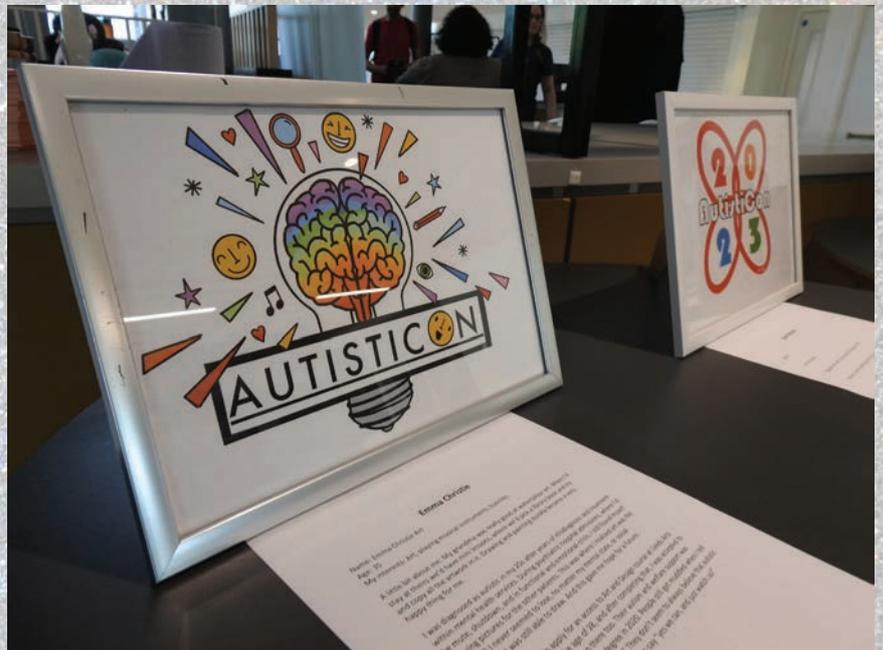
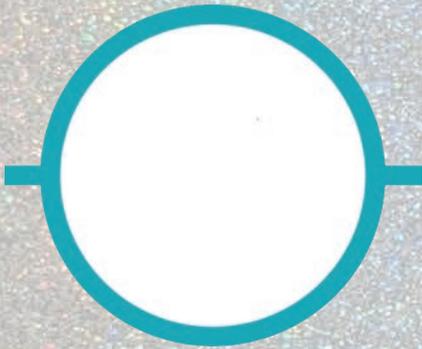
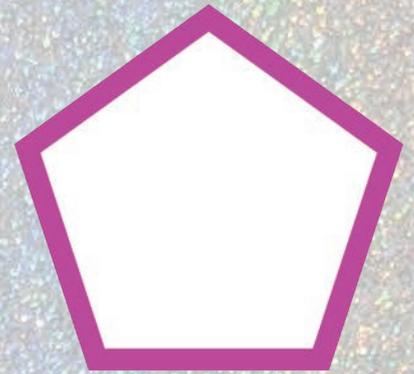


A U T I S T I C O N 2023

A Leeds Autism Event



Impact Report



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About Autisticon



What is AutistiCon?

AutistiCon is a FREE annual event which aims to educate, enlighten and share what it really means to be autistic.

The event hosts guest speakers, information stalls and activities, as well as performances and artworks created by autistic people.

We believe that as a free, open to all, autism convention, AutistiCon is a genuinely innovative and unique experience.

Who is the event for?

First and foremost, AutistiCon exists to serve the autistic community, but anyone with an interest in neurodiversity is welcome.

The event caters for autistic people, families and carers, professionals, business leaders, or anyone with an interest in finding out more about autism and what it means to be autistic.

AutistiCon provides information for people at all stages of life, so is relevant to both adults and children.

As well as being a place to learn, the event serves as an opportunity for autistic people to find like-minded people, and to provide information on the services and support networks that are available in our region.



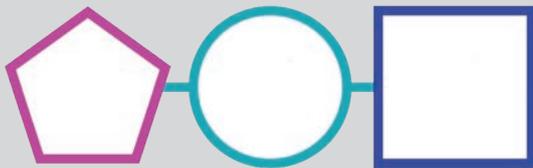
Where did it happen?

