

BUILDING BETTER FUTURES

Our Strategy
2025 – 2028



Registered Charity No. 1063717

Together, we can create better futures.

Over the past 50 years, Autism Anglia has grown and evolved, driven by our mission to support autistic people and their families. Our journey has been shaped by the dedication of our staff, the collaboration of our partners, and the support of our community. Together, we have achieved significant milestones, yet we know that the work is far from over.

The landscape we operate in remains uncertain, with ongoing challenges in education and adult health, social care and the wider economy. That is why this new 3-year strategy is so important. It reflects our commitment to do more, reach more people, and ensure that our support helps people build better futures.

Listening lies at the heart of our approach. Through community surveys, and listening events, we have heard directly from autistic people about the challenges they face and the support they need. By learning from lived experience, we can create services that are relevant, accessible, effective and make a meaningful difference in people's lives.

This strategy is our roadmap for the next three years: a plan to grow, improve, and make long lasting impact. Together, we will continue the journey to ensure that every autistic person has access to opportunities to thrive and reach their full potential.



Andrew Beevers, Chair of Trustees
James McQuiggan, Chief Executive Officer



Our Challenge

Demand for autism services is growing fast, leaving many without the support they need.

Over the past 25 years, autism diagnoses have steadily risen as awareness improves, yet the official figure of **1 in 100** likely underestimates reality. When including the 236,000 on waiting lists or without a formal diagnosis, the true number could be nearly double.

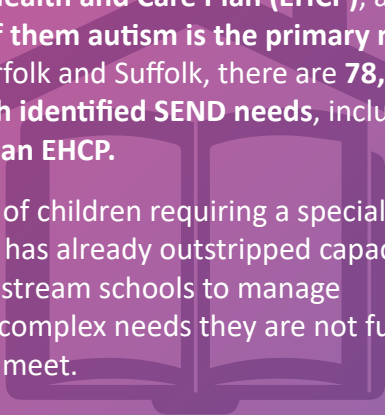
In Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, and Suffolk alone, around **75,000 autistic people** — each with unique needs, challenges, and potential, **enough to fill Norwich City FC's stadium seven times over.**



Education Pressures

Demand for autism-related SEND support is rising fast. Currently, **1 in 20 children has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)**, and for a **third of them autism is the primary need**. In Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk, there are **78,795 children with identified SEND needs**, including **24,333 with an EHCP**.

The number of children requiring a special school place has already outstripped capacity, leaving mainstream schools to manage increasingly complex needs they are not fully equipped to meet.



Health Inequalities

Autistic people face stark health inequalities, with poorer care and shorter life expectancy than others. Many are unable to see a GP, with **one in three adults reporting barriers such as lack of understanding, communication difficulties, and overwhelming sensory environments**. Autistic people are also disproportionately represented in mental health services, making up as many as **1 in 10 psychiatric inpatients**.

Co-occurring Conditions

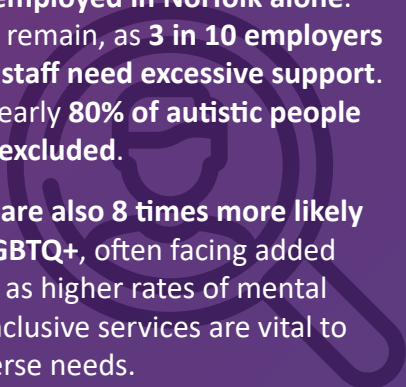
Autism often overlaps with other conditions, especially ADHD. Around **28% of autistic children also meet the criteria for ADHD**, creating complex challenges for families and schools and highlighting the urgent need for joined-up, holistic support.



Employment and Inclusion

Only **3 in 10 autistic people are employed**, with **10,000 unemployed in Norfolk alone**. Misconceptions remain, as **3 in 10 employers believe autistic staff need excessive support**. Beyond work, nearly **80% of autistic people feel lonely and excluded**.

Autistic people are also 8 times more likely to identify as LGBTQ+, often facing added challenges such as higher rates of mental health issues. Inclusive services are vital to meet these diverse needs.



Sources:

- UK Government, 2025 Education, Health and Care plans
- UK Government 2024/2025 Special Educational Needs in England
- BMJ, Barriers to Healthcare for autistic adults
- NHS England Autism Waiting Times July 2025X
- UK Government, The Buckland Review of Autism Employment 2024
- The Lancet Regional Health, Autism in England 2023
- The Lancet Psychiatry, Prevalence of co-occurring mental health diagnoses in the autism population
- Royal College of Psychiatry, Autism and Mental Health 2024
- Cambridge University Autism Research Centre, 2021



Listening to our community

You told us:

Our 2025 Building Better Futures and Listening Events showed that:



7 in 10 people report experiencing **bullying or discrimination** because they are autistic.

