ASPIRE IRELAND
The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland

Stories.
Connections.
Community.

NEWSLETTER

November 2026

This newsletter was made by autistic people, for autistic people and the community

ASPIRE
The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland

IN THIS EDITION

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MADE BY AUTISTIC PEOPLE, FOR AUTISTIC PEOPLE AND THE COMMUNITY

WELCOME

From our CEO

> “ There isn’t one way to participate.

I’ve been looking back at how much has happened across Aspire over the past few months.

We’ve been out meeting people at markets, Pride events and conferences. We held a very successful neurodivergent speed dating night, with lots of interest and a great turnout. We hope to create more opportunities like this in the coming months for people to meet and connect.

Our social groups continue to grow, including the adult 40+ group. Thanks to National Lottery funding, we’ve also started a post diagnostic support group for adults, which has attracted a lot of interest and led to some really insightful chats. We’ve also worked with Autism Services Group on coffee mornings in our Smithfield office and in Wexford, as well as online drop-in clinics. These have given people different ways to come along, ask questions and connect with others.

A grant from the Rosie & Jim Charity & Community Fund made My Life, My Script possible. This new drama programme gives autistic young adults aged 18 to 25 a space to build confidence, express themselves and spend time together.

We’re also delighted to have secured funding from State Street, which will help us provide subsidised counselling, support groups and more opportunities for people to connect through social activities in the year ahead.

Through WorkAbility and Aspire Designs, people have been gaining practical experience and exploring opportunities at their own pace. In our residential service, the last months brought holidays, outings and important personal achievements too.

What stands out to me is that there isn’t one way to participate. For one person, it might be joining a group for the first time; for another, it might be trying a new task or travelling somewhere new. All of those steps matter.

A sincere thank you to our dedicated staff and volunteers for their continued commitment, and to everyone who has taken part, supported our work and helped make others feel welcome.

Linda Blake

Chief Executive Officer

01

IN THIS EDITION

Get involved

Spaces for connection, support and participation.





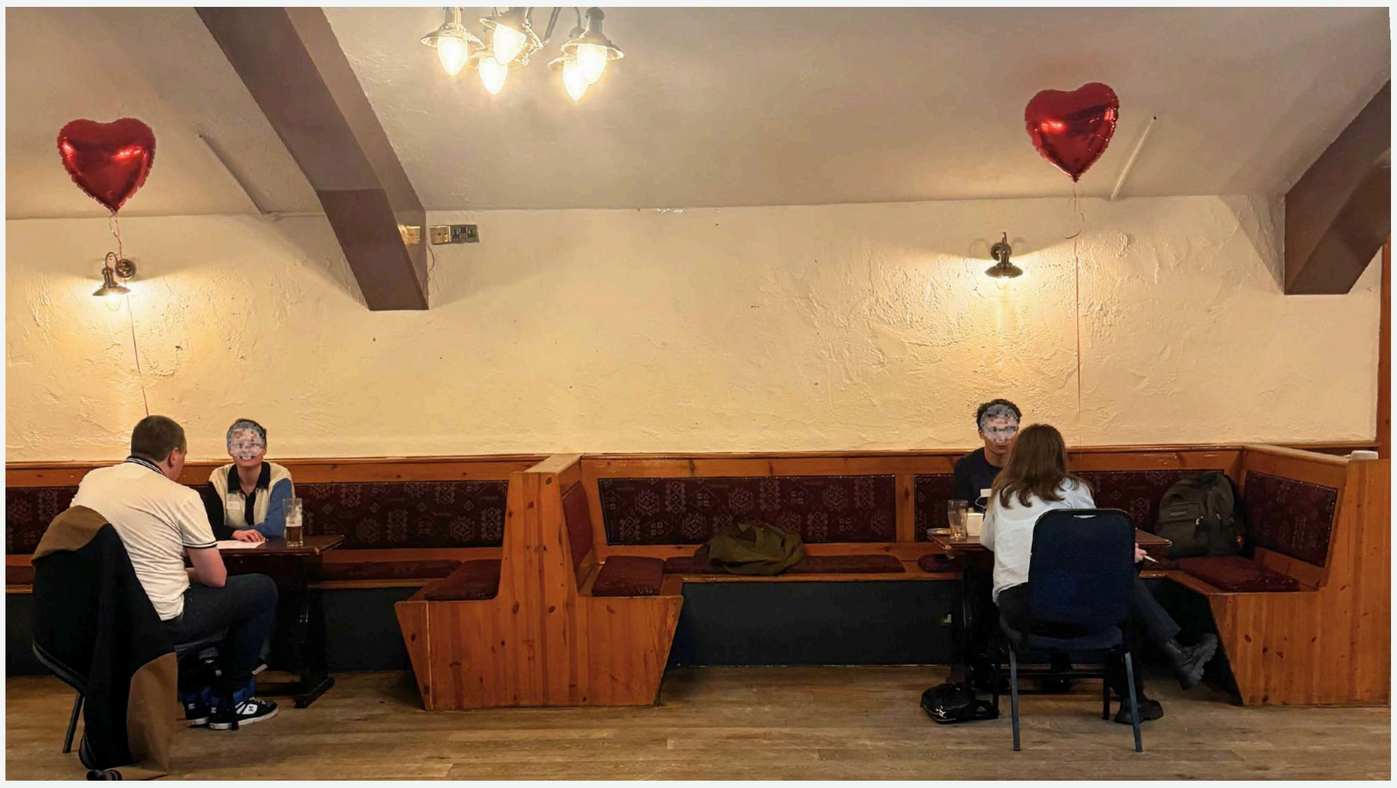




COMMUNITY

Finding connection

Speed dating, coffee and conversation











SPEED DATING

A great night of connection

Aspire’s neurodivergent speed dating event was a great success, attracting lots of interest through our Eventbrite ticket sales and a fantastic turnout on the night. It was lovely to see people meeting, chatting and enjoying the experience together. We received very positive feedback, along with helpful suggestions that will shape how we organise and structure future events. We’ve taken away some valuable learning and look forward to creating more opportunities for people to meet and connect in the coming months.

