

**NOW**

**THAT'S WHAT  
I CALL AUTISM**

**2025**

**EVENT REPORT**



**2nd April 2025**



**NORFOLK  
AUTISM  
PARTNERSHIP**

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## 1. Executive Summary

*Now That's What I Call Autism 2025* was a one-day celebration of autistic identity, creativity, and community, held on **Wednesday 2nd April 2025** at **The Forum, Norwich**, as part of Autism Acceptance Week. The event was coordinated by the **Norfolk Autism Partnership**, in collaboration with **ASD Helping Hands**, and supported by a range of organisations, individuals, and volunteers across the county.

The event brought together autistic people, families, professionals, and the wider community to engage with powerful panel discussions, enjoy performances by autistic artists, explore a vibrant Makers Market, and connect with support services through a range of information stalls. Over the course of the day, attendees also had access to inclusive and sensory-friendly spaces, interactive activities, and an online portal to extend the reach of the event.

The core aim of the event was to create an inclusive, celebratory space where autistic people could take the lead in telling their stories, showcasing their talents, and connecting with others. Through a mixture of in-person and digital engagement, the event reached a broad audience and succeeded in delivering meaningful conversations and uplifting experiences.

This report provides an overview of what took place, who was involved, the feedback received, lessons learnt, and a summary of budget and finances — offering a full picture of the impact *Now That's What I Call Autism 2025* has had across Norfolk's autistic community.

## 2. Why Did We Do This?

*Now That's What I Call Autism 2025* was developed as a response to a recognised need within the autistic community for inclusive, celebratory, and empowering spaces. The event aimed to shift the conversation from “awareness” to “acceptance,” creating a platform led by autistic people, for autistic people. It was timed to take place during **Autism Acceptance Week 2025** and positioned as a flagship event for Norfolk, reflecting the growing movement toward neurodiversity-affirming practice and community engagement.

The event was designed not only as a celebration, but as a practical and emotional resource — offering autistic people an opportunity to share their experiences, showcase their work, access services, and connect with others in an environment built around accessibility, respect, and pride.

### 2.1 Aims and objectives of the event

The core aims of *Now That's What I Call Autism 2025* were to:

Celebrate and amplify autistic identity, creativity, and lived experience

Provide autistic-led platforms for discussion, performance, and enterprise

Foster inclusive community spaces that feel safe, affirming, and empowering

Strengthen connections between individuals, families, organisations, and services

Support the wider public to better understand autism from the perspective of autistic people

Through a dynamic mix of panels, performances, a Makers Market, information stalls and interactive areas, the event brought these aims to life in a way that was community-centred and celebratory.

## 2.2 Strategic alignment with the Norfolk All-Age Autism Strategy

The event directly supported the aims of the **Norfolk All-Age Autism Strategy 2024–2029**, particularly the commitments to:

- **Promote understanding and acceptance** of autism across Norfolk
- **Increase visibility** of autistic people's contributions in all aspects of life
- **Involve autistic individuals in shaping services and initiatives**
- Create opportunities for autistic people to be **leaders in their own communities**

By providing a platform for autistic speakers, performers, and creators, the event modelled these principles in action. Additionally, the event promoted collaborative working between statutory and voluntary organisations, further embedding the strategy's goals into community practice.

## 2.3 The need for spaces that celebrate autistic identity, creativity, and community

Many events and services aimed at autistic people focus on needs, deficits, or support. While those are essential, there's a growing recognition of the importance of **celebrating strengths, identity, and culture** within the autistic community.

This event responded to that need by creating an environment where autistic people could:

Be proud of who they are

Share and celebrate their work, stories, and ideas

Connect with others in meaningful, identity-affirming ways

The overwhelmingly positive feedback from both participants and attendees confirmed that events like this not only benefit individuals but also contribute to broader cultural change — fostering greater empathy, inclusion, and belonging in Norfolk and beyond.

## 3. Who Was Involved?

The success of *Now That's What I Call Autism 2025* was the result of collaborative planning, autistic-led input, and widespread community support. The event was designed and delivered with co-production at its core, ensuring autistic people and families were involved not just in participation, but in shaping the entire vision.