40% of people reported **not being supported to access work**

Parents reported the biggest challenges they predicted their family member will face over the next 3 years were **managing mental health, financial pressures** and a **lack of long-term support**.

The most common challenges people face daily were: **social interactions and relationships, sensory sensitivities, mental health**

The most common co-occurring conditions alongside autism were **ADHD, anxiety and depression**.

2 in 5 people said **healthcare and therapy services are not accessible** at all in their areas.



The support services that will be most important over the next 3 years were: Easy access to therapy services e.g, speech and language, occupational therapy and social and recreational activities .

"People need to understand everyone is different – I'm not comfortable being lumped in with the 'autistic' stereotype."

"Everyone should know where to turn for support or advice to help live a fulfilling life, to appreciate their own value."

"There are so many more people being diagnosed and they will need support, but who will give it? I worry that people give up and go under radar and spiral into crisis."

"We need more debate and discussion re: how autistic people are impacted by a society that hasn't yet embraced an understanding of the challenges we face."

A smiling woman with long brown hair, bangs, and glasses is holding a large, fluffy grey cat. She is wearing a black jacket with pink stripes on the sleeves. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

Our Vision

To create an accepting society where autistic people and their families feel supported, celebrated, and empowered with the opportunities they need to thrive.

Our Mission

To support and celebrate autistic people and their families through providing high quality services, accessible community projects, and tailored opportunities, created to empower.



Our Beliefs

Every autistic person is unique, so we tailor our support to meet each person's strengths, needs, and aspirations.

Empowerment is at the heart of what we do. We provide the tools, knowledge, and confidence people need to make their own choices and shape their own futures.

Everyone deserves the chance to do what they love. We help autistic people access meaningful opportunities that bring joy, purpose, and fulfilment.

Wellbeing matters. Our support is designed to help people feel safe, stay healthy, and live happily — on their own terms.

Together, we can build a more inclusive East Anglia. We believe everyone has a role to play in creating a region where autistic people are understood, accepted, and celebrated.

Our Values

Commitment to empower

Support people to unlock their potential.

Courage to innovate

Be bold and embrace new ideas.

Strength to reflect

Use self-awareness to grow whilst working together to succeed.

Our Goal: Doubling support by 2028

We currently support 1,500 people – by 2028, we're committed to reaching 3,000.

To meet our goal, we have developed **4 strategic pillars** that will be critical to our success.

Grow our services to meet the current and future needs of autistic people, their families and carers.

1

Share our expertise with others to raise awareness and change attitudes to autism.

2

Create a happy, safe and rewarding place to work and volunteer.

3

Maintain financial and organisational sustainability .

4

Grow our services to meet the current and future needs of autistic people, their families and carers

1

*"My local library does have an autism drop-in session, but it's during the working day and so I can't attend. It would be nice if there were some **activities and support groups in the evenings or at weekends as well.**"*

*"**We need to help families prepare for future care.** What will happen to my son when I'm unable to care for him anymore?"*

*"A lot of the activities and local support are tailored to higher support needs autistic folks. While this is absolutely right, it would be nice to see more **casual groups for people with lower support needs to just chat about their conditions.**"*

*"**Education is a huge concern.** Mainstream schools do not have the funding to adequately support autistic children, and special schools are too difficult for autistic children to get into."*

*"**Support is needed for parents navigating issues with schools,** we personally went through hell for two years battling with the local high school."*

No one should feel alone. That's why we will work to expand our services – to bring more people together, to ensure they feel seen, supported and part of a caring community.

Our intended actions



- Expand supported living and outreach services to reach new geographic areas
- Grow support in the community through support and social groups
- Increase education provision so more young people can access specialist autism education
- Expand our assessment and diagnosis service to diagnose more people
- Broaden our online support including our Resource Hub and social media platforms
- Engage with existing and new partners and funders to increase our reach
- Evolve our monitoring and reporting frameworks to more effectively demonstrate our impact

How we'll measure success



- Increase in the number of people supported by our adult services
- Growth of people accessing our online support
- Rise of engagement with our community services
- More learners gaining skills and confidence via our education provision
- Broader reach through new partners/funders
- Upwards trends in positive feedback and survey results

Commitment to empower

Support people to unlock their potential.



