

Shared Memories

From 1968 to 2018, Scottish Autism has evolved and grown into the largest provider of autism-specific services in Scotland and a leading authority and advocate for good autism practice.

Share your memories of Scottish Autism by emailing marketing@scottishautism.org.

Chris and Jane Butler-Cole's Story

After hearing about the Scottish Society for Autistic Children through 'a friend of a friend', Chris and Jane Butler-Cole got involved in 1971. Shortly after, in 1973, Jane joined the Management Committee, and Christopher joined the Maintenance Committee for Balmyre.

Their second child, Tommy was diagnosed with autism at the age of five by Dr Sula Wolff, although before diagnosis he was being monitored by various pediatricians.



'Harvest Supper' at Struan House in Alloa,
Saturday 11th October 1976



Tommy (far left) at Struan House School
Friday, 6th May 1977

At this time, not a lot of people knew what autism was and so Chris and Jane had to explain to their friends and even some GP's. As he approached school age, Tommy was described as being 'uneducable', which prompted the Butler-Cole's to be more persistent.

Tommy became one of the first students to attend Struan House School, along with another boy named Tommy and two girls who were both named Elizabeth!



Original name and logo
1968 - 1998



Name and logo
1998 - 2011



Name and logo
2011- present

Scottish Autism has changed a lot since the Butler-Cole's joined. The name has changed from the Scottish Society for Autistic Children to the Scottish Society for Autism before becoming Scottish Autism. We have also grown significantly, from being a very small membership organisation to a national charity supporting around five hundred autistic individuals in Scotland

In terms of their hopes for the future of the charity and autism, Jane said "Keep up the good work! The training of staff is of huge importance for all age groups of supported individuals.. While public acceptance of autistic people is improving, I think it still needs more work. We have to admit to a certain amount of luck, along with a lot of hard work, that led to Tommy being educated at Struan House and Balmyre, and I hope that similar luck does not have to play a part any longer for today's autistic children."

A Parent's Story

We received a submission from the parent of one of our supported individuals.

"Scottish Autism began providing care for my son roughly 15 years ago, although there may have been some involvement before then. He receives residential support, as well as attending day services at Gartnny Nurseries and Art Opportunities. Throughout the year the provision of care he has received has remained constant, with the main differences being changes in the staff who support him.



Gartnny Nurseries

My son has very definitely developed with the support of Scottish Autism. He has benefited greatly from the residential and occupational services. His quality of life is now quite impressive and he engages in a good range of experiences and activities, with support.

"I hope that Scottish Autism will continue to be able to provide quality care and support for my son and also expand to be able to support more individuals. I am aware that we have been most fortunate in the services he receives from Scottish Autism and that there are many others who deserve the same level of involvement. Scottish Autism should receive more funding and recognition for its work."

Mrs Milligan's Story

As one of our founding parents, Mrs Milligan has been involved with Scottish Autism for 50 years, with her daughter Elizabeth. During this time, Elizabeth has been supported in our first service, Struan House School (now New Struan School) as well as receiving support in our residential and adult services as she got older.

Mrs Milligan has this to say on her journey with Scottish Autism, “Prior to receiving support, life felt mixed up. I was left on my own a lot however I did receive some support through my church.

“My involvement began after attending the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, where I met Dr Sula Wolff and Elizabeth received her diagnosis. I then met Marjory Archer, who was the founder of the National Autistic Society and we set up a group. After becoming members of the National Society for Autistic Children I, along with a group of parents, linked up with Marjory in Scotland and we became known as the Scottish Society for Autistic Children.

“Since receiving support from Scottish Autism, Elizabeth is a lot happier. She is not institutionalized and she is able to lead a normal, happy life. She has gained skills to live relatively independent and has formed relationships with staff.

“In the future I hope that Scottish Autism will continue to enable my daughter to stay where she feels is her home. I also hope that autism services continue to improve for autistic people who have yet to receive a diagnosis and that more people become aware of and understand autism.”

Mrs Fraser's Story

Mrs Fraser and daughter Elizabeth have been involved with Scottish Autism since 1973 after hearing about us through one of Elizabeth’s schoolteachers. At age 12, she began receiving support at Harvey Street in Alloa and has since also benefitted from our supported living service, where our staff have enable her to visit workshops and classes, as well as going swimming.

Mrs Fraser told us “Prior to receiving support from Scottish Autism, life was a bit limited in many ways. Now Elizabeth is more settled and a lot calmer. She is willing to try things and enjoys going on different outings.

“My hope for the future is that Elizabeth will continue to receive support as she gets older.”

Robin's Story



Robin enjoys going on holiday

Robin has been supported by Scottish Autism since 1995, and was one of our first supported individuals in Fife. In this time, Robin has received residential and housing support, as well as attending our Blue Central Day Service. He enjoys activities such as swimming, bowling, camping, going to the cinema, and going on a number of holidays.

His parents shared, "Prior to receiving support from Scottish Autism, life was pretty rough, not very nice. We didn't know what was going on as there was no diagnosis of autism until Robin was 19 years old and by this time he had gone through mainstream school.

"We heard about Scottish Autism after Dr Bell from Lynbank Hospital advised us to get noisy and political about it, and a group of parents formed Fife Action on Autism.

"Since Robin began receiving support from Scottish Autism, he seems to be brighter in his self, more settled than he was before, and listens more to what's being said. Robin used to exhibit challenging behaviours when he didn't understand what was going on. However, this has now improved.

"We hope in the future that Scottish Autism remain as Robin's care provider and a core team is kept in place for consistency. We also hope that Robin can stay in the same environment. We are, as parents, worried about any future government cuts and how it would impact on the service to Robin."

Robin also told us, "I feel that the staff at Scottish Autism care more than other places. I mostly enjoy playing snooker, pool and going swimming. My favourite memories from my time at Scottish Autism have been going abroad to different places, such as Florida, Benidorm and Greece. My hopes for the future are that I can go on a fly cruise for my 50th birthday."



Robin on holiday

His Support Worker also shared, "Although there have been times over the years that Robin has shown extreme anxieties, he seems to be in a more settled place, especially with the move from residential service to housing support. This is more apparent whenever Robin has had a settled core team."

Working at Scottish Autism - My Favourite Memory

by AnnMarie O'Donnell, Senior Autism Practitioner



The Orkney team in 2013

"One of my greatest memories and achievements is working alongside Karen Gracie (Regional Manager) in setting up the new service in Orkney. It was a lot of very hard work and there was a lot of stress, but when I left it was good to know it would go on and as far as I am aware, it is thriving. I met a lot of nice people and supported individuals - one whom will email me now and again and I will meet up with them when they are in Edinburgh for coffee."

Innovation in Autism Practice

Crucially it's not just about how our organisation has grown and developed, but about how our practice and service delivery has evolved. Our Deputy CEO, Charlene Tait told us, " It has been my privilege to work for or be associated with Scottish Autism for 28 years. As an organisation we have pioneered a range of service provision and have evolved our model of practice as our knowledge and understanding of autism has grown. Enabling the authentic voice and participation of those we support is a fundamental principle that underpins our approach. We are lucky to have so many long term dedicated members of staff who are enabling the diverse group of people we support through what I hope will be a happy, healthy and fulfilling life journey"

We would like to thank all of our parents, support workers and employees for sharing their memories with us.

We are also grateful to all of our supported individuals, their families, our staff and supporters who have been involved with Scottish Autism over the past 50 years.