Speed Dating
for neurodivergent individuals

COFFEE & TALK

Your pace. Your space.

Aspire’s adult social groups continue to offer places to connect at your own pace. Our 40+ group continues to grow, alongside the established 18+ group.

COFFEE & TALK
SOCIAL GROUP
40+

COFFEE & TALK
SOCIAL GROUP
18+

I need this place because I'm in my 50s and there isn't really any other space like this for people my age. *40+ participant*

CLICK FOR SOCIAL GROUP 40+

I've been coming to this group for years and it's become part of my routine. It's one of those things you don't fully appreciate until you imagine it not being there. I honestly can't see myself without it. *18+ participant*

CLICK FOR SOCIAL GROUP 18+

NATIONAL LOTTERY SUPPORT

A welcoming circle after diagnosis

Post-diagnostic & neurodivergent support



You do not need a formal diagnosis to attend.

With support from National Lottery funding, Aspire's **adult post-diagnostic support group** offers a free, calm and welcoming space to connect with others. Facilitated by Lyndsey Redmond, pre-accredited counsellor and psychotherapist, and co-hosted by Aspire CEO Linda Blake, the group has attracted lots of interest and some really insightful conversations. Discussions are guided by participants and what matters to them, including the assessment process, understanding a diagnosis and life afterwards.

You do not need a formal diagnosis to attend: adults who are self-identified or exploring whether they may be autistic are also welcome. To join us, email support@aspireireland.ie and we'll send you the link for the next session.

SUPPORT@ASPIREIRELAND.IE

National Lottery

Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Perimenopause, Menopause & Neurodivergence

Psychoeducation and Support Online Session

Wednesday 16 December 2026 | 11:00 am–12:00 pm | Free to attend



Come and chat about what's going on for you, share experiences and support each other in a safe, welcoming forum.

Perimenopause and menopause can bring significant changes to emotional regulation, sensory sensitivities and energy levels. For neurodivergent women, these changes may feel particularly challenging, sometimes making existing sensory difficulties and features of autistic burnout more pronounced.

We are hosting a free online psychoeducation and support session to explore these experiences, provide understanding and offer a welcoming space for women to connect, share their experiences and feel heard and validated.

Wednesday 16 December 2026 | 11:00 am–12:00 pm | Free online session
For bookings and enquiries:

SUPPORT@ASPIREIRELAND.IE

Focus Together

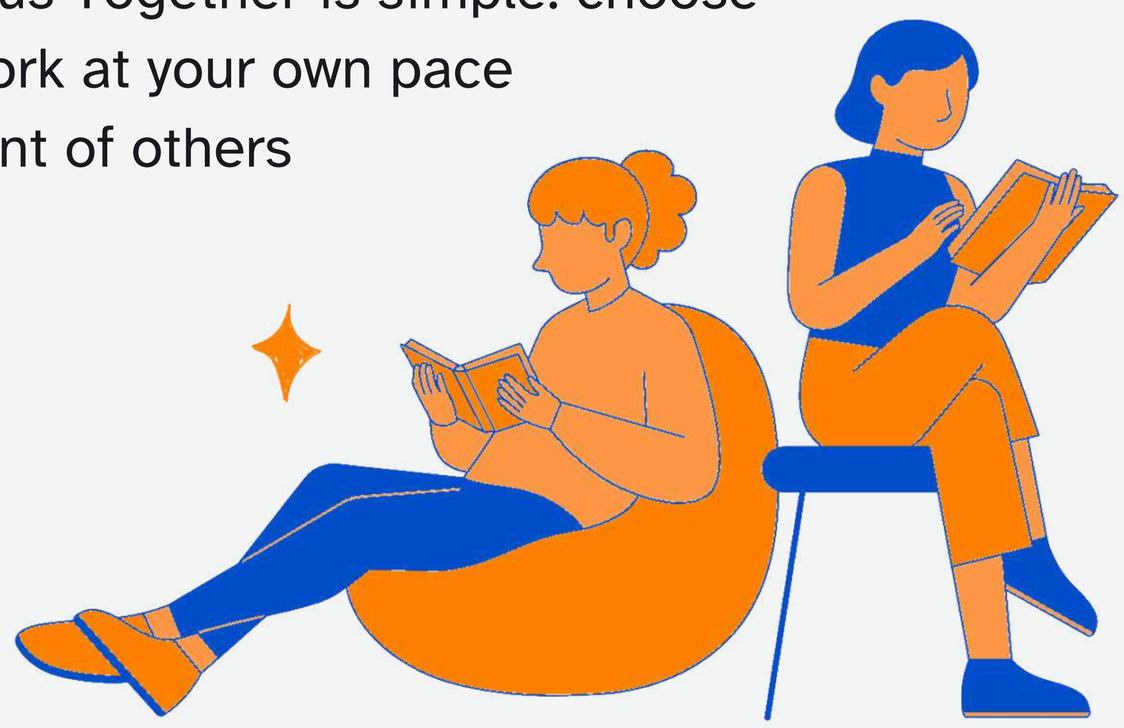
Focusing is easier together

by Aspire Ireland

Coming in 2027

Focus Together is a friendly body-doubling group being planned for 2027, offering a shared space to work on your own tasks alongside others.