### **3.1 Coordinating partners**

The event was led by the Norfolk Autism Partnership, with event delivery coordinated by ASD Helping Hands. Oversight and design were driven by a Task and Finish Group, made up of autistic adults and parent/carers who are active members of the Norfolk Autism Partnership Board. This group played a central role in shaping the event through a co-productive approach, ensuring that accessibility, representation, and celebration of identity remained front and centre.

Through regular meetings, planning sessions, and reviews, the Task and Finish Group guided every stage — from programming and outreach to inclusive design and messaging. Their leadership ensured the event was not just about autistic people, but *by* and *for* autistic people and their families.

### **3.2 Contributors: Speakers, performers, volunteers, vendors, stallholders**

A wide and diverse group of contributors brought the event to life:

- 7 speakers took part in panel discussions, all either autistic or closely connected through lived experience.
- 5 performers were scheduled, with 4 taking to the stage on the day (1 was unfortunately unable to attend due to illness).
- 12 makers hosted stalls in the Makers Market, many of whom were autistic creators or microbusiness owners.
- 15 information stalls provided attendees with access to resources, services and organisations across Norfolk.
- 8 volunteers supported the event on the day — the majority of whom were autistic. Volunteers helped with setup, wayfinding, and ensuring an inclusive, sensory-aware experience for all attendees.

Every contributor added unique value to the event and played a key role in ensuring it was welcoming, empowering, and identity-affirming.

### **3.3 Community and organisational supporters**

The event was supported by a wide network of organisations and community partners. These included:

- Healthwatch Norfolk
- Autism Anglia
- Norfolk and Waveney MIND
- The BUILD Charity
- Family Voice Norfolk

- Thornage Hall
- DRAGONS (Norfolk and Norwich SEND Association)
- New-U
- The Life Skills Mentoring Academy
- S&L Safe Cut Kits
- Lingwood Care Farm
- Norfolk Autism Partnership Board organisations
- And many others

These organisations provided stalls, promotional support, or participated in discussions, helping to connect attendees with information, resources and community links.

### **3.4 Acknowledgements of planning team and funders**

Special thanks go to **Laura, Joseph, and Trevor**, who were instrumental in coordinating logistics, accessibility, and on-the-day support. Their commitment to the event and the community was key to its success.

**No additional external funding was received or requested for this event.** All costs were covered through the existing **Norfolk Autism Partnership Board grant allocation**. Due to time constraints, seeking external funding was not feasible for this year's event, though it is acknowledged that such funding could enhance future delivery.

In-kind support from organisations and voluntary partners was also essential — helping us deliver a full programme without additional financial overheads.

## **4. What Happened?**

*Now That's What I Call Autism 2025* brought together individuals, families, organisations, and allies to celebrate autistic identity, creativity, and community. The event was designed to be inclusive, vibrant, and meaningful — with a strong focus on accessibility and co-production. Through a carefully curated programme, attendees had the opportunity to learn, connect, express themselves, and explore services in a supportive and celebratory environment.

### **4.1 Event overview**

The event was held on Wednesday, 2nd April 2025, from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM at The Forum, Norwich — a central, accessible venue well known for hosting inclusive community events. The location offered a mix of indoor and public-facing space, allowing for footfall from passers-by while maintaining a structured and safe layout for attendees.

The Event was spread over three areas of the Forum:

- **The Atrium** – Which housed our Information stalls and Makers Market
- **The Gallery** - Performance and display space
- **The Auditorium** – Where our speaker panels were held

#### 4.2 Programme summary (panels, performances, interactive elements, stalls)

The day included a rich and varied programme designed to reflect the diversity and strength of the autistic community:

- **Panel Discussions:**  
Three themed panels featured 7 autistic speakers sharing personal insights and experiences:
  - *Intersectionality: The Overlapping Identities of Autistic People* (11:30)
  - *Mental Health and Autism: Navigating Support and Stigma* (13:00)
  - *Thriving as an Autistic Person: Strengths and Realities* (14:00)
- **Live Performances:**  
Autistic performers showcased music, spoken word and poetry throughout the day, drawing audiences and celebrating creativity.
- **Makers Market:**  
12 stalls featured autistic creators and small businesses, selling handmade crafts, art, gifts and more.
- **Information Stalls:**  
15 organisations and services hosted stands offering resources and advice for autistic individuals, families, and professionals.
- **Interactive Zones:**  
Activities included a live *Affirmation Wall*, *Artism* drop-in art workshops, and the *Just One Thing* wellbeing message board.