AutistiCon 2023 took place at Leeds Playhouse, and we've already booked the same venue for AutistiCon 2024.

After visiting a number of different venues, we chose Leeds Playhouse due to its attention to accessibility, central location, and great public transport links.

The venue provided excellent value for money, with friendly staff who were happy to help at every stage.

In 2024, we hope to hire more space in the Playhouse so we can offer an even better experience to attendees.



Who organises AutistiCon?

AutistiCon is organised by a steering group, which is made up of people and organisations who are dedicated to helping improve opportunities for autistic people. The group is made up of a mix of autistic people, professionals who work in the field of autism, and parent / carers.

Steering group members are not paid for organising the event and either volunteer their time, or incorporate meetings into their busy schedules.



AutistiCon: A Truly Inclusive Event

Accessibility: the venue

Leeds Playhouse is part of the 'Ramps on the Moon' consortium, making theatre accessible for all audiences.

They have a range of accessible facilities, including:

- Electric wheelchair accessible lifts to all floors
- 8 accessible toilets, a changing place and family cubicles
- 8 accessible wheelchair spaces in both the Quarry and Courtyard theatres (more usually available on request), and accessible spaces available in the Bramall Rock Void
- Transfer seats with removable arms and an in-house wheelchair available to borrow by prior arrangement through Box Office
- 8 level access parking spaces on Playhouse Square, run by Leeds City Council
- Hearing loop in the Box Office, Bar and Front Room Cafe. Meeting rooms have portable hearing loops. The venue offers an assisted hearing and amplification service.
- Low counters in the bars, café and Box Office
- Support dogs are very welcome





Accessibility: the event

In addition to the excellent facilities offered by Leeds Playhouse, the AutistiCon organisers put additional access arrangements in place to ensure that the event specifically caters for autistic and neurodivergent people:

- Making the event a 'drop-in' so people can dip in and out as they wish
- Soundproof quiet room with fidget toys, and a second quiet room upstairs
- Easy-read venue map
- Signage designed to be accessible for neurodivergent people
- Social interaction 'traffic light' badges
- A team of autistic and neurodivergent volunteers to help people find their way round the venue, and put people at ease

AutistiCon: A Truly Inclusive Event

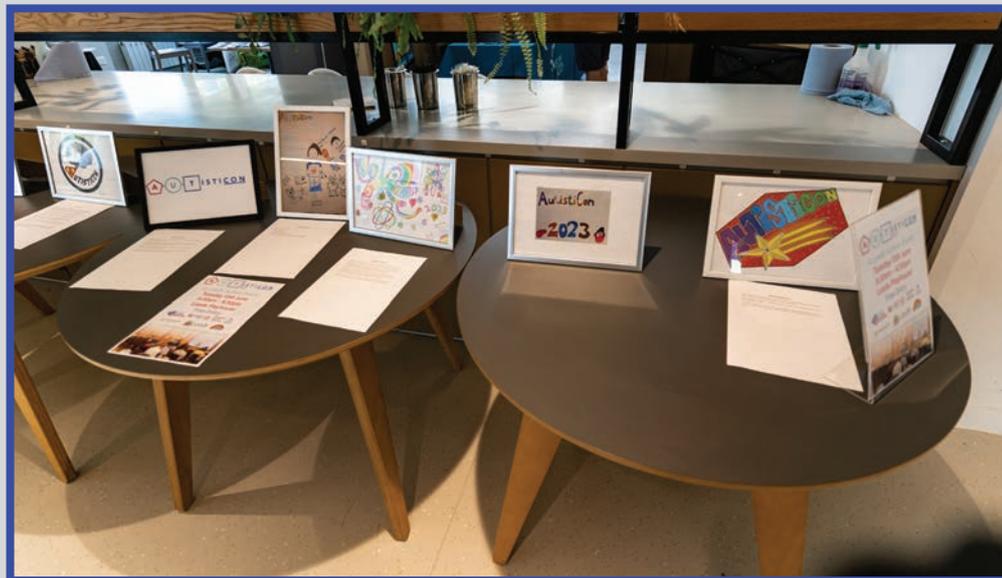
Inclusion: involving the autistic community

It is important to us that autistic people are at the very centre of AutistiCon, so we believe it is essential to gather their views as part of our event planning.