For some autistic and ADHD individuals, starting tasks, maintaining focus and managing distractions can require considerable effort. Body doubling offers a supportive environment where people work alongside others, creating gentle structure, motivation and a sense of shared accountability. This can help reduce the overwhelm of getting started, support concentration and make tasks feel more manageable. The idea of Focus Together is simple: choose something you want to focus on, work at your own pace and benefit from the encouragement of others doing the same.



email **steven@aspireireland.ie**
to be included in the waiting list

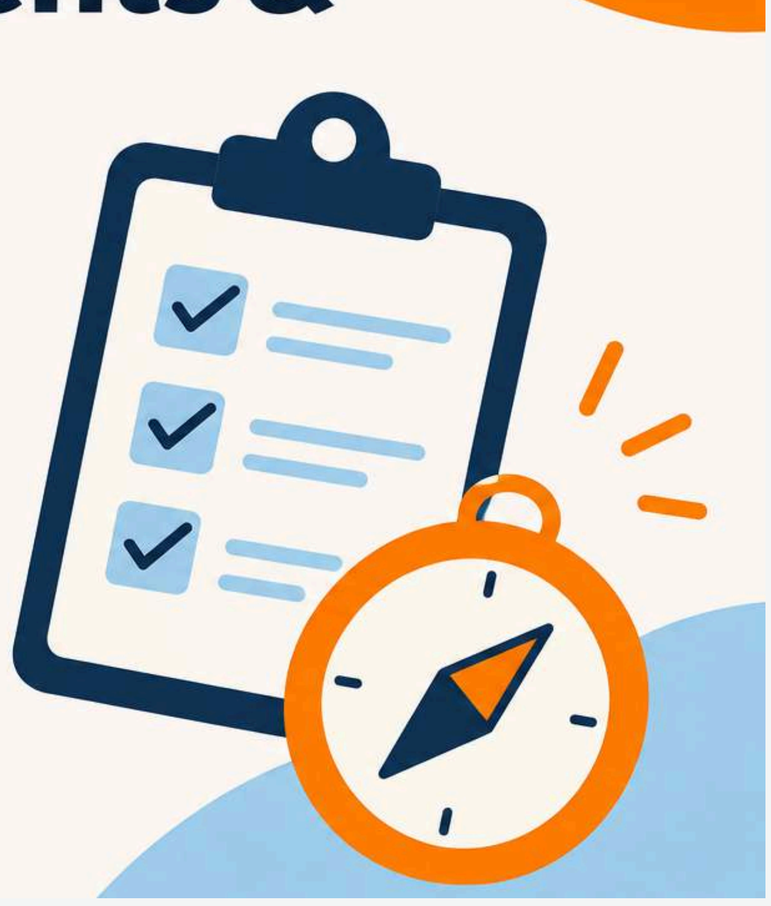
NEW – WAITING LISTS

Private Assessments & Life Coaching

We are now opening our waiting lists for expressions of interest in **private diagnostic assessments and life coaching services.**

If you would like to learn more about these services or register your interest, please contact us at:

support@aspireireland.ie



SUPPORT & LEARNING

Understanding after-school overwhelm

After-school restraint collapse

For Parents Carers & Guardians

After-school restraint collapse can be difficult to understand from the outside.

Lyndsey Redmond describes how some children hold themselves together throughout the school day, then become overwhelmed once they arrive home, where they feel safe enough to stop masking.

Aspire and Autism Services Group offer an online session for parents, carers and guardians. Send an email to support@aspireireland.ie to demonstrate your interest.

SUPPORT@ASPIREIRELAND.IE



ASPIRE
The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland

Autism Services .GROUP

IT EQUIPMENT CALL-OUT

Aspire Ireland is looking for in-kind IT equipment to help us continue our work and support future growth.

We are currently looking for:

- 2 laptops capable of running 3D software
- 2 desktops for daily operations
- 3 monitors, 24-inch or larger
- 3 tablets
- 3 webcams

General peripherals such as power banks, mice, keyboards etc.

We are happy to accept devices **without hard drives** if your business cannot donate equipment with data storage due to GDPR requirements.

Get in touch with us
communications@aspireireland.ie

COMMUNITY NOTICEBOARD

Research opportunities

Two opportunities to participate in research



ICAS COLLEGE

ICAS College study: ADHD and the transition from primary to secondary school.

For more information or to express an interest: support@aspireireland.ie



UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK

UCC research: co-designing resources for autistic mothers and healthcare professionals during the perinatal period.

02

IN THIS EDITION

Organisational updates

New people, conversations and opportunities.



BOARD NEWS

Welcome to the Board, Louise

Louise Domingues | Board Director

Louise Domingues is a psychoanalyst, neuroscience specialist (PUC) and postgraduate economist from Trinity College Dublin, with over 30 years of professional experience and 18 years living and working in Ireland.

Her career spans human development, mental health, organisational leadership and business, with experience across global organisations including Google, Meta and TikTok, as well as the Irish public sector, where she served as Head of Department at the Mental Health Commission. She is the Founder and CEO of the Brazil Ireland Association (BRIA) and Managing Director of the first international unit of RHF Talentos, Brazil's largest HR consultancy and franchise network.

Throughout her career, Louise has trained and supported more than 5,000 professionals and worked across international and multicultural environments spanning more than 20 countries.



My interest in Aspire comes from a long-standing commitment to human development, inclusion and creating environments where people have the opportunity to reach their potential. I believe I can bring a valuable combination of perspectives to the Board: experience in mental health and human behaviour, organisational and people strategy, governance business development and community leadership. Having worked across the private, public and non-profit sectors, I hope to contribute not only to Aspire's strategic direction and governance, but also to its visibility, partnerships, sustainability and long-term growth. I am particularly interested in helping strengthen connections between Aspire, businesses, institutions and Ireland's increasingly diverse communities, while learning from the lived experiences of autistic people and ensuring that their voices remain central to the organisation's work.