#### 4.3 Attendance numbers (approximate breakdown by type)

- Estimated total attendees: 250–300
- Makers Market customers: Approx. 260 footfall across the day
- Panel audience (per session): average 20 per panel, with some variation
- Information stall visitors: Approx 250 visitors
- Online portal visitors (first week): 174 unique views and interactions

In addition to those who attended with intent, the open-plan venue attracted passers-by who engaged with market stalls and performances, helping raise broader awareness.

#### 4.4 Accessibility provisions and inclusive features

Accessibility was a central design principle of *Now That's What I Call Autism 2025*. The event was structured to ensure that all attendees, regardless of their needs, could participate fully and comfortably. Key accessibility features included:

- **Step-Free Access:** The Forum provided step-free access throughout the venue, facilitating easy movement for individuals using wheelchairs or mobility aids.
- **Hearing Loops:** Hearing loops were available in panel rooms to assist attendees with hearing impairments.
- **Accessible Toilets and Changing Facilities:** On-site facilities were equipped to accommodate attendees requiring accessible restrooms and changing areas.
- **Quiet Areas:** Recognising that events can be overwhelming, designated quiet areas were established
  - **MIND Rest Hub:** Located a short walk from the venue
  - **Quiet Area Next to the Auditorium:** Located close to event activities but away from crowds, providing a tranquil space for respite.
- **Breakout Cards:** To discreetly indicate the need for assistance or a break, breakout cards were available at the Event Information stand near the Maker's Market. Attendees could show these cards to event guides, who would then direct them to a quiet area or provide support as needed.
- **Volunteer Support:** Volunteers were stationed throughout the venue to assist with navigation, provide information, and support attendees in accessing various event features.
- **Pre-Event Accessibility Information:** An accessibility guide was published ahead of the event, detailing transport links, parking options, and on-site facilities to help attendees plan their visit effectively.

These measures were implemented to create an inclusive and supportive environment, ensuring that all participants could engage with the event in a manner that respected their individual needs and preferences.

#### 4.5 Online portal and hybrid elements

To extend the reach of the event, a dedicated online portal was launched at:  
<https://www.norfolkautismpartnership.org.uk/now-thats-what-i-call-autism-25/>

The portal included:

- A full event schedule
- Introductions to speakers, performers, and market vendors
- Accessibility information



- Interactive digital versions of activities such as the *Affirmation Wall*

Recordings of panel sessions have been added, increasing accessibility for those who couldn't attend in person and ensuring lasting impact.

## **5. Feedback Received**

Feedback was gathered from speakers, information stallholders, and Makers Market vendors via digital forms circulated after the event. Responses provided valuable insights into the overall impact of the day, how well the event met its objectives, and areas for potential development. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many participants highlighting how empowering and inclusive the experience felt.

### **5.1 Summary of key themes**

- **Overall Experience and Value**

Most respondents rated the event as highly worthwhile and beneficial, both personally and professionally. Contributors felt the event successfully celebrated autistic identity and offered meaningful opportunities for connection and visibility.

- **Celebrating Autistic Identity**

Speakers, vendors and stallholders all praised the event's focus on autistic strengths, self-expression, and lived experience. The programme was described as affirming and empowering, and many noted that it was refreshing to attend an event centred around autistic voices.

- **Organisation and Communication**

The majority of contributors found the event well-organised, with clear pre-event communication and support. Some suggested minor improvements, such as better signposting and clearer maps or layout guides for visitors.

