

# DISABILITY, NEURODIVERGENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Autumn 2025  
Issue 9



Incorporating news and updates from Gloucestershire's Partnership Boards & Partners



**Welcome to the Autumn 2025 edition of Disability, Neurodivergence, and Mental Health in Gloucestershire.**

This is our biggest newsletter yet, reflecting just some of the energy, creativity and hard work happening across the county. Inside you'll find updates from all the Partnership Boards and partners

Items cover such as: creative projects like CASA's blacksmithing course; Active Impact's Neurodiversity Network event; the NDHub Cultural SEN Fair and the ongoing ND Identity Thrive Together workshops; the results of work examining mental health stigma; information about the countywide mental health forums; the agreed learning disability priorities and other items; physical disability, sensory impairment and Neurology Subgroup, updates including accessible transport and digital inclusion.

A huge thank you to everyone who has contributed articles, ideas, photos and feedback for this edition – your time and energy make this newsletter possible. A special thank you to Noor for the time she has again given to co-editing, Emma and Pippa, Nicole and Mar, Paul Tyrell & all the Inclusion Gloucestershire teams, Jan Marriott for all her wider immense work and support throughout the year. Thanks also to Zaphira and team for sharing about their great NDHub work.

I hope you find something here that informs, encourages and helps you feel more connected to what's happening across Gloucestershire.

Finally, as we approach Christmas and the New Year, we know this is not an easy or celebratory time for everyone. Whether you'll be celebrating, working, caring for others or simply getting through, we're wishing you moments of peace, support and kindness in the weeks ahead.

**Andrew Cotterill**

## IN THIS ISSUE

### News for all

- [Update for the Partnership Boards from ASC](#)
- [Introducing the People Experience Programme](#)
- [Are you ready for Winter Holiday Activity & Food \(HAF\)](#)
- [Council's ambitious new strategy](#)
- [Learning from Lives and Deaths \(LeDeR\) Newsletter](#)
- [Disability archive launched](#)
- [Healthwatch - get involved](#)

### Autism (& Neurodivergence) News

- [Strategy update](#)
- ["Autism strategy must deliver change"](#)
- [NHS Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Study](#)
- [News from CASA](#)
- [Neurodiversity Network Event](#)
- [News from ND Hub](#)
- [What about...? "Out of sight, out of mind"](#)
- [Selected Resources](#)
- [Dates for your diary](#)



### Learning Disability News

- [Partnership Board Update](#)



### Mental Health & Wellbeing News

- [Partnership Board Update](#)



### Physical Disability & Sensory Impairment News

- [Partnership Board Update](#)
- [Neurology Subgroup](#)



### (Unpaid) Carers News

- [Carer's Update](#)
- [Call for carers to share their views / Annual Parent Carer Survey](#)
- [Young Carers Update](#)



We are focused on improving our Adult Social Care (ASC) commitment to Co-Production.

**Here's what we're doing:**

- Using the Collaborative Board Co-Production Charter in ASC projects
- Choosing passionate people called Champions to support co-production.
- Thinking about starting a group where people can share ideas and give advice.

**What's Happened So Far:** We held three meetings with people who use ASC and other partners. People said some things need fixing—like how the Local Authority joins in with Boards, how feedback is shared, and how some Boards have more paid workers than people who use services. We shared the Charter during Co-Production Week, and people liked it. Because of changes in how GCC and the NHS work, we've created a new Co-Production Lead role to help with this, who will connect everyone.

**What's Next:** We're checking how money is used to support the Boards and seeing what help we can get from the NHS. Commissioners (people who plan services) will work in a new way—less hands-on and more focused on working together with people who use services. We also want to make sure people's voices are heard and that we act on what they say. We'll set up clear ways to share updates and show how feedback is used. We're working to make Board roles clearer, so everyone knows what to expect. We want more people with lived experience to join, so the Boards better reflect the people they serve. We're also thinking about starting a new Board for older people. We're updating job descriptions and how we recruit for Board Chairs. The ASC Practice Development Team, which includes a Co-Production Champion and soon the new Co-Production Lead, is also looking at the current assessment model – Make the Difference - within ASC.

**Looking Ahead:** We want Boards to be places where people talk openly and make decisions together. By inviting more people with lived experience, we'll get new ideas and make the Boards stronger. We'll offer training so everyone feels confident to join in. We'll also make sure payments and expectations are fair for everyone. Our big goal is to build a culture where feedback helps us keep improving, and working together becomes the normal way of doing things. We're also planning to create a new Framework to make sure ASC services stay strong and helpful. If you have any questions, please contact us at: [asc.co-production@gloucestershire.gov.uk](mailto:asc.co-production@gloucestershire.gov.uk).



***A message from the Adult Transformation Team at Gloucestershire County Council - Your Voice Matters!***

We're excited to announce the launch of a new two-year People Experience Programme. This is designed to transform how we listen to, understand, map, and measure people's experiences across Adult Social Care. Our goal is simple: to ensure that we are making the difference that matters in all areas and that feedback drives meaningful, continuous improvement in the services we provide.

We've started by reviewing the current feedback loops—the ways people share their experiences with us today, what information this gives us, and where there are gaps in opportunities for people to provide feedback.

Next, we will ask people who use our services, carers, families, and providers how they would like to give feedback. We'll explore preferred methods and how we can make this easy and accessible.

People's experiences will shape the future of Adult Social Care. Increasing opportunities to provide feedback will enable us to identify what's working well and highlight areas for improvement. We can use this feedback to inform decisions that make services better for everyone.

If you would like to contact us to ask any questions or if you would like to know how you can get more involved, then please contact the Adult Transformation Team in Adult Social Care by the following e-mail [Asp1@gloucestershire.gov.uk](mailto:Asp1@gloucestershire.gov.uk).

The Holiday Activities and Food (**HAF**) programme is funded by the Department for Education. HAF Events will be available to book from 12pm 1st December 2025 - and offered across the **6 localities** (Cheltenham, Cotswolds, Forest of Dean, Gloucester, Stroud & Tewkesbury). HAF offers fun activities and nutritious meals for eligible children (from Reception to Year 11).

Also, a reminder that the food voucher application opens on the 25<sup>th</sup> November and closes on the 9<sup>th</sup> December. [Holiday free school meal vouchers | Gloucestershire County Council](#). In addition, the Holiday Activity Programme (HAP) will also be running this Winter after securing grant funding. This programme of free holiday activities is offered to all children between the ages of four and sixteen across the district, regardless of free school meal eligibility and there are cinema tickets, pantomime tickets, ice skating tickets, swim passes, museum passes available and maybe some more options so please check in and see what there is. SEND sessions are also available.

**Are you ready for Winter HAF?**

**Winter HAF returns this winter holidays with bookings open on 1 December**

Make sure you're ready to book!  
Scan the QR code and keep your details up to date.  
Visit <https://familyhubs.gloucestershire.gov.uk/haf>

**Gloucestershire HAF** holiday activities & food

Department for Education

**HAF** holiday activities & food

**Gloucestershire** COUNTY COUNCIL

SCAN ME



We want Gloucestershire to be a county where everyone can live a healthy life, get a good education and job, and feel proud of their area. We aim to make sure everyone is treated fairly, can access opportunities and services easily, and feels welcome in a kind and caring community.

This plan sets out the vision to create a county where everyone can thrive, belong, and be proud of where they live. A summary of the four Strategy themes include:

- Children & young people thrive: Ensuring every child has the best start in life, with excellent education and support for those with additional needs.
- Strong, healthy communities that care: Reducing inequalities, supporting vulnerable people, and building resilient, caring communities.
- A place to be proud of: Improving roads, investing in infrastructure, protecting the environment, and supporting the local economy to make Gloucestershire safer, greener, and more attractive.
- An open, fair and sustainable council: Leading with integrity, transparency, and innovation to deliver excellent services and empower communities.

For more on the strategy, visit here: <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/Corporate-Strategy-2025-2029/>



In this edition of the LeDeR newsletter (Learning from Lives and Deaths of people with a Learning Disability and autistic people), we hear about Gemma, a woman with a moderate learning disability and several long-term health conditions, including Type 2 diabetes, COPD and sleep apnoea. Gemma enjoyed family life, going out with support and being part of her community, but she also had health risks – such as falls and breathing difficulties – that meant she needed regular support to stay well. The story describes how her GP, Learning Disability Liaison Nurses, Rapid Response team and hospital staff all became involved when her health deteriorated and she developed serious breathing problems and pneumonia.

From Gemma's story, the LeDeR team highlight some clear learning. People are encouraged to use Hospital Passports whenever they go into hospital, so staff can quickly understand their needs and how to support them well.

There is also a reminder about knowing the signs of COPD and pneumonia, and when to seek urgent help if someone is struggling to breathe.

The newsletter also showcases Gloucestershire Community Dental Service and a new Easy Read leaflet explaining who the service is for, what specialist equipment they have, and how to get an appointment – making it easier for people with learning disabilities and autistic people to look after their teeth.

You can find the full LeDeR Newsletter [here](#).



**Disability Arts Online (DAO)** launched **Crippling Culture: A Journey into Disability Arts Heritage**, an archival initiative preserving the history of disability arts and activism.

In Crippling Culture, DAO are creating a digital archive where the public can discover testimonies and memories from key figures and moments within the Disability Arts and activism movements from the 1970s to the present.