Ensuring that autistic voices remain central to Aspire's work

OUT & ABOUT

Aspire in the community

Markets, Pride events and conversations





Throughout the summer and autumn, Aspire has been taking part in markets, Pride events and conferences, meeting people from different communities, sharing our work and learning from their experiences. These events give us opportunities to raise awareness, exchange ideas and build meaningful connections.

Sometimes a simple conversation can lead to a new opportunity, a valuable partnership or someone discovering support they didn't know was available. Being present in the community helps us strengthen these relationships and extend the reach of our programmes, WorkAbility supports and social enterprise.

EUROPEAN ENGAGEMENT

What a study visit leaves behind

Aspire at the ESF+ Committee plenary in Dublin

16
OCTOBER

On 16 October, Linda Blake and Gustavo Lazarin represented Aspire at the ESF+ Committee plenary meeting in Dublin, sharing our experience with European Commission and EU Member State representatives.



Their presentation drew on a September 2025 study visit to Ferme Nos Pilifs in Brussels, where six Irish organisations explored approaches to inclusive employment.



Rather than simply reporting what we saw, we spoke about what came afterwards: practical changes, new relationships and ideas that continue to shape our work.

FOUR LEARNINGS WE SHARED

01 Positive risk-taking

Appropriate support should open up possibilities for skills, confidence and independence.

02 Diversification

We introduced 3D-printed sensory products alongside our autistic artists' greeting cards.

03 Using what we have

Sharing office space has strengthened links with other services and created rental income.

04 Working together

Connections made during the study visit led to collaborations and workplace awareness opportunities.

The presentation received very positive feedback and reinforced the value of knowledge exchange and collaboration across Ireland and Europe.

WORKABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT

Work Your Way

AsIAm & Intreo Autism Job Fair | 22 October 2026

22
OCTOBER 2026

A space to meet.
A chance to connect.

MAYNOOTH / GLENROYAL HOTEL



On 22 October, AsIAm and Intreo hosted Work Your Way, bringing autistic jobseekers, employers and support organisations together to explore opportunities, inclusive recruitment and employment supports

WHAT THE DAY INCLUDED

01 Recruitment showcase

Opportunities to meet employers and discuss inclusive roles.

02 Career workshops

Practical support with CV development and interviews.

03 Employment conversations

Perspectives on workplace supports and inclusive hiring.

Aspire shared information about our WorkAbility employment supports and showcased products from our social enterprise, including greeting cards designed by autistic artists, sensory items and our in-house 3D-printed creations. We also contributed sensory items to the event's sensory room, helping create a more comfortable environment for attendees.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

WorkAbility in focus

National WorkAbility Conference 2026 | Athlone

22 OCTOBER

CONVERSATIONS

THAT SHAPE THE FUTURE

Aspire was present at the 2026 National WorkAbility Conference in Athlone, organised by Pobal. The day brought together participants, employers and organisations working to make employment more inclusive.



FROM THE CONFERENCE

Different perspectives

Employers in the conversation

Connections across Ireland

Mr Price, Lidl, Trigon Hotels and Pfizer shared their experiences of inclusive workplaces.

Contributions from Pobal, Minister Dara Calleary, European representatives, supported employment organisations and WorkAbility participants.

An opportunity to reconnect with FORUM Connemara, Spraoi agus Spórt, South West Mayo Development Company and others.

We also had the chance to showcase some of our own work, including greeting cards designed by autistic artists and our in-house 3D-printed items. (you can order yours through our online shop → ONLINE SHOP ASPIRE

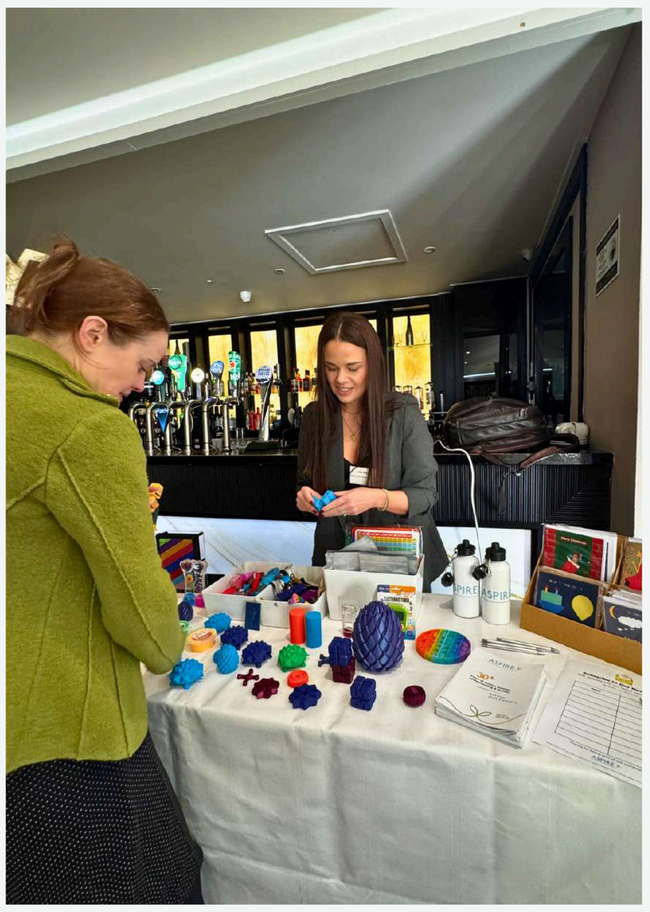
Rialtas na hÉireann Government of Ireland