- **Accessibility and Comfort**

Attendees appreciated the availability of quiet spaces, breakout cards, and volunteers. A few respondents suggested greater visibility of accessible resources (e.g., maps, signage) could improve future events.

- **Suggestions for Improvement**

Common suggestions included:

- Extending the event's duration
- Hosting panel discussions in a more central space for visibility

- More structured promotion of performers and market stalls throughout the day
- More space allocated around the stalls for accessibility, seating and resources.

Despite these suggestions, most respondents expressed interest in being involved again in the future.

- **Community Impact**

The event fostered a sense of belonging and pride. Many respondents described the day as uplifting and emotional, particularly those who were given a platform to speak or sell for the first time. The balance of positive stories and honest discussion was appreciated and noted as a highlight.

## 5.2 Feedback Quotes from Participants

“I really appreciated how safe I felt and how welcomed I was... it was a real pleasure to perform and feel like I was being truly seen for who I am.”

– *Performer Feedback (Kyle Davy)*

“Lovely to be part of such a well-run and positive event. It was great to be in a space that was so welcoming and celebratory of autistic identity.”

– *Information Stall Feedback*

“We felt the event was well organised and that we had plenty of information provided beforehand to help prepare.”

– *Makers Market Vendor Feedback*

“The team were amazing and very helpful – such a warm and positive atmosphere throughout the whole day.”

– *Speaker Feedback*

“Brilliant event. Great turnout, friendly, welcoming, and lots of variety. Thank you for having us.”

– *Information Stall Feedback*

## 6. Lessons Learnt

Reflecting on *Now That's What I Call Autism 2025*, it is clear that the event was a success in celebrating autistic identity and bringing people together in a welcoming and inclusive environment. The feedback gathered from speakers, stallholders, and vendors highlighted numerous strengths as well as constructive insights that will help shape future events. This section outlines what worked particularly well, where challenges arose, and how we can improve and grow for a possible event in 2026.

## 6.1 What worked well

- The event delivered on its aim to create an affirming and safe space for autistic people to share their experiences and talents.
- Contributors consistently praised the welcoming atmosphere, smooth coordination, and helpful communication.

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*“The team were amazing and very helpful – such a warm and positive atmosphere throughout the whole day.” – Speaker Feedback*

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- Quiet areas, breakout cards, and accessibility planning were well received and used by attendees who appreciated the sensory-aware environment.
- Participants felt that their contributions were valued and that autistic voices were genuinely centred throughout.

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*“I really appreciated how safe I felt and how welcomed I was... it was a real pleasure to perform and feel like I was being truly seen for who I am.” – Performer Feedback*

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## 6.2 Challenges faced

- Due to time constraints and reliance on existing grant funding, no additional external funding or sponsorship was secured. While this kept the event resourceful and efficient, future events may benefit from enhanced budgets for materials, accessibility enhancements, or wider promotion.
- Managing crowd flow within the Makers Market and performance areas proved challenging at peak times.
- Some stallholders noted that public footfall dropped during periods when talks or performances were taking place, highlighting the challenge of balancing engagement across multiple event zones.

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*“Footfall seemed to drop around panel times, possibly as people were drawn into those spaces — more signage or promotion during these times could help.” – Information Stall Feedback*

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## 6.3 Suggestions from feedback

Feedback collected across all participant groups offered helpful suggestions for future improvements:

- Clearer event layout and directional signage throughout the venue

- A printed or digital map showing where stalls, quiet areas, and performance spaces are located
- More space given around exhibits and stands to allow easier movement and comfort levels for visitors and guests.
- Increased central visibility of the stage or panel areas to draw more public engagement

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*“Brilliant event. Great turnout, friendly, welcoming, and lots of variety. Thank you for having us.” – Information Stall Feedback*

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- More dedicated promotion of individual performers, speakers, and makers throughout the day

#### **6.4 Opportunities for 2026 improvements (e.g., layout, signage, promotion)**

Based on the feedback and reflections from the delivery team, several opportunities have been identified for future events:

- Enhanced signage and venue mapping, including visual, sensory-friendly guides and clearer wayfinding
- Centralise key elements such as the stage or panels to increase visibility and audience numbers
- Increased pre-event spotlight features (on social media or signage) to introduce stallholders and performers in advance
- Apply for external funding or sponsorship to expand the event’s reach and accessibility offer
- Introduce structured promotion throughout the day, e.g., clearer timed announcements or printed schedules for attendees.