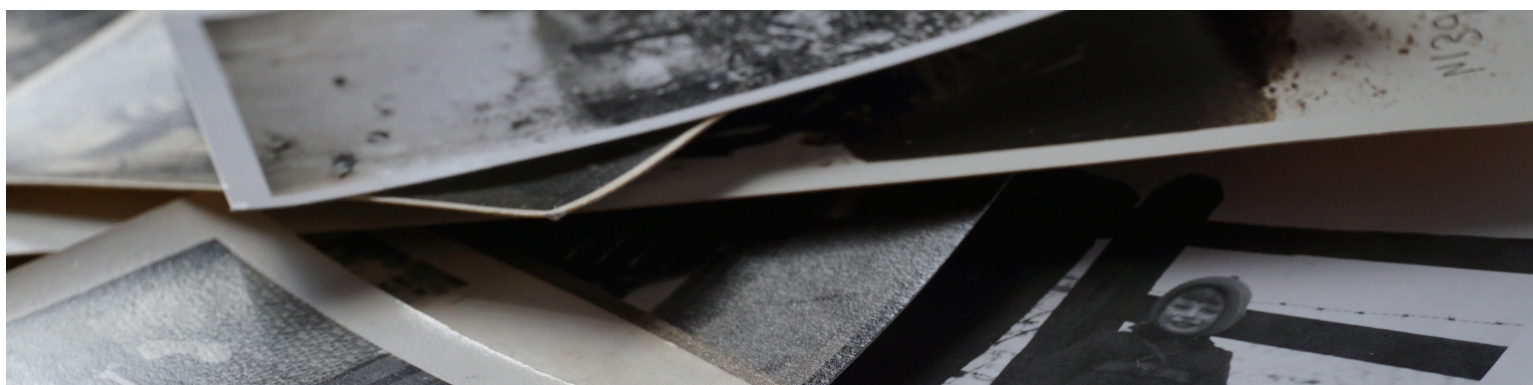
Thanks to a grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Crippling Culture will save the stories of the Disability Arts movement from being lost. They will be shared through a digital archive, interactive timeline and podcast series. This incredible collection will reveal the achievements of the disabled artists and activists who put disability rights on the map.

Over the next three years, DAO will collect memories from those who were, and many who continue to still be, involved in the Disability Arts movement. The platform will spotlight untold stories and little-known chapters in disability history.

As part of this, the organisation will make nationwide call-outs for activists to share their written, spoken and video testimonies. These will then be used to create the accessible archive, interactive timeline and the podcast series, with BSL video version also available.

Disability Arts Online is a disabled-led charitable arts organisation that, since 2004, has documented the development of disability arts. DAO will work in partnership with the **National Disability Arts Collection and Archive (NDACA)**, so as to build on the first archive's historical significance and impact.

**It would be great to see some of the wonderful examples Gloucestershire can showcase.**



## **Attitudes and accessibility of the NHS app**

Our aim is to understand attitudes and accessibility of the NHS app. The NHS App is designed to give people a simple and secure way to access a range of NHS services on their smartphone or tablet or device. The same service is also available in a web browser on the NHS website. Your responses will help identify the main issues and develop recommendations that will be presented to health and social care services. The aim is to make recommendations about the way information is provided and accessed by ALL. We will publish this information in a report that will be available on the website.



## **Exploring the experiences of women, girls and gender diverse people who are autistic or ADHD in Gloucestershire - closing Monday 8 December**

Many autistic and ADHD young people face long waits for assessments, struggle to get the help they need in school or from health services, or feel misunderstood because their experiences don't fit typical expectations. We've also heard that some families have had to seek private assessments, only to face new challenges in accessing support afterwards. Through this project, Healthwatch want to listen directly to those affected — to understand what's working, what isn't, and how things could be better. Your experiences will help shape a public report with recommendations for improving local services to help push for support that is more inclusive, accessible, and responsive to everyone's needs. Get involved if you:

- Are Aged 11–25
- Identify as a girl, woman, or gender diverse person
- Are Autistic or ADHD — diagnosed or self-identified (you don't need a formal diagnosis)
- Are living or accessing support in Gloucestershire

Sharing your experiences **online** or chat over the phone, email or social media

Please note, anything you share is kept anonymous. To find out more, call 0800 652 5193 or email **[info@healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk)**. If you don't meet the criteria above, they still really love to hear about your experiences! Fill out the form on the **website** or pop a message on **Instagram** or **Facebook**.



## **Other useful information from Healthwatch**

**[Top tips for accessing your GP practice](#)** | **[Understanding access to services and quality of life for older adults](#)** | **[Understanding people's experiences of hidden homelessness](#)**



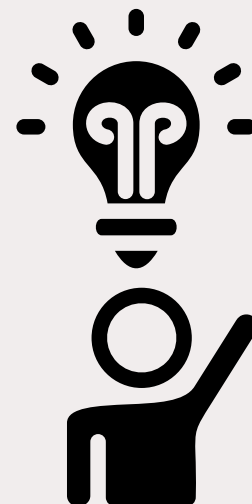


Gloucestershire's Autism Partnership Board brings together people with lived and professional experience of autism and neurodivergence to oversee the implementation of the local Autism strategy. Our local priorities reflect the six overarching themes of the National Autism Strategy. Some of this quarter's highlights are shown below:

### Theme 1 Highlights

#### *Improve understanding and acceptance*

- Community Autism Support & Advice (CASA) Service had a "Listen With" Conversation at Cheltenham Festivals, to promote neuroinclusive practice at future events.
- GCC Neuroinclusive Working group held a safe space with Jo Walker (Chief Executive) & also an all staff briefing - raising awareness on neurodivergence.
- The Neurodiversity Network held a successful event at Churchdown Community Centre.



### Theme 2 Highlights

#### *Improve access to education & support positive transitions into adulthood*

- The ND Hub held a successful Cultural SEN Fair at the Friendship Cafe to reach global majority young people and families.
- Project to understand the experiences of autistic children and young people is developing to understand what we do well and where we have gaps in Gloucestershire, in partnership with Inclusion Gloucestershire and Gloucestershire Health & Care.

### Theme 3 Highlights

#### *Support more people into employment*

- The Employment and Skills Hub had 132 referrals where Autism was declared as their main disability since April.
- Supported 16 individuals into paid employment and 15 into work experience or voluntary placements
- Working with the DWP to make inclusive job fayres that are neuroinclusive.



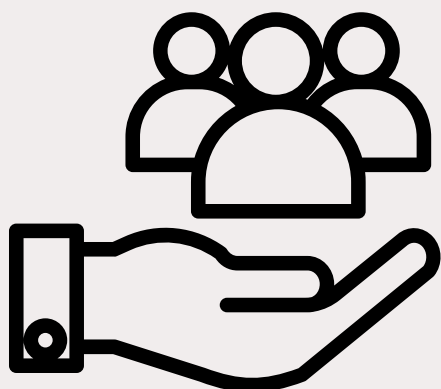


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### Theme 4 Highlights

#### *Tackle health & care inequalities*

- The Waiting Well initiative continues to progress via a working project group for adults, to understand diagnosis needs for those who are waiting for an Autism and ADHD diagnosis.
- Continue to work closely the Diagnostic Team (both adults and children) and Autism Liaison Officer to embed learning within the system.



### Theme 5 Highlights

#### *Build the right support in the community & support people in inpatient care*

- The Autism Partnership Board presented at the ASC Quality Assurance Board in October, highlighting successes and gaps.
- The Neurodiversity network held a successful sold out event in October, bringing together key partners across the neurodiversity providers.

### Theme 6 Highlights

#### *Improve support within criminal & youth justice systems*

- Hate Crime steering group met to discuss developing priorities for new local Hate Crime Strategy, with representatives from the Partnership Board highlighting neurodivergent needs.





The Autism Act Reform Committee has now delivered its recommendations to Government. The Committee’s main recommendation is that the Government must now urgently develop and deliver the new autism strategy, so it is ready to launch when the current one expires in July 2026. Key recommendations that matter are:

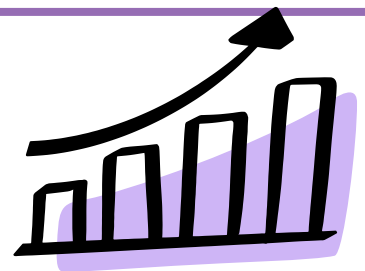
1. The new autism strategy must be co produced with autistic people and led by a named minister.
2. Lifespan support, with a focus on key life transitions.
3. Mandatory autism and neuroinclusion training for all public facing staff.
4. Shorter waits and better support before and after autism assessments.
5. Investment in early, preventative support, not just crisis response.
6. More supported internships and employment programmes for autistic people.
7. Strong community services to end inappropriate detention in mental health hospitals.
8. More inclusive education, with trained staff and specialist schools as centres of excellence.
9. A national public understanding campaign on autism and neuroinclusion.
10. Better identification and support in the criminal justice system for autistic people as victims, witnesses or offenders.

To read the full press release, click [here](#). Other information is found below.

- [Report: Time to deliver: The Autism Act 2009 and the new autism strategy \(html\)](#)
- [Report: Time to deliver: The Autism Act 2009 and the new autism strategy \(pdf\)](#)
- [Summary and list of conclusions and recommendations](#)
- [Shorthand story: Time to deliver: The Autism Act 2009 and new autism strategy](#)

## NHS Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Study

The NHS has published the [Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Study](#), which shows that the prevalence of autistic adults in the UK remains at around one in 100 people.



The results also showed that most of the autistic adults identified were male, and there was an association between living in more deprived neighbourhoods and being autistic. It also found that those identified in the survey were no more likely to use mental health services or receive mental health treatment than non-autistic adults. The fact that autistic adults are not more likely to receive mental-health services suggests under-recognition and under-support. Other findings include a rise in common mental health problems in general, increase in screening-positive for ADHD and rise in medication and psychological therapy use.





**CASA's Blacksmithing Course** for Autistic Young People ended in October with an exhibition of work at Stroud's Museum In The Park. Thanks to a grant from the Ironmongers' Company, our Community Autism Support and Advice (CASA) team have run a free, hands-on blacksmithing course for young autistic adults, led by tutor Arian Leljak at his teaching forge in Cranham.

The course consisted of eight two-hour sessions, where the students learned practical blacksmithing as well as boosting their artistic skills, self-esteem, and social confidence. The course was linked to the Earth Fire Iron Exhibition at Stroud's Museum In The Park, which commemorated the life and work of Stroud's nationally-famous artist-blacksmith Alan Evans who died in 2023. At the end of the course, a selection of the students' work was added to the Earth Fire Iron exhibition, alongside works by Alan Evans and the many other contemporary artist-blacksmiths whose work and careers had been influenced by him. Part of the aim of Earth Fire Iron was to extend Alan's legacy by creating more opportunities for young people to start learning the craft and begin what could possibly be a life-changing journey.