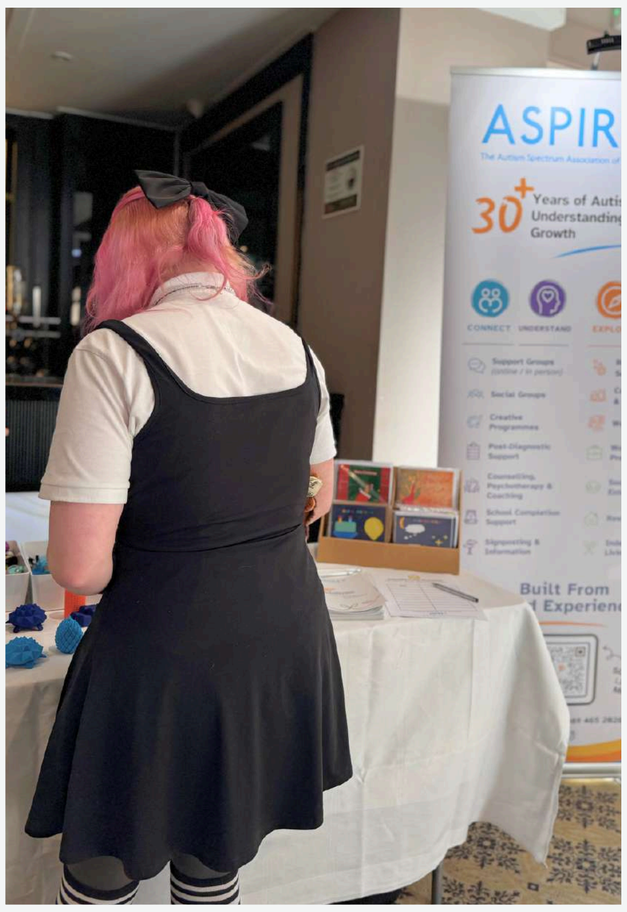
Arna chomhchistiú ag an Aontas Eorpach
Co-funded by the European Union

pobal
government supporting communities

This project is co-funded by the Government of Ireland, through the Department of Social Protection, and the European Union.


ASPIRE
The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland
30+ Years of Autism Support Understanding & Growth
CONNECT
UNDERSTAND
EXPLORE
Support Groups (online / in person)
Social Groups
Creative Programmes
Post-Diagnostic Support
Counselling, Psychotherapy & Coaching
School Completion Support
Signposting & Information
Resources & Sensory Items
Workshops
WorkAbility Programme
Social Enterprise
Residential
Independent Living Skills
Built From



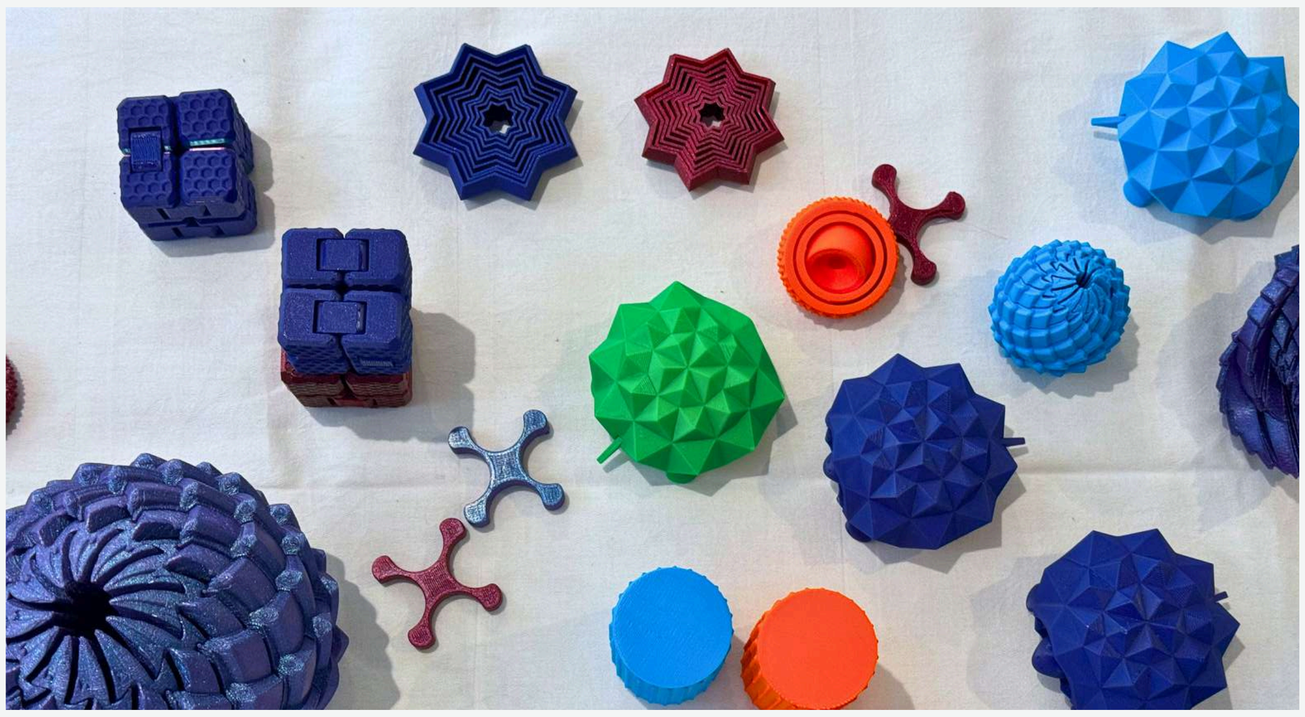

ASPIR
30+ Years of Autis
Understanding
Growth
Built From


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Connecting
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Bringing


