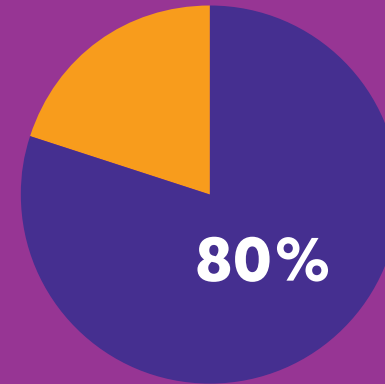
Communication difficulties make it harder to relay symptoms and health concerns, and engage with investigations and treatments.



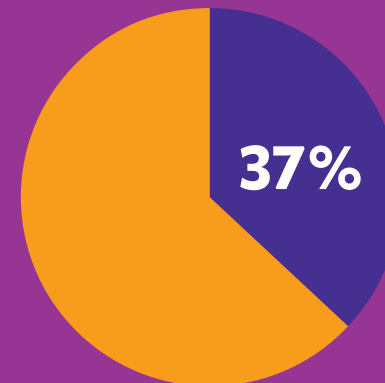
Services do not effectively communicate and co-operate; time and resources are not sufficient.



There is inadequate knowledge of autism amongst healthcare professionals; they may not adapt to best treat autistic people and sometimes do not take the health concerns of autistic people seriously.



80%
of autistic adults had
difficulty visiting a GP.



This compared to
37% of adults
without autism.

What do we know from data?

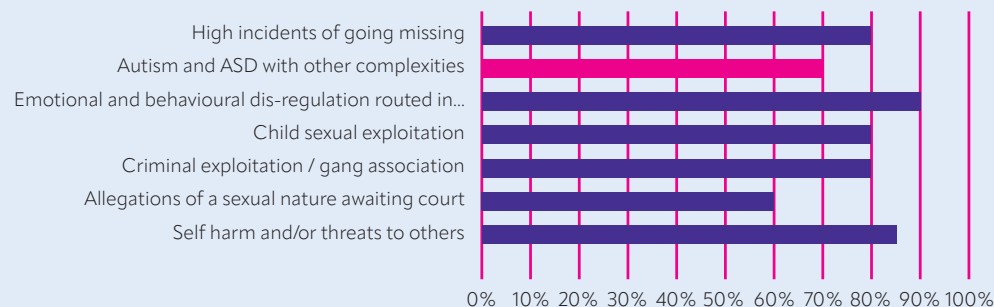
Autistic people are overrepresented in inpatient facilities. As of March 2023, **2,215** autistic adults or a Learning Disability were in inpatient mental health hospitals in England, **62%** of these people were autistic. On the same date there were **220** under 18s in inpatient units in England that were autistic or had a learning disability, of these **93%** were autistic.

BBC research in 2023 identified five key concerns repeatedly flagged by coroners over the past decade relating to inpatient care:

- A lack of trained staff with an understanding of autism
- Failure to treat autism and mental health problems as two separate conditions
- Shortage of specialised accommodation
- Lack of a health professional to co-ordinate the young person's care - as recommended in NICE guidelines
- Late diagnosis of autism

A challenge exists locally in supporting autistic children who are in the care of the Local Authority; accessing suitable placements and providers with the correct skillset. The below is a poll of local children's care providers, demonstrating a significant proportion who did not feel able to support the needs of autistic children.

Which of the following needs listed would you feel that your organisation could support?



Sources: [NHS England, five-year autism research strategy for England, 2022](#) [Autistica, fact sheets \(various years\)](#)

SCAN ME:



[Young autistic people still dying despite coroner warnings over care, 2023](#)

SCAN ME:



What else have we been told locally?

Young people in Suffolk have told us about the types of support they would like to be able to access in the community. Young people have told us that they would like to see the following:

A drop-in service which helps with:



Stress and anxiety



Sleep problems



Post traumatic stress disorder



Caring for a loved one or family member



Mental health



**A place where we
feel safe
and welcome**

Assistance with:



Using public transport



Arranging trips and things to do



Friendships



Support through tricky times



Healthcare



Planning and execution of our ideas

What else have we been told locally?

Suffolk residents have told us that difficulties in getting a diagnosis due to long wait times has in some cases acted as a barrier to them getting the support they need in the community.

“““

I went private for my diagnosis. Went back to my GP and it was back to square one – they said I had to wait for an NHS diagnosis before they could do anything.

Suffolk Resident

Residents have also told us that the services available to them are not sufficiently tailored to meet the needs of autistic people and where autism specific services are available, they are difficult to access. We have also heard about difficulties in matching identified needs to available resource for autistic people.