Nine students took part, and the only thing they didn't like about it was that it couldn't go on forever! Several of them are planning to carry on learning the craft.



### Here are some of the students' comments:

- "What did I enjoy most about being at the forge? Doing something physical and practical. And looking back at what I did – seeing my achievements!"
- "I enjoyed working around people – body doubling and learning new skills under guidance, and having freedom to play around with ideas and techniques"
- "I enjoyed making and being hands-on. Geeking out."
- "I loved the whole thing – the whole experience."
- "I loved the freedom to be creative – I feel calm here."
- "It's easier than it looks. I normally struggle with fine detail. I've had a lot of fun being creative and physical at the same time."
- "Arian the tutor is super-supportive, he helps when needed but gently. This has been a dream of mine for 10 years. If you've ever thought of doing it, give it a go."







### Cheltenham Festivals

Pippa and Emma have been working with the Cheltenham Festivals recently to help make their events more neurodiversity-inclusive. "We were excited to be invited to join a panel with Cheltenham Festivals to discuss how they can make their Jazz, Science, and Literature festivals more neuro-inclusive," said Pippa. "We visited their offices and the Literature Festival for round table talks, followed by being guests at a panel discussion. We discussed various things for them to think about, including creating sensory-friendly environments, providing clearer event schedules, and incorporating quiet spaces into their events. The Festivals' staff were able to ask us questions with the aim of ensuring that everyone feels welcome, can fully engage with, and can enjoy the rich experiences these festivals offer."

### CASA's Neuro-affirming Practice Training for Professionals

CASA recently delivered a session on "Neuro-affirming Practice When Working with Autistic Adults" for Gloucestershire County Council's Occupational Health staff. The course looked in detail at five broad topics:

- What it means to be neuro-affirming and how do we achieve this as professionals?
- Understanding neurodiversity as natural
- Honouring lived experience
- Shifting away from compliance-based goals
- Promoting empowerment and advocacy



Pippa and Emma were able to give lots of real-world examples and practical tips, including guidance about Reasonable Adjustments, and they supplied links to resources which the Occupational Health staff would find useful in future, such as our Autism Passport. *"I found the autism training session to be extremely informative and valuable to my practice as a clinician,"* said Occupational Health and Wellbeing Adviser Laura Bokhoree. *"It has encouraged me to reflect on my own approach, particularly in being more mindful of the language and tone I use. The training has also given me the confidence to engage in bolder and braver conversations, which I feel will greatly enhance the support I provide. I am very grateful for the insight and practical strategies shared."*

The course is available for other professional groups – do get in touch with the CASA team if you think your organisation would benefit from such a course.

### CONTACTS

Email: [infocasa@grcc.org.uk](mailto:infocasa@grcc.org.uk) || Phone: 01452 317460 (Monday to Friday 9.00am – 4.30pm).

For more information, and links to leaflets and resources, visit <https://www.grcc.org.uk/CASA>.

For support groups and drop-ins, please see the dates for you diary page later in the newsletter.

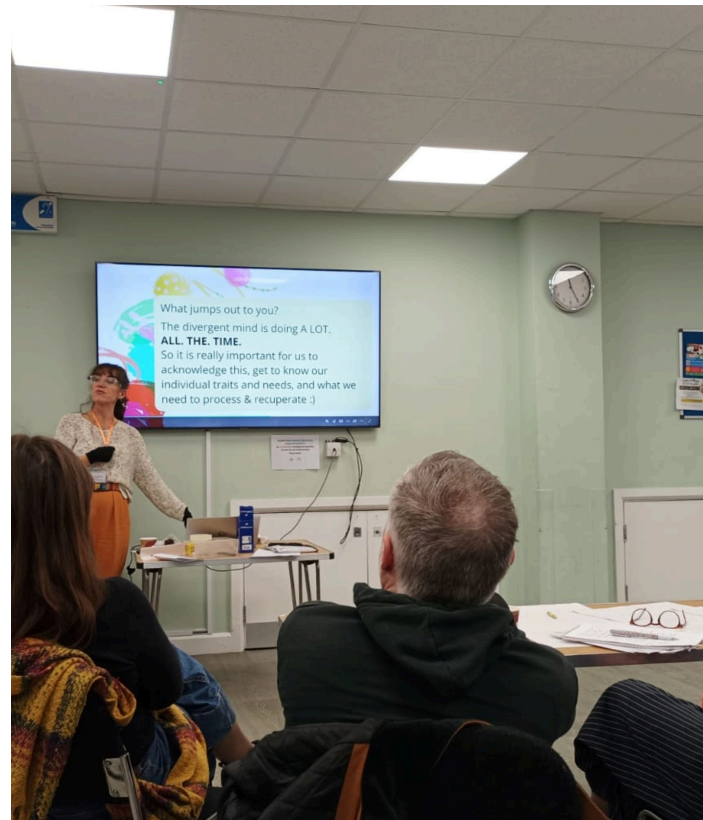




On Wednesday 22nd October, we welcomed a full house to Churchdown Community Centre for our third Neurodiversity Network Conference. It was a vibrant morning of connection, creativity, and inclusive conversation.

The sold-out event brought together organisations, neurodivergent people, families, and advocates to explore neurodiversity in leisure, arts, and wellbeing. Attendees shared ideas, learned from lived experience, and built new relationships across sectors. The venue buzzed from the start, with pastries and refreshments fuelling early networking.

We then opened with a short presentation from our neurodiversity network coordinator, Mar, who welcomed everyone and gave an overview of work done since the project began at start of 2023.



We were pleased to welcome researcher Becky Govan as our keynote speaker, who delivered an engaging and educational presentation on FASD – Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Following this we had a selection of workshops across the venue, including sessions on Ripple Effects Mapping, a creative and interactive method of recording the impact of community projects, delivered by Create Gloucestershire.

Kate Cox, from ArtShape, joined us to provide a dynamic, interactive session on neurodiversity and mental health that emphasised the benefits of creativity, where attendees had the opportunity to get hands on with some activities! Likewise, Liz Bell joined us to provide a practical zine workshop and to share the potential for this medium as a form of self-expression for neurodivergent people and a way of highlighting neurodivergent voices.







Before closing, we hosted a discussion session to which attendees brought a range of perspectives on topics of intersectionality, practical support, and funding. Thanks so much to all our speakers and attendees for making the event a huge success!

*We are delighted to share that the Neurodiversity Network will be continuing in the new year. What would you like to see from the network in the future that will increase accessible leisure opportunities for neurodivergent people in the county? Let us know at [ndnetwork@gmail.com](mailto:ndnetwork@gmail.com).*

If you want to find out more about the Neurodiversity Network and keep up-to-date with the latest news, please visit [www.activeimpact.org.uk/neurodiversitynetwork/](http://www.activeimpact.org.uk/neurodiversitynetwork/) to sign up to our newsletter.





The Cultural SEN Fair that was held at the Friendship Café in Gloucester was created to centre global majority families, amplify lived experience, and build a bridge between communities and the services designed to support them. This year's event proved how powerful a culturally intentional space can be when it is shaped with care, representation, and meaningful connection at its heart.



**Global majority families** shared openly and honestly about the barriers they face in navigating the SEND system, and the difference it made to be welcomed into a space that felt safe, calm, and culturally aware.

**One mother shared:** “Where I live there are many Africans, but hardly any children. I don’t understand the school’s SEN language, it feels like a different world. Today, I finally felt like someone understood and could help me.”

**Another mum told us:** “I’ve been blamed as a parent, even by people from my own community. My children’s struggles are seen as my fault. Today, for the first time in a long time, I felt hope that things could change.”

**One parent reflected on the environment itself:** “My children could see themselves in the toys and the colouring sheets, the skin tones, the hairstyles, the characters. It was the first time they didn’t feel like guests in someone else’s space.”

**A dad shared:** “Greeted with a drink, snack, and somewhere to sit as a whole family made a huge difference. We felt valued, not rushed. It helped us open up and talk.” Families also highlighted the impact of having dedicated places to sit and talk. The chance to have longer conversations, rather than walking past a stall in a busy hall helped families feel seen, listened to, and supported.

**Colleges and professionals** repeatedly told us that attending the fair connected them with families they had never met before and would not have reached otherwise.

**One college lead** said: “Every family we spoke to was entirely new to us. We realised how many people aren’t finding their way to the usual events.”

**Another commented:** “We made connections with families who told us they’d never spoken to a college provider before. This event opened a door we didn’t even realise was closed.”

**And a youth service provider reflected:** “We assumed we were reaching these communities through our outreach. Today proved we’re not, but now we know how to change that.”

These reflections confirm why culturally safe spaces matter, and why representation, pace, and intentionality must be built into the design of any SEND engagement.







The **Friendship Café** was intentionally chosen as a community-rooted space, place that feels familiar and accessible to many. Its central location, transport links, and large free car park removed barriers that often limit attendance. We also want to openly acknowledge that, despite its roots, the family demographics who attended did not entirely reflect who we hoped to reach by choosing this venue. This is important. It reminds us that culturally safe engagement requires more than an appropriate venue; it requires sustained relationship- building, visible representation, trust, and supported pathways into those spaces.

We also know some people may worry that events like this are “box ticking”. That perception exists because culturally marginalised families have, for too long, been invited into systems that were not designed with them in mind. Our response must be honest and fearless: centring global majority families is not tokenism when it is done with integrity, representation, accountability, and community leadership. The stories shared at this event show how necessary this work is, and how much impact it can have when done with care.

A **heartfelt thank you** goes to Nicole (Active Impact) and everyone who stepped in when the Friendship Café staff were unexpectedly called away due to a family emergency. The way people organised tables, created seating areas, and supported each other was a powerful example of what inclusive community looks like in practice.