Irish Wheelchair Association

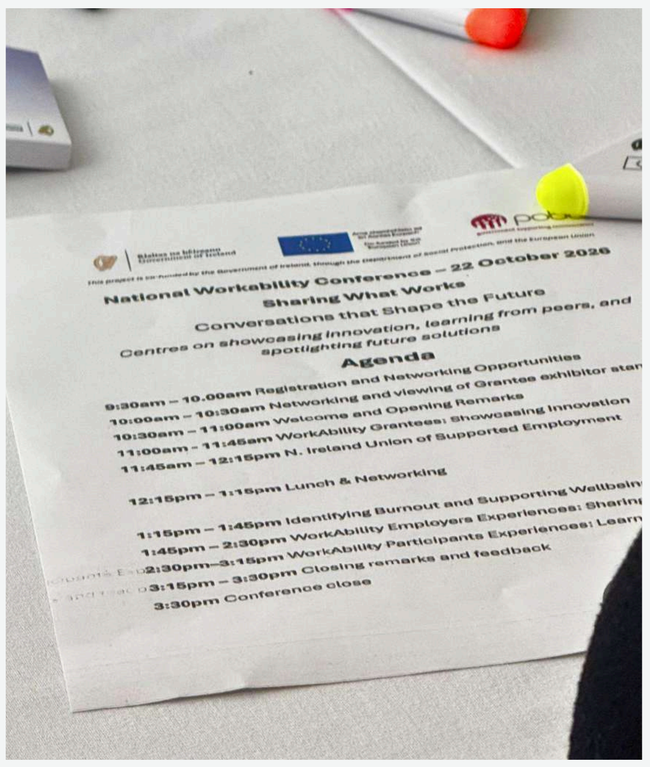

Pfizer
Introducing Tony
Tony Daly


pobal
supporting communities




pobal
EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND PLUS
Programme for Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training 2021 - 2027


pob
ernment supporting comm


This project is co-funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Social Protection, and the European Union
National Workability Conference – 22 October 2026
Sharing What Works
Conversations that Shape the Future
Centres on showcasing innovation, learning from peers, and spotlighting future solutions
Agenda
9:30am – 10.00am Registration and Networking Opportunities
10:00am – 10:30am Networking and viewing of Grantee exhibitor stan
10:30am – 11:00am Welcome and Opening Remarks
11:00am – 11:45am WorkAbility Grantees: Showcasing Innovation
11:45am – 12:15pm N. Ireland Union of Supported Employment
12:15pm – 1:15pm Lunch & Networking
1:15pm – 1:45pm Identifying Burnout and Supporting Wellbein
1:45pm – 2:30pm WorkAbility Employers Experiences: Sharing
2:30pm–3:15pm WorkAbility Participants Experiences: Learn
3:15pm – 3:30pm Closing remarks and feedback
3:30pm Conference close


Irish Wheelchair Association
Ability
PROGRAMME
EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND PLUS
Programme for Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training 2021 - 2027
The WorkAbility Programme 2024-2028
'The Journey Ahead'
Guiding people with disabilities towards employment supports

Celebrating a unique collaboration between

ASPIRE
The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland

&

OUTSIDE the BOX
LEARNING RESOURCES

ASPIRE (The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland) and Irish publisher and distributor ***Outside The Box Learning Resources (OTB)*** have collaborated to offer ***ASPIRE*** members discounted access to valuable resources, carefully selected by ***ASPIRE***.

It is hoped that the resources on this page will help you on your journey with Autism, whether you are an autistic person or someone who cares for an autistic person – be that a parent, teacher or therapist.

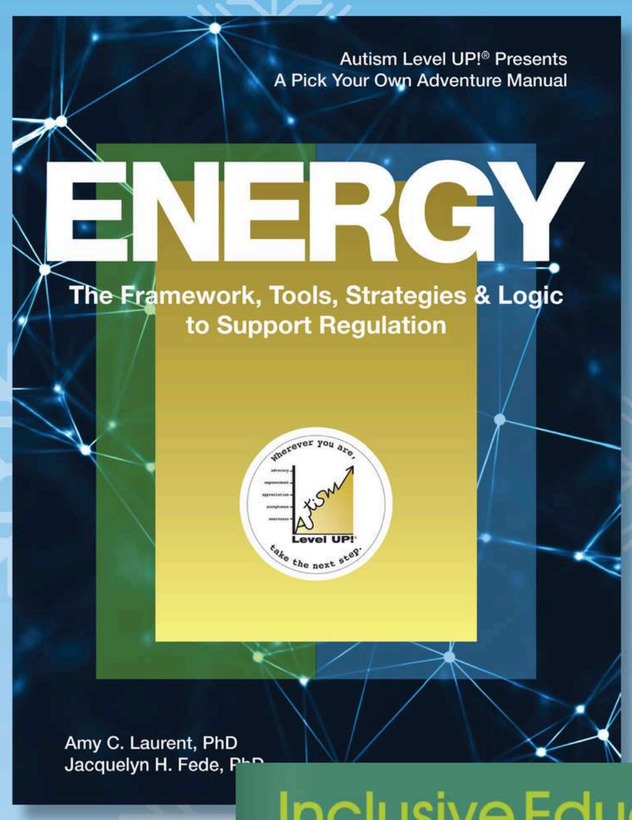
OTB is one of Ireland's leading providers of inclusive resources for parents, carers, educational and health professionals. The company is a passionately, family-run business.