While we try our best to make the event as inclusive as possible, we feel that there are always ways to improve, so we gather feedback throughout and following the event to help ensure we're listening and responding to the people we aim to serve.

Autisticon is hosted by an autistic person, and the majority of people who speak at the event are, themselves, autistic.





Inclusion: choosing the look



In the run up to AutistiCon 2023, the steering group felt it was time for a re-brand after the event was formerly known as 'Bigger and Better in Leeds', and then briefly in 2021 as 'The Leeds Autism Show'. We wanted an eye-catching name, which summed up what the event is all about, so we asked people to put names forward in our pre-event survey. The AutistiCon name was put forward by Eli Smith, a member of the Leeds Autism AIM team, poet, and campaigner, and we thought it was perfect!

We also held a competition to design the AutistiCon logo, and received some fantastic entries which we displayed at the event. It was a difficult decision, but in the end, Barbra Barnes' design was chosen as the winner. Barbra is a member / volunteer at Leeds Autism Services, and gives talks to businesses and public services on how to improve accessibility for autistic people.

Feedback

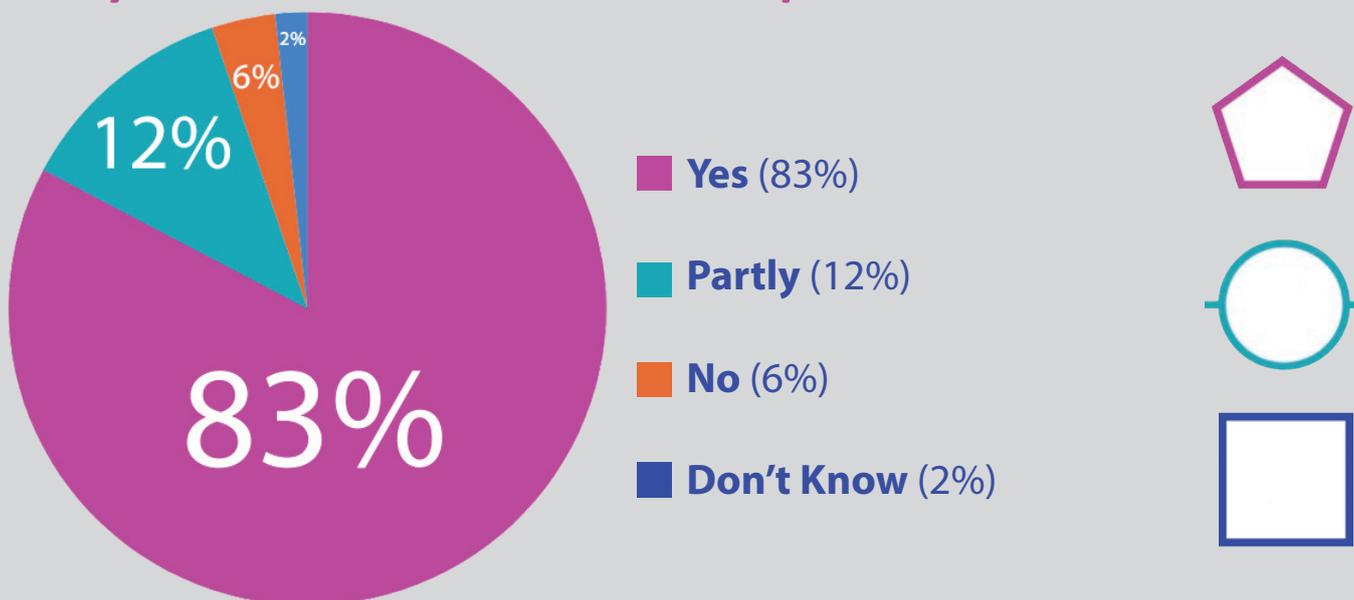
What did people get from the event?

It is important to us that autistic people are at the very centre of AutistCon, so we believe it is essential to gather their views as part of our event planning.