The Fair has shown us that when families feel welcomed, represented, and unhurried, they speak more freely. They share what’s working, what isn’t, and what they need from us. And when providers place themselves in these environments, not at a distance, but shoulder-to-shoulder with families, something shifts. Trust begins to build. Barriers start to come down. We need more organisations to step into culturally diverse spaces to sustain progress, not expecting families to come to them, but showing up where they are, with openness, humility, and genuine commitment to anti- racist, culturally competent practice.

We plan to create future opportunities for SEN parents from African, Caribbean, South Asian, Middle Eastern and other Global Majority backgrounds to share their own experiences, guidance and lived expertise directly with families. This includes supporting them to host their own stands at future Fairs so their knowledge, languages and cultural perspectives are part of the event’s core offer. We will work alongside community leaders, faith groups and parent networks to identify families who want to take part. We will provide practical support such as stand set-up, materials, translation where needed, and preparation sessions to help parents feel confident sharing their stories and signposting others. We will also promote their involvement widely, so that every family sees their culture represented and respected. All communities in Gloucestershire are valuable and must be valued.





The **ND Identity Thrive Together** workshops brought young people from across Gloucestershire, transforming their own activity space into a neuro-affirming space designed to deepen understanding of self, identity, and community. These coproduced sessions offered a place where young people could explore their strengths, experiences, needs, and challenges without judgement or pressure to mask. The workshops were intentionally structured to reduce anxiety, centre autonomy, and make space for creativity and emotional safety. The overall tone of the sessions was warm, informal, and youth-led. Rather than a curriculum heavy approach, the workshops created a space where young people could think aloud, express themselves, and connect in ways that felt natural to them. The atmosphere encouraged curiosity, humour, sensory comfort, and collective exploration.

**Format and Participation:** Young people participated in a blend of creative activities, guided reflection, and group discussions supported by facilitators with lived and professional expertise. The group included autistic, ADHD, dyslexic, dyspraxic, Tourette's, and otherwise neurodivergent young people at different stages of self-understanding, from newly assessed to long-term self-identified. The format centred on sensory-safe activities, identity mapping, low-pressure conversations, and tools young people could personalise and keep. The diversity of age, background, and communication style created a community where shared experiences could be expressed freely and without translation.

**Topics Covered:** The workshops explored identity and wellbeing through real conversations, creative exercises, and youth-led prompts. Core topics included:

- Self, exploring neurodivergent identity, strengths, and internal narratives
- Belonging, understanding masking, unmasking, safety, choice, and emotional labour
- Self-advocacy, speaking up, asking for support, and navigating systems
- Executive function, working with your brain rather than against it
- Regulation and rest, sensory needs, burnout awareness, self care and practical tools

Other themes emerged through group dialogue and creative work:

- Friendships and belonging
- School stress and survival strategies
- Suicidal ideation and intrusive thoughts
- Perfectionism and fear of failure
- Eating disorders and disordered eating
- Navigating diagnosis (or lack of access to diagnosis)
- Future hopes, work, and independence
- Shame, pride, and narrative repair





Across discussions and creative reflection, several shared insights took shape:

- **Belonging matters.** Many young people had never been in a room where their communication, pace, and sensory needs felt normal and understood.
- **Pressure to mask is high.** Young people spoke openly about exhaustion, burnout, and feeling unsafe to be themselves in mainstream environments.
- **Identity is a source of strength.** Participants expressed relief and pride as they reframed neurodivergence as part of who they are rather than something “wrong”.
- **Systems remain overwhelming.** School, assessment pathways, and support services often feel inaccessible, confusing, or invalidating.
- **Shared language is powerful.** Learning terms like “sensory saturation,” “executive function,” and “monotropic focus” helped young people contextualise their experiences.

### Key Outcomes

- Increased confidence in young people naming needs and communicating boundaries.
- Feeling valued as part of a neurodivergent-led environment where experiences were validated without question.
- Interest in ongoing youth groups, identity workshops, and peer-led sessions.
- Creative identity tools (such as visual self-maps and “brain user manuals”) were widely appreciated for supporting regulation and self-advocacy in daily life.
- Improved understanding of neuro-affirming practice and stronger relationships with the young people they support.

### Next Steps

- Expand ND Identity Thrive Together workshops across more Gloucestershire settings.
- Develop follow-on sessions focused on belonging, self-advocacy, and wellbeing.
- Build a youth co-production panel to shape future content and approaches.
- Strengthen partnerships with schools, alternative provision, and community groups to embed neuro-affirming identity work.
- Grow the Professionals Network to support inclusive environments where young people can thrive.

In Summary, the ND Identity Thrive Together workshops demonstrated a clear and urgent need for spaces where neurodivergent young people can explore who they are without pressure to conform or explain themselves. When young people are given safety, language, and community, identity becomes a foundation for resilience, pride, and empowerment.





### Some observations young people made:

- “I didn’t know there were others who felt the same way my brain feels. I like myself now.”
- “When you explained executive function in normal words, it was like... finally someone gets how my brain actually works.”
- “I felt safe to talk, but also safe not to talk.”
- “My whole life I’ve been told to fit in. This was the first time someone said it’s okay to fit myself.”
- “I thought I was the only one who gets overloaded by tiny noises. Hearing other people say it made me feel less alone.”

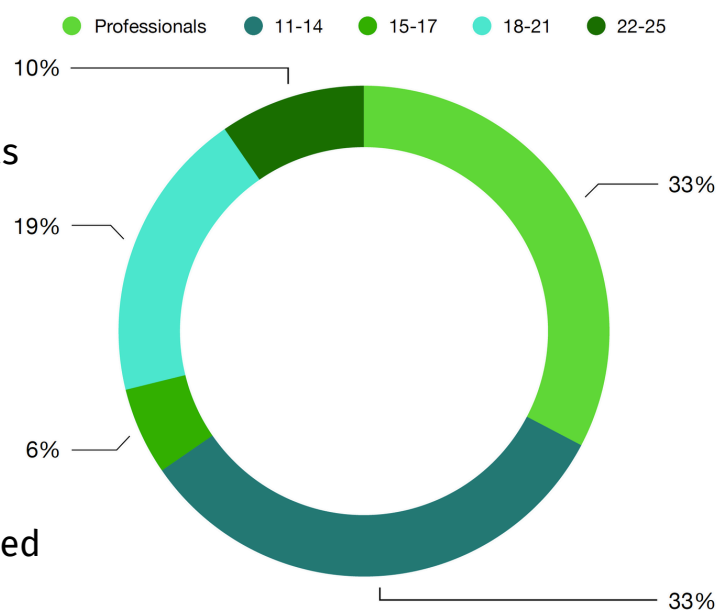
### Observations professionals made:

- “I learned more in two hours listening to them than I have from years of formal training.”
- “The young people led the pace. We followed. And the room became calmer, safer, and more honest”
- “I saw young people who usually shut down at school come alive here. It showed what is possible when they’re not under pressure.”
- “I witnessed friendships form in minutes because the young people didn’t have to explain or hide their differences.
- “The identity tools were brilliant. I watched a young person who rarely speaks create a whole ‘manual’ for her brain. She was proud of herself.”

### Workshop Reach and Ongoing Impact

So far, 35 neurodivergent young people and 16 professionals have taken part in the Thrive Together workshops. Every single participant has continued their journey beyond the sessions, either by creating follow-on workshops, joining peer activities, or setting up their own ND-safe friendship or identity clubs in their schools and communities. All attending professionals have now joined the Professionals Network, ensuring ongoing support, shared learning, and a sustained commitment to neuro-affirming practice.

These numbers reflect more than attendance; they show the beginning of a growing, connected, resilient ND community across Gloucestershire. If you want to know more about free funded sessions, please contact [info@adhdhubglos.org](mailto:info@adhdhubglos.org)







### “Out of sight, out of mind” for Tasks, People and Projects?

Why “out of sight, out of mind”, sometimes termed object permanence issues, doesn’t mean “I don’t care”

What do we mean by “object permanence” here?

In child development, object permanence means knowing something still exists when you can’t see it. Neurodivergent adults sometimes borrow the phrase to describe a very real everyday experience: “If I can’t see it, it sort of stops existing in my mind – until it suddenly pops back in with a jolt.”

It’s not that you literally think things vanish. It’s about how your attention and working memory work. For many autistic and ADHD people (and others), there’s a strong split between:

- Things in front of you / on screen / in your current focus → vivid, urgent, hard to ignore
- Things out of sight → drift out of awareness, sometimes completely

This “now vs not-now” pattern can affect:

- Tasks and admin
- Tidying and belongings
- Friendships, family and projects

...and is often misunderstood as laziness, selfishness or not caring.

**How it can show up with tasks and “stuff”?** Common examples people describe:

- Emails and messages – you read them, mean to reply “later”... then they slide off the screen and might as well not exist until something reminds you weeks later.
- Household jobs – laundry in the machine, bins not put out, food in cupboards going off because you don’t “see” it in your mind.
- Work admin – forms or reports vanish from awareness the moment you close the tab.
- Tidying away = mental disappearance. Once something is shut in a drawer, it no longer “pings” your attention.

Most people in this situation do care about these things – and often feel anxious, ashamed or baffled about why they keep slipping.

**How it can show up with people and relationships**

- Forgetting to message back – you read a text, plan a thoughtful reply later... and your brain drops the whole thing until it returns with a stab of guilt at 3 am.
- Friendships in bursts – when you’re in contact, you may feel intensely connected and present. Then life shifts, other demands fill your attention, and you drift – not because you care less, but because your mental “radar” is full.





Importantly, this is not about not caring. For many neurodivergent people, when they do think of the “temporarily forgotten” person, there can be a:

- Deep sense of fondness and warmth
- Horrible fear they may have offended or hurt them by going quiet
- Flood of shame: “They must think I don’t care at all”

From the outside, it can look like:

- Flakiness or unreliability
- Only appearing “in bursts”
- “Only contacting me when they want something”

From the inside, it can feel like:

- Caring deeply
- Getting overwhelmed
- Struggling with memory and time rather than love or loyalty



### Why does this happen?

This “Out of sight, out of mind” / “object permanence” difficulty is usually linked to:

- Working memory differences – holding multiple things in mind at once is hard, especially under stress or sensory overload.
- Attention style – brains that hyperfocus or follow a monotropism pattern tend to lock onto one thing at a time; everything outside that “spotlight” fades.
- Time perception – if time feels fuzzy, “I’ll reply in 10 minutes” can accidentally become “How is it next week already?”