Share our expertise with others to raise awareness and change attitudes to autism

2

"We need more understanding and acceptance. Our daughter constantly feels anxious, embarrassed and angry at having to constantly explain why her son makes the noises he does. The lack of tolerance in people is astonishing."

"It would be helpful if retail shops could be made more aware of the sensory issues faced by those of us on the spectrum. I've often had to walk out of shops to get away from loud music being played or overly bright lights."

"Education for medical professionals, workplaces and benefits services on autism and how it impacts a person day to day so they can offer more support and empathy for us. I spend most of my day hiding my autism and it's becomes exhausting."

"Allowing Autistic people additional time to process information and providing an explanation of what is happening would be really helpful. Many places state that they are 'Autism Aware' but then they rush through things, don't explain and treat you like your stupid or being deliberately difficult. Kindness and respect go a long way, even if the other person doesn't fully understand what your needs are."

We will share our expertise to raise awareness and change attitudes towards autism. Alongside supporting autistic people and their families, we will seek to influence wider understanding to help build a more inclusive and accepting society.

Our intended actions



- Expand our external training programme through developing new packages for schools, workplaces and groups.
- Develop our schools consultancy service 'Schools Connect' to enable mainstream schools to access tailored support for their autistic learners.
- Participate in regional special interest and networking groups contributing expertise to foster meaningful connections and collaborations.
- Develop our online support and resources to reach more people by creating inspiring and accessible content.
- Commission research to explore neurodivergent friendly workplaces by gathering data, and analysing findings to inform practical strategies for workplace inclusion.

How we'll measure success



- Number of schools participating in Schools Connect
- Number of training sessions delivered
- Visits to our online Resource Hub
- Attendees at online events
- Social media engagements

Courage to innovate

Be bold and embrace new ideas.



Create a happy, safe and rewarding place to work and volunteer

3



"The heart of our strategic plan is our team. When we nurture and equip them with the right skills, they drive our mission forward with passion and purpose."

Andrew Beevers, Chair of Trustees.

We will create a safe, happy, and rewarding place to work and volunteer by attracting and retaining skilled staff through fair pay, recognition, and investment in development. By supporting and empowering our teams to grow and innovate, we strengthen our organisation and ensure lasting impact.

Our intended actions



- **Strengthen our team leaders and managers** through our leadership training programme.
- **Ongoing consultation with our staff and volunteers** to listen to their views, including our annual Staff Survey.
- **Improve the physical working environment** across all our sites.
- **Develop innovative models of volunteering** to offer flexible, meaningful opportunities for autistic people.
- **Develop our understanding and approach to Equity, Diversity, Equality and Inclusion** to remove barriers to participation, and build a stronger, more inclusive community.
- **Empower our staff** to innovate and implement new approaches.

How we'll measure success



- **Staff survey results**
- **Internal communications engagement**
- **Number of managers completed leadership training**



Strength to reflect

Use self-awareness to grow whilst working together to succeed.

Maintain financial and organisational sustainability

4



“Organisational stability empowers us to plan boldly, support our workforce, and ensure the sustainability of the services and outcomes the people we support rely on.”

James McQuiggan, Chief Executive

We will maintain financial and organisational stability by embedding environmental sustainability in our operations and reducing our carbon footprint. Through investment in high-quality, future-ready housing, we will meet evolving needs, deliver exceptional care, and create environments where autistic people can thrive.

Our intended actions

- **Sustainable service models that are financially viable, adaptable,** and continuously improved based on user feedback and impact.
- **Review our housing provision** to ensure they are modern, fit for purpose, and effectively meet the needs of those we support.
- **Reduce our carbon footprint** by adopting energy-efficient practices, reducing waste, and prioritising sustainable choices across all operations.
- **Increase voluntary income** to meet needs by diversifying activities, strengthening donor relationships, and exploring new opportunities.
- **Identify and implement operational efficiencies** by regularly reviewing processes, adopting best practices, and encouraging a culture of continuous improvement.



How we'll measure success



- **Increased cost effectiveness and efficiency of services**
- **Increased brand awareness, engagement and conversion**
- **Growth of voluntary income**
- **Reduction in carbon footprint**



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Together with our partners
and supporters we will work
tirelessly to ensure autistic
people are understood, able
to access opportunities and
fulfil their full potential.

846 The Crescent, Colchester Business Park, Essex CO4 9YQ
01206 577 678 • info@autism-anglia.org.uk

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Autism Specialist
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