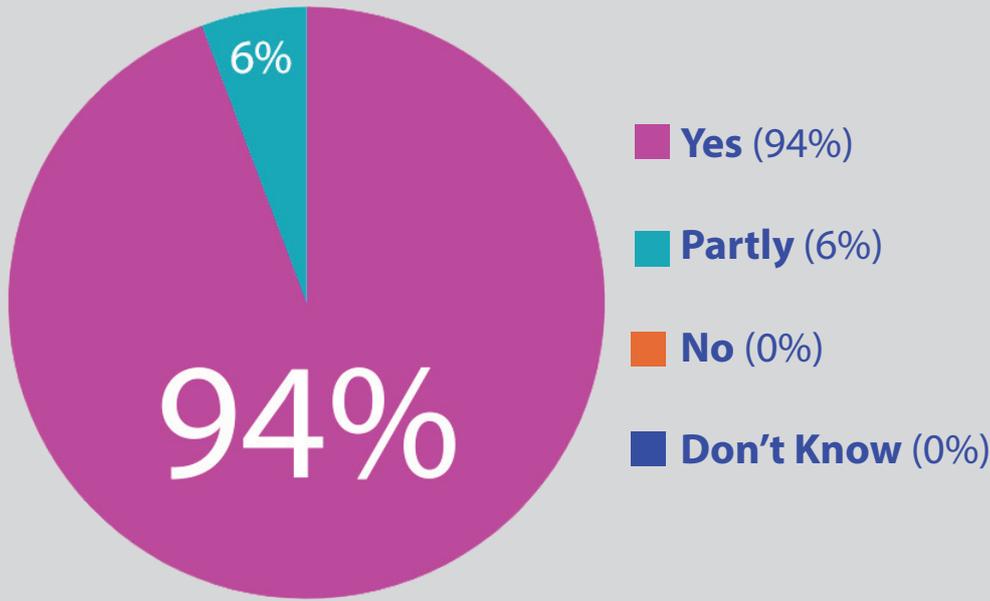
We have several autistic / neurodivergent people who sit on the AutistiCon steering group, and we send out surveys during planning to find out which topics autistic people want to see covered at the event. This helps us to ensure that we can book guest speakers and stall-holder which really meet the needs of the community.

While we try our best to make the event as inclusive as possible, we feel that there are always ways to improve, so we gather feedback throughout and following the event to help ensure we're listening and responding to the people we aim to serve... here's what people had to say*:

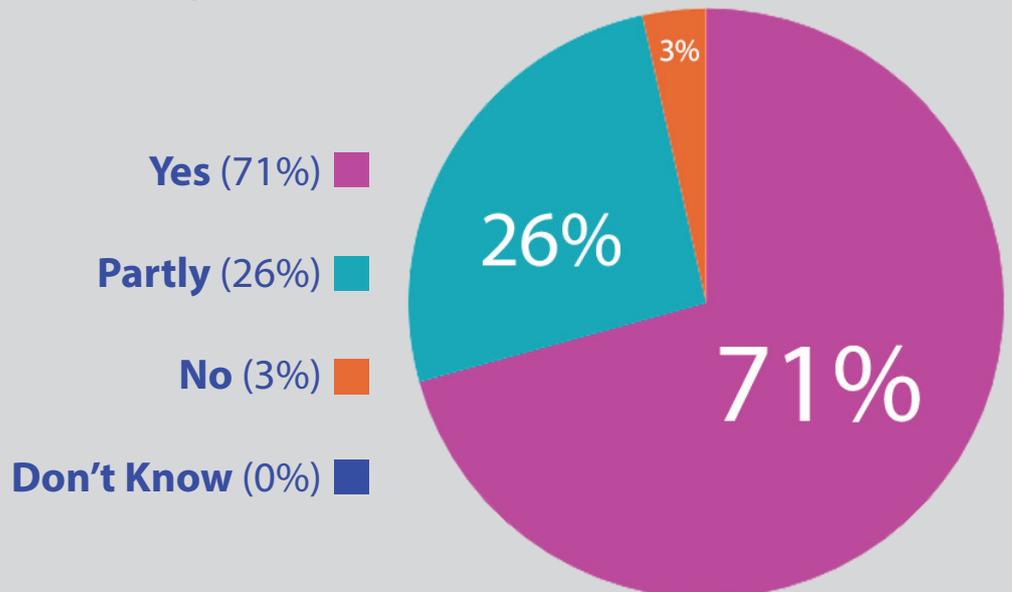
Did you think the event was helpful?