“““

I'm too autism for mental health services and too mental health for autism services so I'm sort of pushed into Learning Disability services but I'm not allowed to feel like I've been put in a place I don't belong because then I'm ungrateful.

Suffolk Resident

Source: [Suffolk Engagement Hub Young People's Voice, 2022](#)

SCAN ME:



Examples of good practice

Below we highlight some examples of good practice already underway in Suffolk – these examples provide a snapshot of the good work and do not cover everything happening across the county:

Community based support for children on the pathway to diagnosis

Suffolk and North Essex Integrated Care Board (SNEE ICB) commission a range of voluntary and community sector groups to offer support to Suffolk residents aged 5 – 18 who are on the neurodevelopmental disorder pathway awaiting an assessment:



Suffolk Family Carers provide a one-to-one support offer for autistic children and their families; developing a family action plan with support from a family advisor who will take a strengths based, empowerment approach.



The BEANS team support autistic children in East and West Suffolk. They also provide wraparound support for the wider family using the community circles approach. The service is flexible around duration of support.



Green Light Trust provide support to children in Suffolk on the diagnostic pathway through a forest school approach.



Noise Solution provide support to children in Suffolk on the diagnostic pathway through a music mentoring approach.



Family Action offer support in West Suffolk including free courses, online or face to face peer support groups, focused information sessions, monthly newsletters and one to one chat with a Family Support Worker.

Family Action – Norfolk and Waveney

Family Action are also commissioned in Norfolk and Waveney to provide support for those waiting for a neurodevelopmental assessment, and after diagnosis.

They offer support to parents/carers by listening and giving advice and guidance. This includes behaviour and routines, schools and education, anxiety and sleep:

- Signposting to resources and other services, including Family Action's FamilyLine.
- Monthly newsletters with information on our upcoming events and articles of interest.
- Peer support groups such as coffee mornings, virtual evening groups and a Dads and Male Carers support group, all run by our experienced team.

Our courses:

They also offer bespoke training courses for parents/carers:

Plan Bee: a 3-week course to support parents/carers to understand their child or young person. The course is particularly written for parents/carers who suspect their child has autism or ADHD. The course is delivered face-to-face and online.

Puffins: (4 weeks) in Norfolk and **Cygnets** (6 weeks) in Waveney. These courses are very popular with parents/carers and are delivered by a range of people with expertise in autism.

“”

None of the support systems work for us

5. Improving autistic children and young people's access to education, and supporting positive transitions into adulthood.

This section of the strategy will outline how the Partnership will work to improve support for autistic young people in education settings, and in the transition to adulthood. We know that nationally autistic children don't always get the support they need in school and don't always feel informed in the transition to adult services. We have been told locally about difficulties in the EHCP process and getting the right support at the right time in schools. We have also been told that it makes a big difference if teachers and other school staff are informed about and understand autism.



What do we know from data?

National research shows the range of issues that autistic children and their families across the country experience in accessing support at school, and in the transition to adulthood



Fewer than half of children and young people on the with an autism diagnosis said they were happy at school.



42% of parents said their child was refused an assessment of their special educational needs the first time it was requested.



50% of parents said their child waited more than a year for support to be provided at school.



40% of parents said their child's school place did not fully meet their needs.



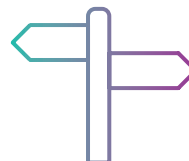
Fewer than 5 in 10 teachers said they were confident about supporting a child with an autism diagnosis.



6 in 10 young people said that the main thing that would make school better for them was having a teacher who understood autism.



Just over a third (**36%**) of people who have gone through the transition to adults' services say they were fully involved.



Just over a quarter (**26%**) received enough information.



Just over a quarter (**26%**) felt properly supported.



Less than a third (**30%**) had enough time to prepare for the transition to adulthood.



As of March 2023, **93 pupils** in Suffolk were in Elective Home Education: **38%** were recorded as being autistic.

SCAN ME:



Source: [The Autism Act, Ten Years On, 2019](#)

What do we know from data?

Locally young people have told us their view on what good support looks like:

“““

We may struggle being sociable and take things literally. Give me extra time to think and don't ask too many questions

“““

Give me time! We may need instructions simplified as it may take us longer to process.

“““

I like my special interests because it helps me when I'm feeling tired, worried or anxious

“““

Like all people, autistic people have their own strengths and weaknesses. We are all individual

“““

We often work better in smaller groups and with more teachers

“““

Remember having autism we have heightened senses. We may feel overwhelmed with the environment like strobe lighting, and loud noises

“““

Take turns when we have a conversation

SCAN ME:



Suffolk SEND Strategy

Suffolk's SEND Strategy 2024-2029 has been coproduced and this slides shows the commitments and outcomes from the strategy:

Vision

Together we will understand and support children and young people so that they feel included, supported, and fulfilled to live their best lives.