It is not a reliable measure of:

- How much you care
- How hard you’re trying
- Whether you’re a “good” or “bad” friend/colleague

### What might help?

#### 1. For you (the neurodivergent person)

You probably won’t turn yourself into someone with a totally different brain style – but you can externalise memory and attention, so fewer things vanish.

Some ideas:

- Make important things visible
  - Use trays, shelves or boxes for “in-progress” tasks rather than hiding them in drawers.
  - Keep “active” projects somewhere you actually see them, not buried in piles.





- Use visual prompts and check-ins
  - Sticky notes on doors, mugs, screens or mirrors.
  - A simple “today” list where your eyes naturally land (fridge, phone home screen, whiteboard).
  - A short daily or weekly “what have I forgotten?” check-in with yourself.
- Relationship reminders
  - A gentle recurring reminder: “Check in with X this week?”
  - A short list of “my people” you glance at when you have social energy.
- Be upfront about it
  - “If I go quiet, it’s my brain, not my feelings about you. Nudges are welcome.”
  - Many people feel relieved to know it isn’t rejection.

## 2. For family, friends and partners

You can’t rewrite someone’s working memory, but you can make life kinder:

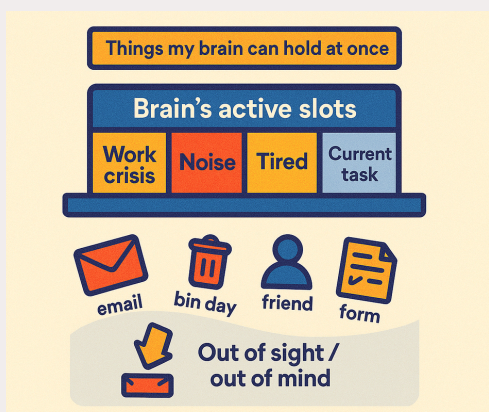
- Don’t automatically assume rejection—contact gaps often mean overload, not lack of love.
- Agree that reminders are OK – a simple “Just bumping this 😊” can really help.
- Offer concrete, low-shame support
  - “Shall I text you on bin night?”
  - “Do you want me to sit with you while you tackle those emails?”

Try to notice the effort they do make, not only the times things slip.

## 3. For schools, services and workplaces

Small design choices can change everything:

- Multiple reminders – e.g. text a few days before an appointment and another on the day.
- Written follow-up – short, clear notes after meetings with “next steps” highlighted.
- Predictable systems – information stored in consistent places rather than scattered across platforms.
- Assume barriers, not “non-engagement” – missed forms or replies may indicate cognitive load, not apathy.



### Reframing the story

Instead of: “**I’m lazy, selfish and unreliable.**”

**Try:**

- “My brain finds it hard to hold onto things that aren’t in front of me.
- I can care deeply and still need visible reminders, routines and nudges.

Those supports are an access need, not a weakness.”







Here you'll find some neurodivergent resources that may be of interest.

Please be aware that content linked to from this page is not necessarily provided by us, we cannot guarantee that all the content is perfect - merely that we hope you might find it of interest!



### YouTuber of the issue!



### How to ADHD

How to ADHD (Jessica McCabe) shares practical, honest videos about ADHD – including working memory, time, motivation and “out of sight, out of mind” struggles.

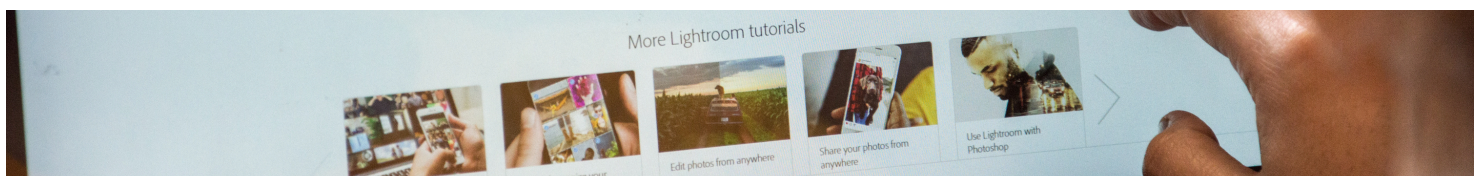
It's a helpful channel for ADHDers, autistic people with similar experiences, and anyone wanting to understand why “just try harder” isn't the answer.

Youtube Channel: [Videos](#)

## Theme based resources of the issue!

**A few links to articles associated with Out of sight out of mind / Object permanence and related issues.** Though with ADHD in the titles for two of these, these can be relevant many types of neurodivergent individuals!

- **Psychology Today – Time Blindness:** Broader overview noting that time-perception issues
- **Psychology Today – Understanding ADHD Working Memory Challenges:** Explains uneven memory in ADHD – why people can remember tiny details from years ago yet lose track of everyday tasks – with strategies for supporting working memory.
- **Medical News Today – What to know about object permanence and ADHD:** Clear, short explainer of how the ADHD community uses “object permanence” to describe out of sight, out of mind, and why it's really about working memory rather than losing the infant skill. Also follows on the same link is a series of other ADHD related articles.





### **Young people Post Diagnostic Support group**

**Inclusion Gloucestershire** have been working alongside the Children's Autism and ADHD Assessment Service (CAAAS), to develop a 6 week post diagnostic support group. Currently, support after a young person is diagnosed is only offered to their parents or guardians, so this will be the first group of its kind. It aims to start early next year, with sessions on self-care after meltdowns and shutdowns, friendships and relationships, stimming, reasonable adjustments, coping with change and transitions, and daily planning.

### **AutismUnderstood.co.uk – a website for autistic young people.**

Autism Understood is a website about autism, created for autistic young people and led by autistic people themselves. Developed by the charity Spectrum Gaming, it's aimed mainly at ages 10+ and gives clear, affirming information about what autism actually is – in language and examples that make sense to young people.



The site covers autistic ways of thinking and processing, sensory differences, executive functioning, "spiky profiles", social life, co-occurring conditions, health and wellbeing, and education, with blogs and new content being added over time. It's a great place for autistic young people, families and professionals to explore together when talking about identity, support needs and autistic culture.

Autism Understood is widely recommended by NHS trusts, CAMHS teams and local authority SEND / Local Offer sites as a clear, autistic-led website for young people who want to understand autism in their own words.

### **Uncommon**

Uncommon offers a comprehensive range of services designed specifically to support neurodivergent young people (aged 8-16) and their families, including:

- One-to-one mentoring with neurodivergent young adults who share lived experience
- Weekly online interest-led clubs (Minecraft, Roblox, D&D, Creative Writing, etc.)
- Psycho-educational courses like "Understanding My Brain"
- Community Hour Clubs - relaxed social spaces to connect around shared interests
- Creative Afternoons Clubs are 1-hour standalone drop-ins where young people can explore writing, drawing, role play, or video

Services are designed and delivered by neurodivergent staff with small group sizes (4-6 young people per group) and flexible participation options where young people choose how to engage (camera on/off, chat vs voice)





### The Barriers to Education website

This was started in 2024 as a collaborative project by Spectrum Gaming, an autistic-led organisation for young people founded by autistic adult Andy Smith. It grew from the need to better support children and young people who are struggling with school attendance. The project brought together autistic young people and adults, project leads and other experts to create a fantastic resource that can be adapted and added to over time. Barriers to Education is now a national, co-produced hub for understanding and reducing barriers to school and college, especially for neurodivergent young people and those experiencing emotionally based school avoidance. At its heart is the WARMTH framework – Wellbeing First, Affirming Practice, Relational Approach, Mutual Understanding and Partnership, Timely Response and Holistic Support. The site offers clear explanations, practical tools for young people, families and schools, and guidance on key topics such as burnout, profiling individual needs and building safer, more flexible support around each learner. The website is designed to be copied, adapted and built on by local areas, with credit – it’s intended as a living, growing resource, not a fixed document. Many services, schools and parent groups are already signposting to it as a compassionate, neuroaffirming alternative to “attendance-first” approaches. You can explore the story behind the project and all the resources at: <https://barrierstoeducation.co.uk>.

### Aubin travel App.

Aubin is a free autism-friendly travel app designed to make public transport less stressful and more predictable for autistic and other neurodivergent people. Aubin has been developed with direct input from autistic people and organisations, including co-design workshops and ongoing trials.



It helps you plan journeys by more than just speed – you can prioritise simpler routes, fewer changes and less busy options where possible. The app includes live updates, disruption alerts and automatic re-planning if something changes, plus clear information about station facilities such as step-free access and toilets.

Aubin also builds in practical support for when travel feels overwhelming. There’s a digital autism card you can show to staff, simple communication tools (including text-to-speech) and grounding techniques you can use if you start to feel overloaded, as well as an emergency button to contact a trusted person.

It’s been highlighted in transport/rail industry news as a neuroinclusive innovation intended to reduce anxiety, increase independence and reduce isolation for neurodivergent travellers. Aubin is available on Android and iOS – just search for “Aubin autism travel app” or visit [aubin.app](https://aubin.app) to find out more.

**[Many thanks to Emma Whittaker for the information on page 25 and 26]**





# DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



Here are support groups, meet ups or events happening around Gloucestershire. Let us know if you need anything relevant adding.

## **Your Voice SW Neurodiversity Group**

Meets online on the first Thursday of every month from 18:00-19:30. Contact Sammy Roberts on [sammyr@inclusion-glos.org](mailto:sammyr@inclusion-glos.org).

## **Churchdown Autism Group**

Meets at Churchdown community centre on the first Thursday of the month from 14:00-15:30.