Did you think the talks were useful? **



Did you think the venue was suitable?



Overall, how would you rate the event?



*503 people attended the event, and 58 of them responded to our survey. % shown are rounded to the closest decimal point

**24 respondents said they did not attend any talks, so are not included in these figures

Feedback: Survey Comments

“Excellent event! Having organisations, charities, and the DWP there made it well rounded, well informed, and diverse. We found all the information and help we needed”



“There was a great mixture of organisations and some that were new to me”

“I just want to say how much I enjoyed this. The event was a very special experience for me. It was extremely cathartic to hear other people’s stories and feel included. Thanks so much for making it happen!”

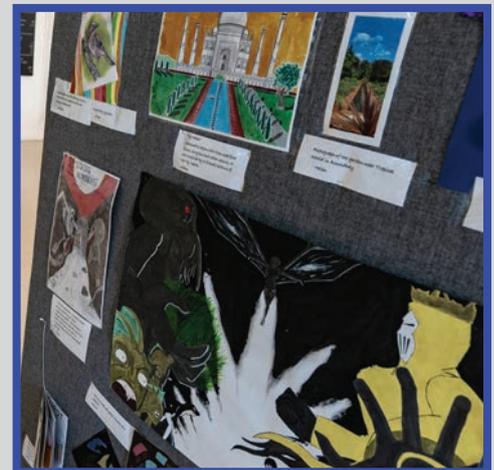


“I really enjoyed the talk from the man that was late diagnosed as it resonated with my experience deeply.”

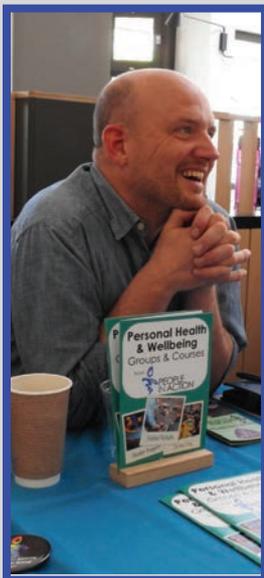
“It was good to see a range of organisations from across Leeds and the wider region covering different age groups and needs.”



“Excellent that there were plenty of helpers around to answer queries. I liked the system with the coloured badges”



“ I enjoyed the event and thought it was great. I would recommend it others”



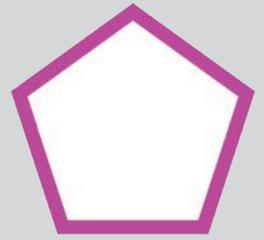
“It was brilliant to see an event like this; not seen anything like it before and it was really helpful and encouraging to see. People were so friendly and helpful, I really enjoyed my time there and made lots of contacts”

“It was good to hear about other people’s problems and how they are trying to solve them”



AutistiCon 2023 Stallholders

AssistiV CIC
Live Well Leeds
Connect in the North/Through The Maze
DWP
Engage Leeds
Fidget Turtles
Forum Central
Healthwatch Leeds
Journey of You
Laura Hellfield, Neurodivergent Nurse Consulting
Leeds Autism Diagnostic Service
Leeds Autism Services
Leeds Involving People (LIP)
Leeds Safeguarding Adults Board
Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust
Leeds Trinity University
Lighthouse Futures Trust





Little Hiccups
Live Well Leeds
LYPFT - COMIC Research
MHLDA/Touchstone: West Yorkshire Neurodiversity Review
nunu
People in Action
People Matters, Leeds
Pinc College
Prince's Trust
Purple Patch Arts
Pyramid
Reed in Partnership
Specialist Autism Services
The Advonet Group - Leeds Autism AIM/Yorkshire Autism AIM
The Endorphins Group
West Yorkshire Combined Authority

AutistiCon 2023: The Speakers

The host: Michael Duffy

Michael is an autistic Leeds resident who is a member at Leeds Autism Services, where he also volunteers. Michael helps with employee induction and also visits businesses, schools and public services to share his experiences of being autistic and to promote equal rights and inclusion for autistic people. Michael also works as an autism accessibility consultant for Community Integrated Care (CIC).



