



**National Autism Wales  
Conference – Promoting  
Autistic Wellbeing  
3 April 2019**

Liberty Stadium Swansea  
**Cllr Huw David**

## Good afternoon Everyone,

I am delighted to be here this afternoon to open the afternoon plenary session of this unique conference. I say unique because it's the very first major conference that the Welsh Local Government Association's National Autism Team has facilitated since the team started back in 2008. I am proud to be associated with the WLGA, which is a representative body of all local authorities in Wales.

I won't get into the politics but many of you in the audience will know that public sector cuts are significant in Wales and local government is no exception. That's why this conference is such an achievement. The National Autism Team, with a number of partners and stakeholders, have managed to bring this conference together through sponsorship. Almost £15k of sponsorship from the private, public and third sectors to bring you a free conference with a whole host of great speakers and workshop leads. I'm sure you'll agree that the effort has been worth it?



They had the vision for it many, many months ago and today we are here. Many autistic people had fed back to the team that they felt "invisible": that events were run for parents and carers specifically; that events were run for people with co-occurring conditions; that events were run for professionals. But there was little for autistic people to help with day to day life. So, the team began planning and prepared a business case and established a group to co-produce the conference, and the day has arrived as part of World Autism Awareness Week.

The partners involved include: Public Health Wales, who co-host the National Autism Team with the WLGA; the Swansea City Football Club Community Trust – and I was really thrilled to hear that the Swans have managed to secure funding from the Football League to have a *permanent* sensory room for the benefit of autistic football fans here at the stadium... Isn't that great news? – The Ospreys in the Community, who have recently achieved Autism Awareness accreditation through ASDinfoWales; and Swansea University, who have been a strong advocate and contributor to the conference. These core sponsors have sponsored today's event, together with the WLGA, for which we are really grateful. We also have co-sponsors in Hacer Developments who are working with other partners across the city to change the face of the City of Swansea and Swansea Bay with regeneration projects; the Autism Directory who do fantastic work around advice and

guidance to autistic people, especially in relation to employment and Welsh Government's Social Services and Health Directorate. They have all sponsored some of the workshops today. Again, we are really grateful for their support.



Today's conference has been a fantastic example of co-production. This is a "buzz word" heard throughout the public and third sectors at the moment, but it's actually a very tricky thing to achieve with real results and to the satisfaction of all involved. This conference, though, has been a genuinely co-produced event, which owes much to the patience and diligence of the National Autism Team. They have worked with five autistic people, five parents and carers and five professionals over six months to bring you the event today – and it hasn't been without its challenges. NAS Cymru have provided valuable guidance and support every step of the way, and I'm sure you would agree, it's been well worth the effort!

Let me tell you a bit more about the work of the National Autism Team. They used to be the National ASD Development Team and are funded by Welsh Government to help partners deliver the Strategic Action Plan and the Delivery Plan for Autism in Wales. They started off as a small team of one and now have seven team members who work across Wales to raise awareness and understanding of autism, undertake training, and develop and deliver free resources in partnership with autistic people and other stakeholders.

Critically, the team also has a role in overseeing and supporting the seven Integrated Autism Services across Wales. As of this week, all seven are now up and running. Not all of them are at full staffing capacity, but all of them have a phone number and an email address where autistic people can go to be self-referred or for advice and guidance. The IAS was established across Wales in response to a major consultation exercise in 2015 where over 1000 autistic people, parents and carers and professionals were surveyed or interviewed. The responses were stark and the messages clear: there was a gap in services, for autistic adults in particular, and a gap in diagnosis but more than anything, there was a gap in support for adults once they had been diagnosed. The seven IAS' are

being piloted across Wales to address the gap. The WLGA and PHW are pleased to have had a significant part to play in the establishment of the IAS and we were encouraged to read the recent report by People and Place Unit about the progress of the IAS. There's work to be done and much to resolve before all seven IAS' are working to full capacity, but the indications are positive – autistic people in Wales welcome and value the development. The IAS' work closely with neurodevelopment teams across Wales as well to support children who are autistic and the IAS' have a role in supporting parents and carers post diagnosis.

The National Autism Team changed its name this week... as I explained, they were the National ASD Development Team but as of this week they are the National Autism Team. Why? And what's in a name? Well, the autistic community told us that they don't like the term "disorder" and as a team they have responded to that. The team is also no longer "developing" – they are consolidating, they are delivering, and they are pleased to celebrate a year of work during 2018/19 that concludes with this conference and then starts 2019/20 with the same great event too!

Yesterday, the team was pleased to support the Going Gold event at the Senedd, led and facilitated by Willow Holloway, Vice Chair of Disability Wales and founder of the Autism Women's Network. It was a really positive event and having had the opportunity to look at the Senedd, autistic people presented their experiences to an audience of autistic people, politicians and professionals. It was really good by all accounts. The National Autism team was pleased to launch the consultation around its Engagement and Participation Strategy and invited people to respond to this key piece of work. Since joining the team as interim leads, Wendy Thomas and Sara Harvey have been committed to engagement with autistic people and parents and carers across Wales. The strategy is part of that, and I would encourage you to have a look at it and respond to it.

I do hope you continue to enjoy the conference. I for one, am looking forward to hearing Jules Robertson's presentation and insights. I don't watch Holby City very often but I am sure many of you are do and I understand that the BBC have done a fabulous job in conveying the challenges autistic people face in work and in their daily lives in a real and non-patronising way. You'll notice that Jules is with Gemma Smith, his "creative enabler" – what a fantastic job eh? And a fantastic title... I hear most of the National Autism Team are now making the case for a Creative Enabler in the office!

So with no further ado, please welcome Jules Robertson and Gemma Smith.