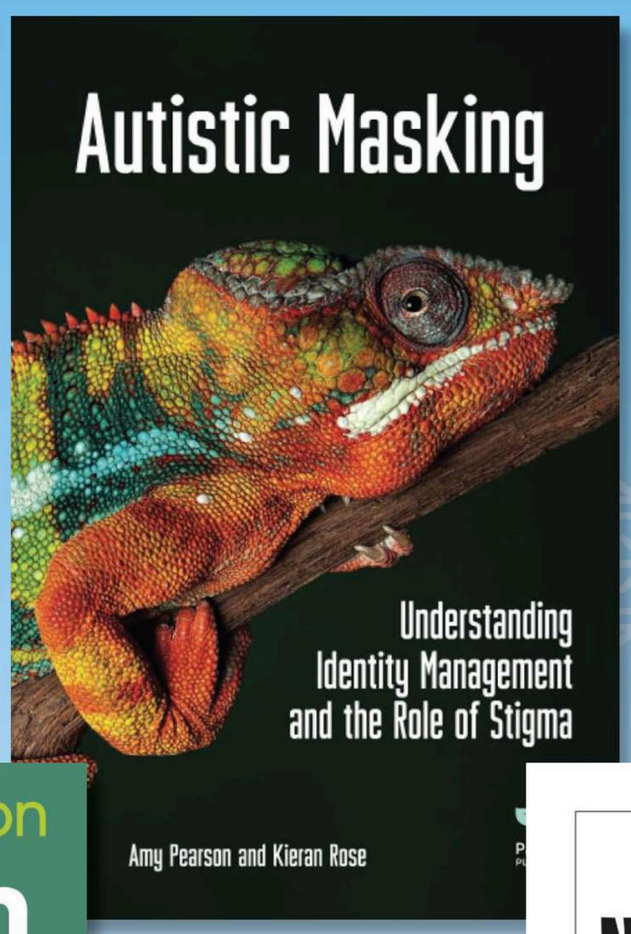
10% DISCOUNT
Coupon Code:
aspire15

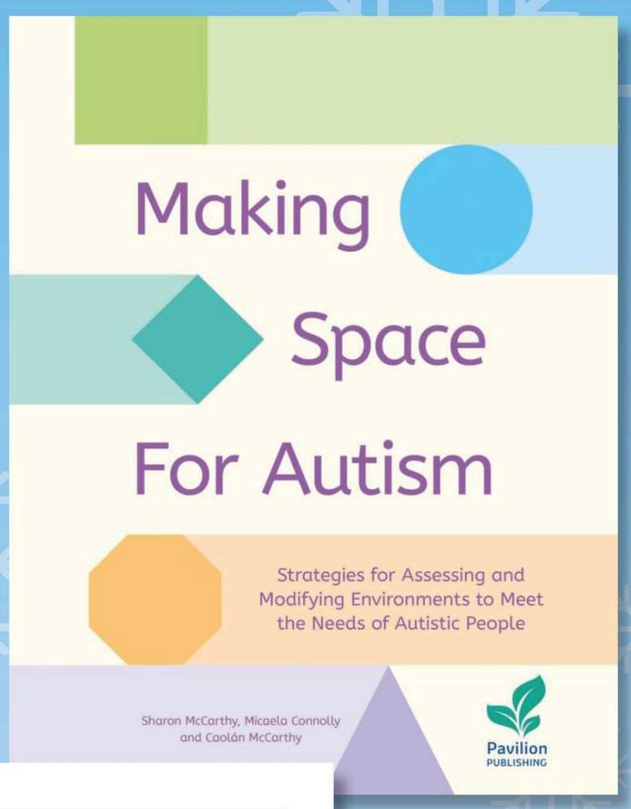
10% discount on all online orders of books on web page:
www.otb.ie/aspire

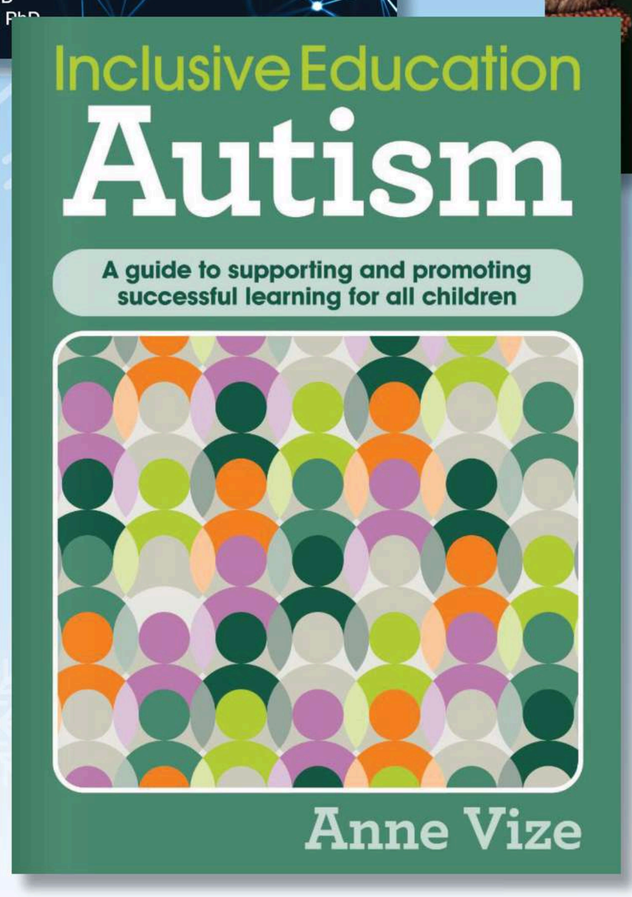
Use the Coupon Code: aspire15 when checking out.