Paul Davies

Paul is an autistic accredited autism trainer and instructor, working full time within a national autism specialist charity organisation. He received his diagnosis late in life and has spent his career working within a range of rights and equality projects. Paul has delivered sessions for a wide range of organisations focussed on autism and trauma informed care.

Mandy Craven

Mandy is the parent of a 23 year old who was diagnosed as autistic aged 3. After struggling with mental health issues she came to realise she was autistic herself, and after a 10 year battle she eventually got her diagnosis. Mandy works for People Matters where she co-ordinates the wellbeing project and one of the outreach services. Mandy advocates for equal employment opportunities for autistic people and was involved with Leeds ABC, a family support group, for 14 years.



Kate Dean

Kate is autistic and in 2020 set up Enable Disability & Inclusion Consultants. Her work involves identifying appropriate adjustments and developing strategies that allow people to work to their strengths. Kate works across a wide range of disabilities and long-term conditions, but specialises in neurodiversity, mental health, and hidden disabilities.



Ronnie Pinder

Ronnie is an autistic clinician and works as a coach and peer mentor with a neurodevelopmental service, where he provides post diagnostic support for autistic adults. He received his own autism diagnosis in early 2015 and before becoming a clinician he spent a number of years as a public speaker, autism consultant and trainer. Ronnie is married and two of his children are also autistic.



Dr. Connor Davidson

Dr Connor Davidson is a consultant psychiatrist, and clinical lead of the Leeds Autism Diagnostic Service. He was appointed Autism Champion for the Royal College of Psychiatrists in May 2021. The focus of this work is on improving autism awareness and training for psychiatrists. He chairs the College cross-faculty autism group and sits on the NHS England national autism strategy steering group.



AutistiCon: Funding and the Future

AutistiCon 2023 was funded through donations kindly made to Leeds Autism Services but, unfortunately, the charity does not currently raise enough money each year to fund the event in the long-term. We are looking for grants, donations, or partnerships, to help ensure this important and much needed event continues for as long as it is needed, and can retain its status as a free-to-access event.

The event forms an essential part of the network which is helping to make Leeds one of the best places in the country for autistic people to grow up and live in. Through bringing autistic voices and support services together under one roof, while showcasing the talents of local autistic people, we believe AutistiCon exceeds its aims of educating, enlightening and sharing what it really means to be autistic.

AutistiCon is *the* place where people can find out where they can get help, get advice on how to navigate often complex routes to support, and, perhaps most importantly, find acceptance, inclusion and opportunities to network with other members of the autistic community.



Providing a central event which helps people to find vital support, can lead to better opportunities and outcomes for autistic people and their families / carers, including:

- Improved access to healthcare and preventative medicine
- Improved access to education and better education outcomes
- Better access to early mental health interventions
- Better employment opportunities, and increased job retention

AutistiCon also provides opportunities for autistic individuals to develop their skills, confidence and opportunities by:

- Providing a space where they feel understood and included
- Giving people the opportunity to attend a conference type event where their accessibility needs are catered for
- Giving them the opportunity to try event volunteering
- Opening up opportunities for making connections and forming networks
- Helping to ensure autistic residents feel valued by the city

AutistiCon 2023 cost under £5000 to put on, which the organisers feel offers great value to the city; with over 500 attendees, that's less than £10 per head!

This money isn't used to pay any salaries, and goes towards the cost of venue hire, expenses for guest speakers, and the cost of materials. The event is marketed entirely by the steering group members through their networks.

Autism diagnosis continues to rise year-on-year, so our aim is to continue running the event for as long as we need to promote autism inclusion, and help reduce pressure on public services by ensuring autistic people in the Leeds area are well supported. If you think you can help us to fund future AutistiCon events, please contact danielle.furness@leedsautism.org.uk

Thank you!



A **U** **T** **I** **S** **T** **I** **C** **O** **N**