Contact [rachel.hodges-cox@nhs.net](mailto:rachel.hodges-cox@nhs.net) or [cashmir.martin@nhs.net](mailto:cashmir.martin@nhs.net).

## **Gloucestershire ND Hub Events**

Various events and activities for young and adults  
See [ND Hub Events](#)

## **The Youth Forum**

The Youth Forum is for neurodivergent young people between the ages of 13 and 19. It is about having your say about how things can be better in Gloucestershire. Held as a monthly Zoom group it meets on a Tuesday evening between 5.30pm and 6.30pm. If you want to join, a parent or guardian needs to complete a consent form. For more information, email: [emilyl@inclusion-glos.org](mailto:emilyl@inclusion-glos.org).

## **Community Autism Support and Advice (CASA) support groups and drop-ins**

For weekly updates about our Drop-in Groups and full details of drop-in venues and times, see our pages on Instagram and Facebook:

<https://www.instagram.com/casagloucestershireshire/>

<https://www.facebook.com/CASAGloucestershireshire>

## **Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum 'Listen To Me' Social Meet-ups**

Various locations - for more information visit [www.glosparentcarerforum.org.uk](http://www.glosparentcarerforum.org.uk).

## **Your next Autism (and Neurodivergence) Partnership Board**

Tuesday 2nd December 2025

10.00am to 12.30pm

Venue: Zoom [Online]

### **Main Topics:**

Cultural SEN Fair

Autism Wait list Project

Update on GCC's Co-production Lead

### **Next Partnership Board Dates:**

3 March 2026

10.00 - 12.30

[Online]

## **WANT TO JOIN THE PARTNERSHIP BOARD?**

WE MEET ONCE PER QUARTER. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO COME TO OUR NEXT MEETING, **EMAIL:**

[NEURODIVERSITY@GLOUCESTERSHIRE.GOV.UK](mailto:NEURODIVERSITY@GLOUCESTERSHIRE.GOV.UK).

## **MORE INFORMATION**

TO FIND OUT MORE, AS WELL AS READ PREVIOUS NEWSLETTERS, VISIT:

[HTTPS://GLOUCESTERSHIRE.GOV.UK/HEALTH-AND-SOCIAL-CARE/DISABILITIES/AUTISM-PARTNERSHIP-BOARD/](https://gloucestershire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/disabilities/autism-partnership-board/)







### From your Chair:

Jan Marriott

Sadly Sinead Harper has stepped down from being co-chair of the Learning Disability Partnership board.

The Partnership Board is therefore looking for a new Co-Chair for the Learning Disability Partnership Board. We need someone who can work 4 hours every week.

Most work will be on a Monday morning and a Wednesday afternoon. The pay is £13.78 per hour. You need to tell us if you are interested in the job by Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2025.

For more information about this opportunity, please visit the website:

[inclusiongloucestershire.co.uk/co-chair-for-the-learning-disability-partnership-board/](http://inclusiongloucestershire.co.uk/co-chair-for-the-learning-disability-partnership-board/)

For a video introduction to the role, please look at the video posted on 24<sup>th</sup> November on <http://www.facebook.com/inclusionglos>

### The National Star College Presentation

The team were really excited to welcome Ella, Sophie and Andrew from the National Star College. Andrew is the student voice lead and Ella and Sophie are both students who are part of the NSC Student Union.

They came to explain how students at the National Star College engage with the community and help change people's attitudes to disability. They spoke passionately about the college's life skills programme, work experience opportunities at the NSC and the lots of positive things students get involved with both locally and nationally.

Life Skills is all about learning skills in the community, focusing on what people can do. Ella explained that in life skills they learn how to talk to people and tell them how they can help. Work experience is offered in different departments across the college including marketing and fundraising. Ella has had the opportunity to speak to MP's at the Houses of Parliament about how they could give more help to young people leaving college whilst another student ran a campaign for Blue Badges to show if someone has a hidden disability. The students clearly have a strong voice, which they are using to influence positive change. One attendee said it was the best talk she had been to all year!

***Thank you Ella, Sophie and Andrew!***





### **The Inclusion Gloucestershire Talking Therapies report**

Vicci talked to the group about Inclusion Gloucestershire's Talking Therapies Research Report. This research was done because of what people said in Inclusion Gloucestershire's 2022 Big Survey. Inclusion Gloucestershire spoke to adults with disabilities living in Gloucestershire. They had used talking therapies in Gloucestershire in the last 5 years.

#### **Three key issues were raised:**

1. Reasonable adjustments
2. Treating disability as important in therapy
3. Living with a disability.

The report says how the people who pay for and run services can make them better for people with disabilities.

Download the different versions of the report here:

[inclusiongloucestershire.co.uk/research-strategy-and-partnerships/](https://inclusiongloucestershire.co.uk/research-strategy-and-partnerships/)

### **Our Partnership Board new priorities**

Back in August the board spent some time reviewing and discussing the LDPB priorities. Following this the team created an Easy Read summary of what people said about the priorities. At our October meeting we were pleased that the board agreed the following priorities for the next 12 months:

- Advocacy
- Health
- Work
- Hate Crime

### **Our next Learning Disability Partnership Board**

Our next meeting is on Monday 15th December from 11am – 1pm at Kingfisher Treasure Seekers Hub, 118 Eastgate Street, Gloucester.

Rosanna James from the GHC Partnerships team will be coming to talk about the Learning Disability Services Review.

Helen Crocker from Artlift will also be attending to let the group know about a project she has been coordinating helping to raise awareness of cancer screening for people with learning disabilities.

### **Joining the Learning Disability Partnership Board**

The Board meets every two months on a Monday at the Treasure Seekers Hub in Eastgate Street, Gloucester. If you would like to join us please either email: [partnershipboards@inclusion-glos.org](mailto:partnershipboards@inclusion-glos.org) or call Inclusion Gloucestershire on **01452 234003**





**From your Chair:** Jan Marriott

**And the Mental Health Partnership Board Team**

### **Rise in mental health stigma in England | Mind**

Colleagues from Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust have shared with us the recent research commissioned by Mind. It found that public attitudes towards mental health and people with mental health problems are getting worse, with more than one in ten unwilling to live next to someone who has been mentally unwell – even if they have since recovered.

- Fewer people are comfortable about mental health services being delivered in their communities (from 70% in 2015 to 63% now)
- 14% of people are frightened of people with poor mental health living in their neighbourhoods, up from 8% in 2017
- Fewer people now believe that being part of a normal community is the best therapy for people with mental health problems than 2008 (from a peak of 83% in 2015, to 68% now), when this research was first conducted.

Mind, the nation's largest mental health charity, is warning that an increasingly negative public discourse about mental health, from politicians and in the media, risks undoing the progress in attitudes and stigma achieved in recent years. Researchers have suggested that this discourse, including that young people with mental health problems being branded as “workshy” and as misusers of the welfare system may be contributing to the shifts in public attitudes.

The report states there is a clear link between poor services and stigma. When the UK government doesn't prioritise mental health services, it gives the message that mental health isn't important. By investing in and prioritising policy solutions that improve the lives of people living with a mental health problem, this sends a clear signal that these individuals should be treated with dignity and respect.

In the past the first Gloucestershire Strategy for Mental Health and Wellbeing had a strong focus on reducing stigma and discrimination led by Professor Jane Melton and our late Co-Chair Dan Beale-Cox. Do we need more focus on this again? Let us know if you have any ideas and would like to be involved?

### **Joining the Mental Health & Wellbeing Partnership Board.**

If anyone is interested in the joining the Board or Network meetings please email: [asc.co-production@gloucestershire.gov.uk](mailto:asc.co-production@gloucestershire.gov.uk).





### **Gloucestershire Mental Health Forums (run by Rethink)**

The Gloucestershire Mental Health Forums are where a mix of people come together to discuss actions that could improve the lives of people affected by mental ill health.

The purpose of the Forums is to:

- Help the mental health system in Gloucestershire to be joined up
- Identify gaps in what is being provided, and also gaps in training
- Co-produce solutions to problems with Experts by Experience (people with direct and caring living experience of mental ill health)

There are five Forums across Gloucestershire, held every 3 months. They are usually held online, and sometimes in-person as well. These are based:

- Forest of Dean & Tewkesbury, West Cheltenham, Newent and Staunton (TWNS)
- Stroud and Berkeley Vale
- Cotswolds
- Cheltenham
- Gloucester

People who come to the Forums altogether have a wide range of knowledge, views and ideas for action. They are:

- People with direct lived experience, including carers
- People supporting people in the community, cultural and faith groups, grassroots organisations and charities
- People working for the Council, Public Health and the NHS

A digest covering what was talked about across all five localities is shared after each series of Forums. People can also share information and ideas at other times with the organisers. The aim of the digests is to spark action. They also aim to increase awareness and understanding about the topics and helpful resources. The digests are discussed at the One Gloucestershire Mental Health and Wellbeing Partnership Board and with other networks in the system. This is to spark action for change for better experiences and outcomes for people. This influence, awareness and understanding can be helpful for:

- Individuals who draw on care and support
- Carers and families
- People who work or volunteer offering care and support (services)
- Commissioners and public health officers

If you would like to find out about how to get involved with the Forums please email: [rhiannon.davis@rethink.org](mailto:rhiannon.davis@rethink.org).







### Community of Practice

We have been holding mental health network events over the year with a strong focus on lived experience and peer support led developments. Simon Price, who is currently co-chairing the Mental Health & Wellbeing Partnership Board, agreed to facilitate a Community of Practice (CoP) for people using lived experience and peer support worker roles to improve peoples' lives.