Commitment

Communication & Information

Preparing for Change

Timeliness and Quality

Right Support, Right Time

Outcomes

1. Children and young people with SEND will achieve by making progress academically, emotionally and socially.
2. Children and young people with SEND and their families will access services and their communities through the right support at the right time from the right people.
3. Children and young people with SEND and their families will tell us that early years, education, health and care services are meeting their needs.
4. Children, young people will tell us through the Children Outcomes Framework, that they are Happy, Healthy, Able to Learn, feel Safe and support and are in control of their life and have their voice heard



Suffolk SEND Strategy

Suffolk residents have told us about the difficulties they have experienced in getting the right support in education settings; challenges in being referred for assessment, in accessing an EHCP, and in accessing educational support that made a difference:

“““

At my daughter's school they have a dedicated team, but the backlog is huge

Suffolk Resident

“““

It was positive when we had SES (Specialist Education Services) involved. They really helped to implement a plan

Suffolk Resident

“““

My daughter started a new school, and the SENCO was amazing, picked up things that others had missed.

Suffolk Resident

Some residents told us that they have chosen to home educate their autistic children and young people. There is a range of information available on [Suffolk Infolink](#) around the home education offer.

SCAN ME:



Examples of good practice

Below we highlight some examples of good practice already underway in Suffolk – these examples provide a snapshot of the good work and do not cover everything happening across the county:

Suffolk County Council Inclusion Service Specialist Teachers - School-facing service



- Supporting mainstream schools across Suffolk around early intervention for pupils with SEND
- Offering advice and guidance to schools around reasonable adjustments, strategies and interventions
- Providing training, modelling and workshops for school staff to develop early intervention skills
- From January 2024 – termly visit offered to every mainstream school in Suffolk, as well as targeted advice and guidance for specific areas of need
- Offering bespoke advice and guidance to schools through our popular Inclusion Support Meetings

Engagement Hub

The [Engagement Hub](#) is a part of Suffolk County Council's Children and Young people's Services. The Engagement Hub works with children and young people to ensure they have a chance to shape the services that they receive across the county. The Engagement Hub team supports opportunities for children and young people to have a voice, shape services, learn new skills and influence the world around them. They work on projects and campaigns with young people, together with schools, professionals, youth support groups, service providers, and organisations. They ensure that they hear the voices of young people in Suffolk, and know what is important to young people to help them thrive.

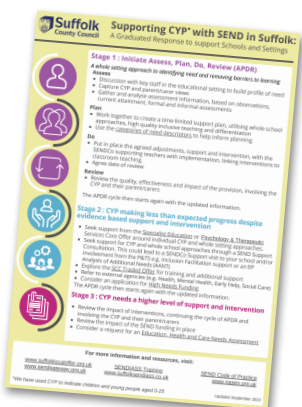
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Graduated response

Suffolk have developed a local [Graduated Response](#) to support Schools and Settings to meet the needs of Children and Young People with SEND. This sets out a three stage approach starting with planning and implementing a whole setting support to remove barriers to learning, moving to increased specialist intervention where the whole system approach has been evidenced as not making sufficient improvements and finally moving through to requests for higher levels of support and intervention for those who require it.

SCAN ME:



“““

It's all about equity not equality

6. Improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems

This section of the strategy will outline how the Partnership will work to improve experiences of autistic young people and adults in the criminal justice system. We know from national research that autistic people can be especially vulnerable in prison settings. We know that different situations in the criminal justice process can be especially difficult for autistic people due to social and communication difficulties. We have heard both nationally and locally that police and others in the system do not have sufficient awareness and understanding of autism, and do not have access to effective training on autism.



What do we know from data?



Nationally, only **6%** of autistic adults and **5%** of families feel that police officers have a good understanding of autism.



A national survey found only **42%** of police officers surveyed were satisfied with how they worked with autistic people and just **37%** of respondents said they had autism training.



Just **3%** of autistic adults and **1%** of families nationally feel that criminal justice professionals other than the police, such as courts and prison staff, have a good understanding of autism.



National research shows that disabled people, including autistic people, struggle to participate and engage in areas like sentencing because adjustments are not made to these processes, or because their needs are not identified early enough.

Suffolk residents have told us about a lack of understanding of autism in the criminal justice system, and the need for more training on language needs, and de-escalation that is appropriate for autistic people.

“““

It would help if the police knew what types of signs to look for, for possible autism. It can't depend on someone having that diagnosis.