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*“A map or programme leaflet would have been useful so visitors knew what was on and where.” – Vendor Feedback*

*“I think next time the performances and talks could be more central to help more people see and hear them.” – Speaker Feedback*

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Despite these minor challenges, there was a strong appetite across all groups to return in 2026 — with participants consistently expressing that they felt proud, welcomed, and empowered.

## **7. Budget and Finances**

The financial approach to *Now That's What I Call Autism 2025* prioritised cost-effectiveness, transparency, and impact. The event was delivered entirely within the allocated budget provided by the Norfolk Autism Partnership Board, with no additional funding or sponsorship sought due to time constraints. Despite this, the event successfully met its objectives through careful planning and the generous support of volunteers and partners.

### **7.1 Total income and funding sources**

- Total income: £2,500.00
- Funding source: Norfolk Autism Partnership Board – allocated grant funds
- Additional income/sponsorship: None (external funding was not pursued due to short lead time)

## 7.2 Key expenditure areas

Expense	Amount
Involvement Fees	£324.55
Venue Hire (Atrium Zone 2)	£252.00
Venue Hire (Atrium Zone 4)	£84.00
Venue Hire (Gallery)	£507.00
Venue Hire (Auditorium)	£222.00
Panellist Contributions	£500.00
Volunteer Expenses	£124.85
T-Shirts (Team/Event Branding)	£175.87
Flyers	£28.25
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£2,218.52</b>

Remaining budget: £281.48

## 7.3 In-kind support

In-kind contributions played a significant role in extending the impact of the event without increasing financial cost. These included:

- Volunteer time for planning, coordination, and on-the-day support
- Social media promotion and web hosting via Norfolk Autism Partnership channels
- Stallholder and performer contributions offered without a fee
- Visual design and accessibility consultation offered informally through partner expertise

## 7.4 Summary of cost-effectiveness and sustainability for future years

The event was delivered under budget while maintaining high-quality programming and accessibility. This demonstrates a model of delivery that is both cost-effective and scalable. For future years, additional external funding (via grants or sponsorships) could allow for:

- Expanded marketing and visibility
- Increased accessibility features (e.g. BSL interpretation, printed guides)
- Enhanced volunteer support (e.g. training, refreshments)

- Professional audiovisual support for live-streaming and recording

Moving forward, securing this additional funding could improve reach and sustainability while maintaining the strong community-led ethos of the event.

## **8. Conclusion and Acknowledgments**

*Now That's What I Call Autism 2025* was a powerful celebration of autistic identity, creativity, and community. Through thoughtful co-production, careful planning, and the dedication of contributors across Norfolk, the event delivered a meaningful and inclusive experience that resonated deeply with those who attended.

From panel discussions and performances to the Makers Market and information stalls, the event provided a platform for autistic voices to be heard, seen, and celebrated. The overwhelmingly positive feedback confirms that the event achieved its aims — offering not just support, but pride, connection, and joy.

This success would not have been possible without the collaborative efforts of the Norfolk Autism Partnership, the Task and Finish Group, ASD Helping Hands, and our wider network of partners and supporters. We would particularly like to acknowledge:

- Our autistic contributors and parent/carers who co-produced the event
- Our volunteers, many of whom are autistic, who gave their time and energy
- The panelists, performers, stallholders, and vendors who brought the space to life
- Our partners and organisations who provided resources, information, and in-kind support
- The Norfolk Autism Partnership Board, for its funding and strategic support
- And the entire planning team — with a special thank you to Laura, Joseph, and Trevor — whose dedication, creativity, and care made this event possible

As we look to the future, the feedback and lessons from this year provide a strong foundation for planning *Now That's What I Call Autism 2026*. We are proud of what we have achieved together, and even more excited about what comes next.