The members have agreed the purpose of the CoP as a space to:

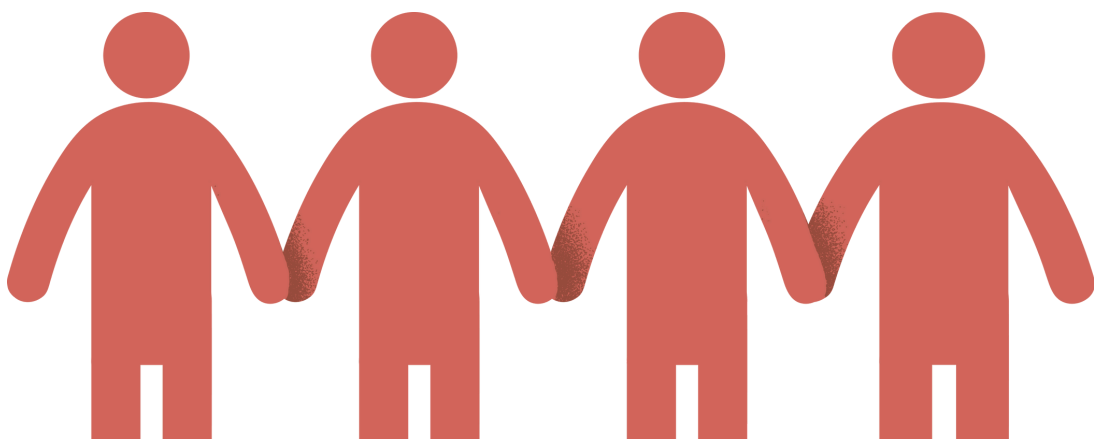
- Connect, network, and share resources.
- Support one another in lived-experience and peer roles.
- Reflect, learn, and co-produce ideas that make change happen.
- Turn shared learning into action across NHS and voluntary settings.

The third meeting is going to be the first in person get together and will be held at: The Arts Health & Wellbeing Centre. University of Gloucestershire City Campus, King's Square, Gloucester. GL1 1AW.

**Date:** Friday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2025

**Time:** 1-3pm

It will be an informal session so that all of us who are involved locally in Lived Experience Practice can mark the festive period and get to meet each other off screens for the first time. If anyone who is working as a peer worker or developing lived experience practice in Gloucestershire would like to join the community please email Simon on [siprice79@outlook.com](mailto:siprice79@outlook.com) I think this is relevant to a lot of people who are using their lived experience to ensure the Partnership Boards reflect the voices of people in seeking to improve lives.





**From your Co-Chairs:** Katie Peacock and Jan Marriott

### **Working together for a more accessible Gloucestershire**

As we look ahead to next year, we have listened carefully to feedback from board members who want our meetings to stay focused, practical, and action-driven. With that in mind, we have streamlined our priorities so we can aim for clear, SMART goals and positive outcomes that make a real difference for disabled people in Gloucestershire. Our 2026 priority will be “Accessibility in the community” which will include “Advocacy and Transport” Specific actions relating to this will be coproduced by the Board.

### **Advocacy**

Advocacy as a priority, could be said to be the thread that connects everything, running through all of the change we are working towards. The Advocacy Charter (2002) summarises it beautifully:

*“Advocacy helps people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests, and access the services they need. Advocates work in partnership with the people they support and always take their side.”*

### **Accessible Transport**

Transport continues to be a major issue raised by our members, so we’re pleased that the Building Better Transport Links meeting has now been reinstated. This gives us a way of feeding back directly to Gloucestershire County Council.

#### **Key issues raised at the transport meeting**

##### **1. Gaps in morning services**

Some buses simply don’t allow disabled people to reach essential services when those services actually open. One person said, for them, getting into central Gloucester for around 9am is only possible on a Sunday.

We want to understand:

- Why do these gaps exist?
- Are school-run vehicle allocations making this worse?
- How can operators adjust timetables so people can reach services when they’re open?





### 2. Wheelchairs vs Mobility Scooters – priority in the wheelchair space

Multiple attendees reported experiences where drivers were unsure about the rules, or unwilling to enforce them. Wheelchair users must have priority for the designated space.

This shows a need for:

- Clearer driver training
- Better understanding of priority rules
- Driver communication skills to ask people politely to move when required

Can the rules show some flexibility? When buses are quiet, is it possible for a second wheelchair user to board even if one is slightly outside the official space?

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### Other updates

- We were made aware of Passenger Forums and the upcoming Passenger Survey.
- The next meeting is planned for late January or early February (depending on PDSI PB meeting dates).

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### Accessibility of the Community

Accessibility means something different for everyone and we want to reflect that. It's not just about physical access; it's about removing all disabling barriers, including for people with sensory impairments. Members highlighted the need for clearer, more accessible information, especially paperwork from local authorities. Plain English, simple layouts, and easy-to-follow instructions can make a huge difference.

At our November Board, we were delighted to welcome Daniel Gale from GRCC to talk about the **DAISI (Digital Accessibility, Inclusion, Support, and Innovation)** Project. This is an initiative tackling digital poverty.

#### *Why digital access matters?*

In a world where almost everything is moving online, digital access is no longer optional. It affects:

- Employment (job applications, training, small businesses)
- Social connections
- Education
- Healthcare (telehealth, GP systems, online prescriptions)





### What makes **DAISI** special?

- It is community-driven, co-produced with local people.
- It includes genuinely inclusive support — from cyber-safety training for the Deaf community to accessible webpage redesign projects.
- One standout example: a visually impaired man went from isolation to gaining qualifications, becoming a football team captain and inspiring others all thanks to accessible digital support.

DAISI demonstrates what's possible when digital inclusion is treated as a basic right, not a luxury.

As we push for better transport, clearer information, and digital inclusion, advocacy ensures every voice is heard and valued. We're also pleased to announce that a new Co-production Lead will be joining early next year to support this work further.

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### **Spotlight: The Isbourne Centre**

We were also joined by Bonnie Lloyd, who gave a fantastic presentation about the Isbourne Centre, Gloucestershire's leading wellbeing charity based in Cheltenham.

They offer:

- A wide range of therapies
- Wellbeing courses
- Community outreach
- Support aimed at promoting positive mental and emotional health for everyone

Their work aligns strongly with our mission to create inclusive spaces and services.

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### **Thank You**

We want to sincerely thank every board member, guest speaker, and community participant for their contributions over the past year. Your lived experience, expertise, and passion continues to drive meaningful change across Gloucestershire.

We look forward to working with you again in the New Year, stronger, more focused, and more committed than ever to improving accessibility and equality.







**From your Neurology Subgroup Co-Chairs:** Jan Marriott and Dave Evans

**Educating us about Neurological Conditions:** Since our last update, we have learnt about:

- Parkinson's Disease - [Homepage](#) | [Parkinson's UK](#)
- Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP) and Corticobasal Degeneration (CBD) - with presentations from representatives of Parkinson's UK and PSPA  
<https://www.pspassociation.org.uk/>

Information about the conditions, diagnosis and support available was shared, and some good connections were made to share good practice. They are also keen to work together to benefit the people they support.

**Frame Running** is a fantastic Gloucester activity. Frame Running Giants was set up to enable people with mobility challenges freedom to move and enjoy activity safely. For more information about it and sessions being held, check out their website: <https://frgg.org.uk/>

**ME/CFS (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis also known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) Friendship Group** updated that NHS England has delivered 3 training modules, including one on managing severe ME/CFS. The group is keen to get this training known as widely as possible amongst healthcare providers. There is also work being done nationally to commission a service for severe patients, and NHS England are looking at specifications for mild and moderate services. Everything happening nationally will be relevant for local people and services.

**Going Forward:** Following the changes within Gloucestershire County Council's Commissioning Team, support for the Neurology Subgroup is changing. The Co-Chairs and members would like to continue meeting to discuss and act on the important issues that challenge people with neurological conditions. We also don't want to lose the important connections we have already made with people with lived experience, health and social care professionals and the range professionals from charitable and other organisations who support people with neurological conditions.

We're not sure how the subgroup will work with the new Co-production Lead once they are in post, but we can update in the next Newsletter.

**For more information:**

**Physical Disability & Sensory Impairment Partnership Board:** [partnershipboards@inclusion-glos.org](mailto:partnershipboards@inclusion-glos.org)

**Neurology Subgroup:** [asc.co-production@gloucestershire.gov.uk](mailto:asc.co-production@gloucestershire.gov.uk)



### Carers Rights Day Overview from Gloucestershire Carers Hub

Carers Rights Day is a vital annual event that raises awareness of the rights and entitlements available to unpaid carers. It's about making sure carers know where to turn for advice and support, and encouraging organisations to work together to improve services. This year, Gloucestershire Carers Hub marked the occasion with a series of activities designed to inform, connect, and empower carers. In the lead-up to Carers Rights Day, we took our message on the road with the Carers Rights NHS Bus Tour, visiting various locations throughout the county. The aim was simple: bring information and support directly to carers where they are. The bus tour allowed carers to access advice on their rights, benefits, and local services without needing to travel far. It also provided an opportunity for carers to meet our team face-to-face, ask questions, and pick up resources. Feedback from the tour was overwhelmingly positive, with carers appreciating the convenience and personal touch. On Carers Rights Day itself, we hosted our Carers Rights Day Event, bringing together carers, professionals, and organisations under one roof. We welcomed 115 attendees to the event. The event was praised for its excellent mix of agencies and charities, and the stallholders valued the opportunity to connect with carers and professionals.

Alongside the main event, we hosted a Co-production Workshop to involve carers and professionals in shaping future services. We welcomed 12 attendees to the workshop. This session provided a meaningful space for carers to share their experiences and influence service design, ensuring that future support reflects real needs.

Carers Rights Day reminds us that unpaid carers deserve recognition, respect, and support. From the Bus Tour to the Main Event and Co-production Workshop, we are proud of the connections made and the conversations started. Thank you to everyone who attended, shared their views, and helped make the day a success. If you missed the event but would like information on carers' rights or support services, please contact Gloucestershire Carers Hub today by calling 0300 111 9000 or emailing [carers@peopleplus.co.uk](mailto:carers@peopleplus.co.uk).



### Join Us This December at Gloucestershire Carers Hub

As the year draws to a close, Gloucestershire Carers Hub is here to support unpaid carers with a range of friendly and informative sessions. Our December programme includes opportunities to connect with other carers, learn practical tips for managing your caring role, and take time for your own wellbeing. Highlights include our YouCan session at Rosebank Community Space, offering a welcoming environment to share experiences and access practical advice. We'll host online coffee mornings, peer support groups, and festive activities designed to help you feel connected and valued during the holiday season.