Suffolk resident

“““

We've had several interactions with police for my child, communication has always been very difficult. Very little awareness or understanding. Questioning/interviewing was traumatic and triggered child. They assumed guilt because of way they behaved rather than being aware they were in a shutdown/meltdown.

Suffolk resident

What do we know from data?

“““

The word 'training' is very broad and it's important that training on autism is high quality...really direct training with experts by lived experience

Suffolk resident

“““

When a young person goes into custody it's unlikely that they will see the same person more than once, they kind of get passed from person to person. It can be difficult for continuity for that young person and especially hard for an autistic young person

Suffolk resident

“““

Training is needed in terms of de-escalation that is more autism aware. If an autistic child is having a meltdown and causing damage as a result, police need to understand that the child is having an autistic meltdown and not intending to cause criminal damage

Suffolk resident

“““

There is a big lack of understanding around speech, language and communication needs which can be an element of the autistic profile. More awareness is needed."

Suffolk resident

Sources: [The Autism Act, Ten Years On, 2019](#)

[Crane et al, Experiences of Autism Spectrum Disorder and Policing in England and Wales: Surveying Police and the Autism Community, J Autism Dev Disord. London, UK. , 2016](#)

SCAN ME:



SCAN ME:



Examples of good practice

The Suffolk Youth Justice Board contributes to the national Youth Justice Board's strategic approach and guiding principle of 'child first, offender second' and in line with that principle the Suffolk Youth Justice Service and the Board are committed to:

- Promoting the best interests of each child or young person in or on the edges of the Youth Justice System
- Helping them build on their strengths, fulfil their potential, and make a positive contribution to society
- Collaborating with children, young people and parents and carers
- Putting the views, needs and safety of actual and potential victims at the centre
- Focussing on equality, diversity, and inclusion

Suffolk Youth Justice Service (SYJS) is hosted by Suffolk County Council and is a discrete service co-located with other parts of Suffolk Children Services. It is multi-disciplinary and includes youth justice practitioners, restorative approaches specialists, reparation workers, police officers, a probation officer, speech, language and communication specialists, primary mental health workers and educational psychology support. It also recruits, trains and manages volunteer referral order panel members.

SYJS delivers child focussed relationship-based practice which sits within a Signs of Safety Framework and uses a locally developed trauma informed approach. This approach helps staff look beyond how a child is behaving, to understand why they are behaving that way, and so to help them make lasting change. The trauma informed approach is supported by a psychologist who delivers skills workshops for staff.

Draft Monitoring Arrangements

Governance and monitoring

The Suffolk Autism Partnership has been running since April 2023 and has representation from a wide range of Local Authority, Health and Community partners alongside a strong Lived Experience presence that has been key to co-designing the Suffolk All Age Autism Strategy.

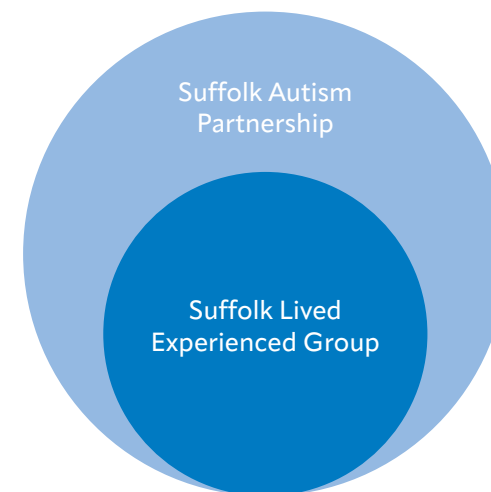
The Suffolk All Age Autism Partnership (SAAAP) will provide annual updates to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

To reflect all age arrangements the SAAAP will provide 6 monthly updates to the existing LD&A Integrated Board (Adults) and SEND Programme Committee (Childrens).

The SAAAP will meet on a quarterly basis to monitor implementation of the action plan and to agree highlight reports for the wider governance.

Task and finish groups will be developed as required to focus on implementation of the priorities set out in the strategy and delivery of the action plan.

The current make up of the Suffolk All Age Partnership is set out below. This will continue to function following publication of the strategy but membership of the overall partnership will be reviewed to ensure that partners represented are focused on those who will be responsible for the delivery of the priorities outlined in the strategy:



Roles:

Suffolk Lived Experience Group: the foundation of the Suffolk Autism Partnership. The group is open to anyone in the county with lived experience of autism. The aim of this group is to provide a forum and safe space dedicated to those with lived experience to give their views on the strategy, it's implementation and set priorities for the Partnership.

Suffolk Autism Partnership: provides a single focal point and leadership body for autism in the county and a place from which the system can be viewed from the perspective of autistic people. This group has lead on directing the co-production of the All Age Autism Strategy and will continue to monitor implementation.