**For full details and booking, visit [Gloucestershire Carers Hub](#) or call 0300 111 9000.**

Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) is inviting carers to take part in the 2025 national survey of adult carers in England. Surveys have now been sent out to a random sample of around 1,000 carers across Gloucestershire, giving them the opportunity to share their experiences and help shape future support.

The survey, organised by the Department of Health and Social Care, has been running every two years since 2012. It plays a vital role in helping both local councils and national bodies understand what support carers need and how well current services are working.

Carers who have received a survey are encouraged to complete and return it by 31 December 2025.

You can find more information about [support available for unpaid carers](#) on GCC's website.

## The Annual Parent Carer Survey is Now Open

If you are a Parent Carer of a child or young person aged between 0 to 25 years old with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who is receiving education or support in Gloucestershire, then this survey is for you.

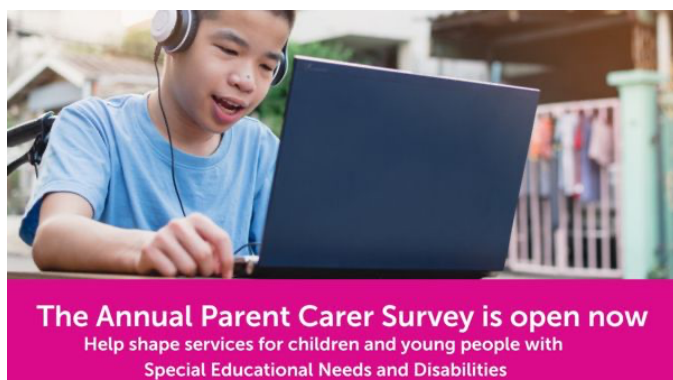
It is an anonymous questionnaire that asks for feedback about the Education, Health and Care services and support available for children and young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The information you share in the survey will help the SEND and Inclusion Partnership (SILAP) to better understand how to make continuous improvement to the services and offer for families.

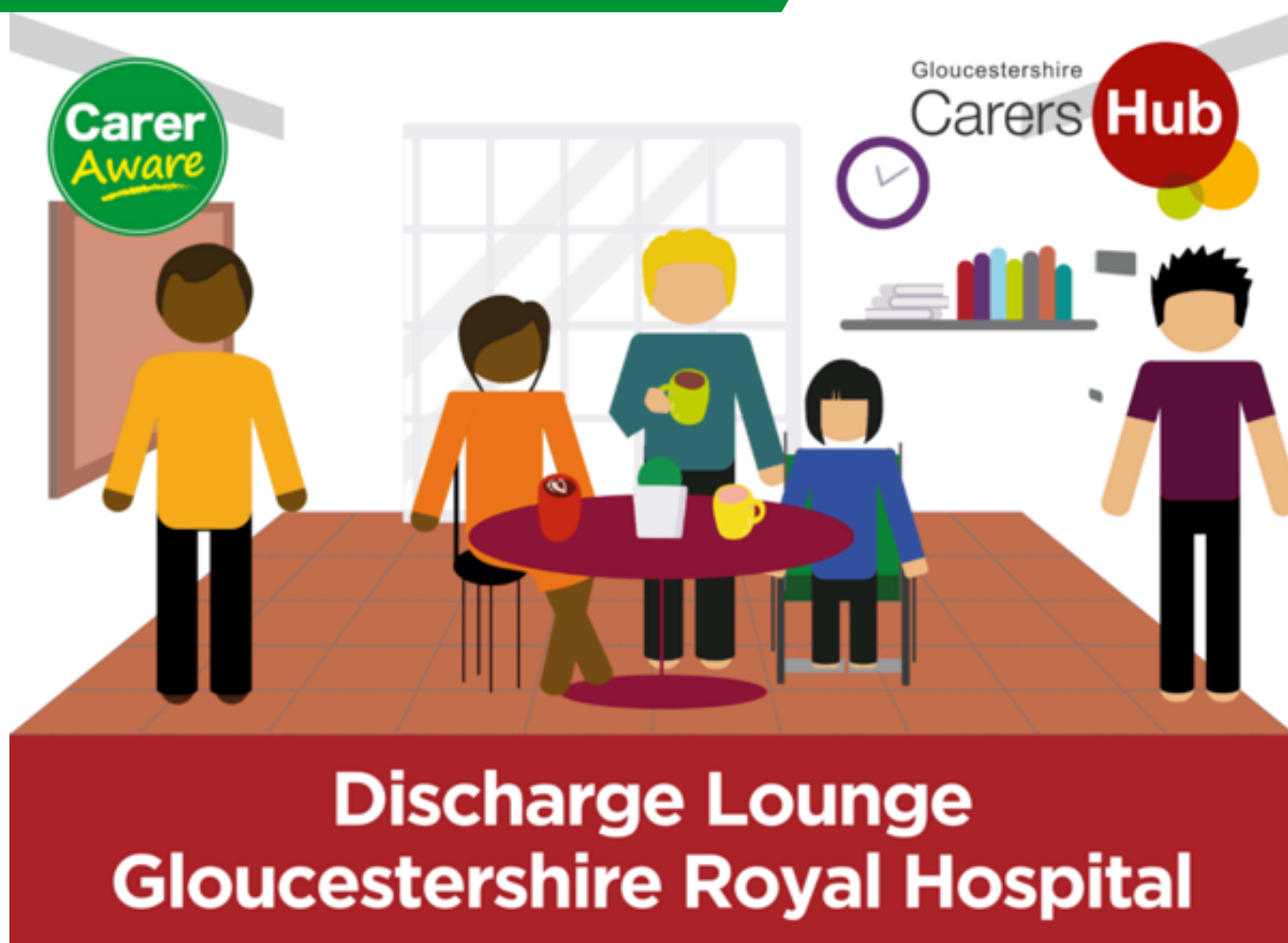
We encourage you to take this opportunity to share your views and experiences. It is an opportunity to give feedback on any advice, support and information you currently receive, how helpful it is, and how you think support and services can improve.

It takes no more than 12 minutes, and is open until Friday, 5 December 2025, at 5pm.

To take part click below:

**[Gloucestershire Parent Carer Survey 2025](#)**





We will be in the discharge lounge should you need any information or support.

**Location:**

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital, Great Western Road,  
Gloucester, Gloucestershire, GL1 3NN

**When:**

Every Friday of the month

**Time:**

12.00noon - 3.00pm

[www.gloucestershirecarershub.co.uk](http://www.gloucestershirecarershub.co.uk)





### The Mosquito Mission

A group of teenagers has come together to support each other through the tricky path of caring for a relative. The Mosquito Mission, which is run by Gloucestershire Young Carers, is made up of carers aged 11 to 25, who have lived experience of caring for a parent with mental ill-health or substance misuse. Their aim is to raise awareness of young carers amongst professionals who can make a difference such as social workers and those who work in drug and alcohol services. The group gets its name from the famous quote from the Dalai Lama 'if you think you are too small to make a difference try sleeping with a mosquito in the room'.

Through Mosquito Mission, the young carers deliver training and awareness-raising sessions to those who most need to hear it, including teachers, social workers, GPs, university staff and trainee police officers. In person and online, they share their stories and offer real-life insight into what being a young carer really looks like in Gloucestershire today. Scott Bailey-Locke is the participation lead at Gloucestershire Young Carers. He helps guide the Mosquito Mission group as they prepare their talks and campaigns.

- "A very inspiring and courageous presentation"
- "It really opened my eyes to young carers and will definitely be using this knowledge"
- "I now completely understand the impacts on young people when professionals do not hear their voice, and make decision not considering young carer responsibilities."

These are some quotes from the latest training delivered by the Mosquito Mission, a group of young carers raising awareness across the county. Third year Social Care students at the University of Gloucestershire received a 3-hour lecture devised and delivered by young and young adult carers, sharing their stories and experiences with professionals. They explained how they can help identify young carers in their work, how to best support them and how professionals can help them feel heard and seen.

The Gloucestershire Young Carers community is full of passion, understanding, and shared experiences. When you join, you open the door to vital support and guidance for young carers across the county. Whether you are a young person, family member or a professional please get in touch if you need support advice or information.

**Visit us:** 7 Twigworth Business Centre, Twigworth, Gloucester GL2 9PG

**Telephone:** 01452 733060

**Email:** [mail@glosyoungcarers.org.uk](mailto:mail@glosyoungcarers.org.uk)

### CALLING ALL YOUNG CARERS!

DO YOU WANT TO HAVE  
YOUR VOICE HEARD?



WE WANT TO HEAR  
**FROM YOU!**



NHS ENGLAND, THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND  
SOCIAL CARE, AND THE DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION ARE WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE  
THE LIVES OF YOUNG CARERS.

### LED BY YOUNG CARERS!

WE ARE HOSTING A SERIES OF WORKSHOPS TO  
HEAR YOUNG CARER VOICES ON THESE DATES:

16<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 4-5PM & 6-7PM

17<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 6-7PM

6<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 4-5PM & 6-7PM



THE INFORMATION WE HEAR WILL HELP  
MAKE REAL CHANGES TO THE LIVES OF  
YOUNG CARERS ACROSS ENGLAND.

WE CAN ONLY MAKE CHANGES BY HEARING FROM YOU ABOUT YOUR  
EXPERIENCES OF BEING A YOUNG CARER, AND RIGHT NOW WE DON'T KNOW  
WHO ALL OF THE YOUNG CARERS IN ENGLAND ARE, AND SO NOT EVERYONE IS  
BEING SUPPORTED.

Do I look  
like I care?  
#NHSThinkCarer

GET INVOLVED,  
AND BOOK YOUR SPACE IN A WORKSHOP  
BY CONTACTING THE EMAIL  
ADDRESS BELOW:

ENGLAND.NHSTHINKCARER@NHS.NET