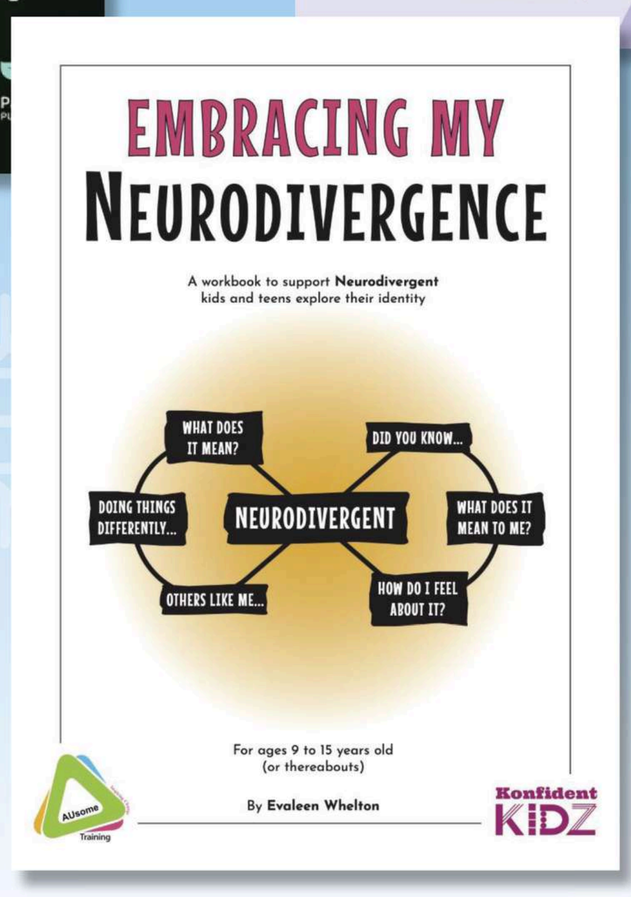
Please note the 10% discount will be applied only to resources on this page and not sitewide (otb.ie).











03

IN THIS EDITION

Aspire Residential

Personal milestones, new experiences and everyday achievement.



A PERSONAL MILESTONE

Colm takes to the skies

An overnight trip to Kerry

KERRY

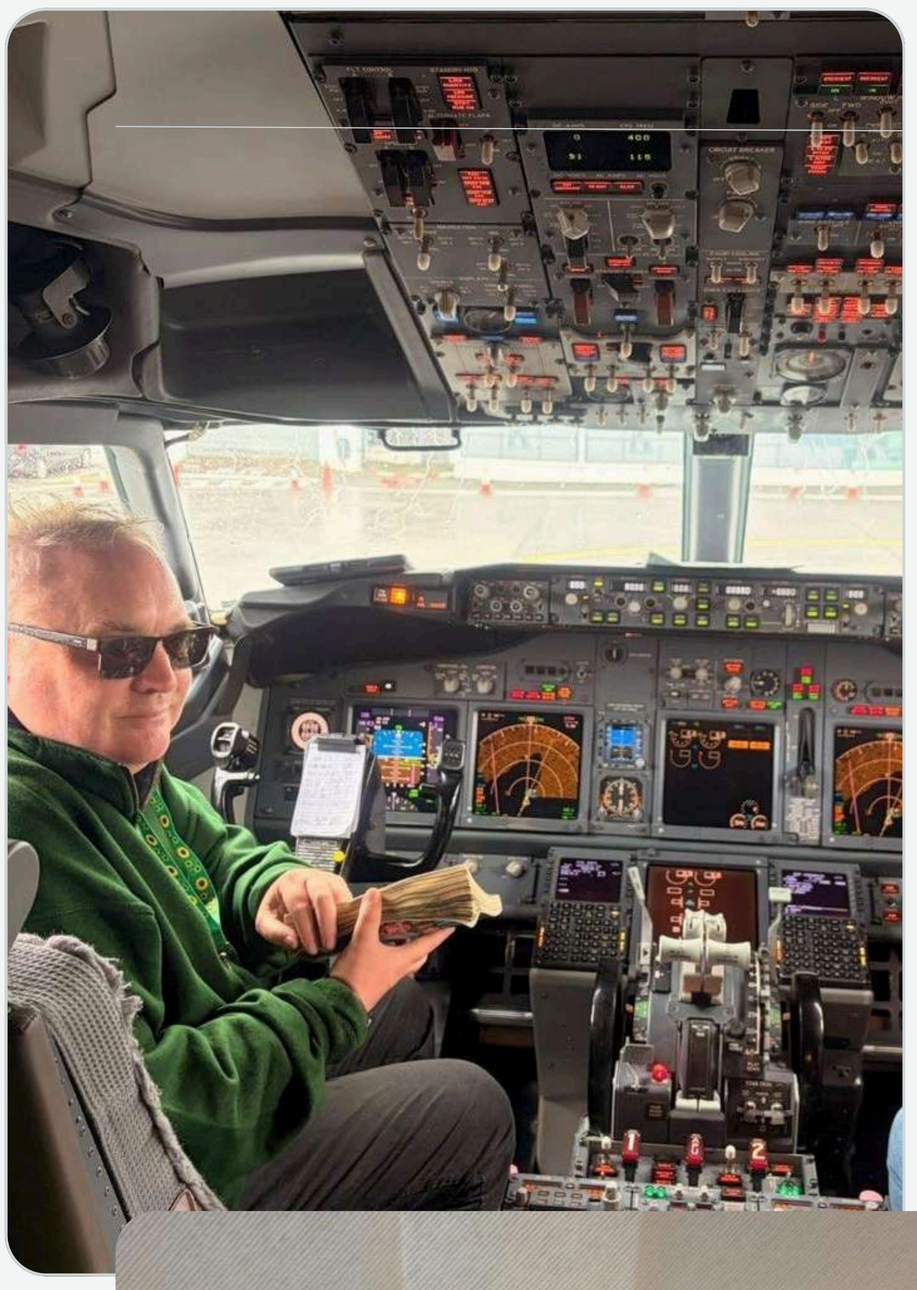
Colm hadn't been on a plane since his teens, but his eyes would always light up with a big smile whenever we returned from holidays and showed him our photos.

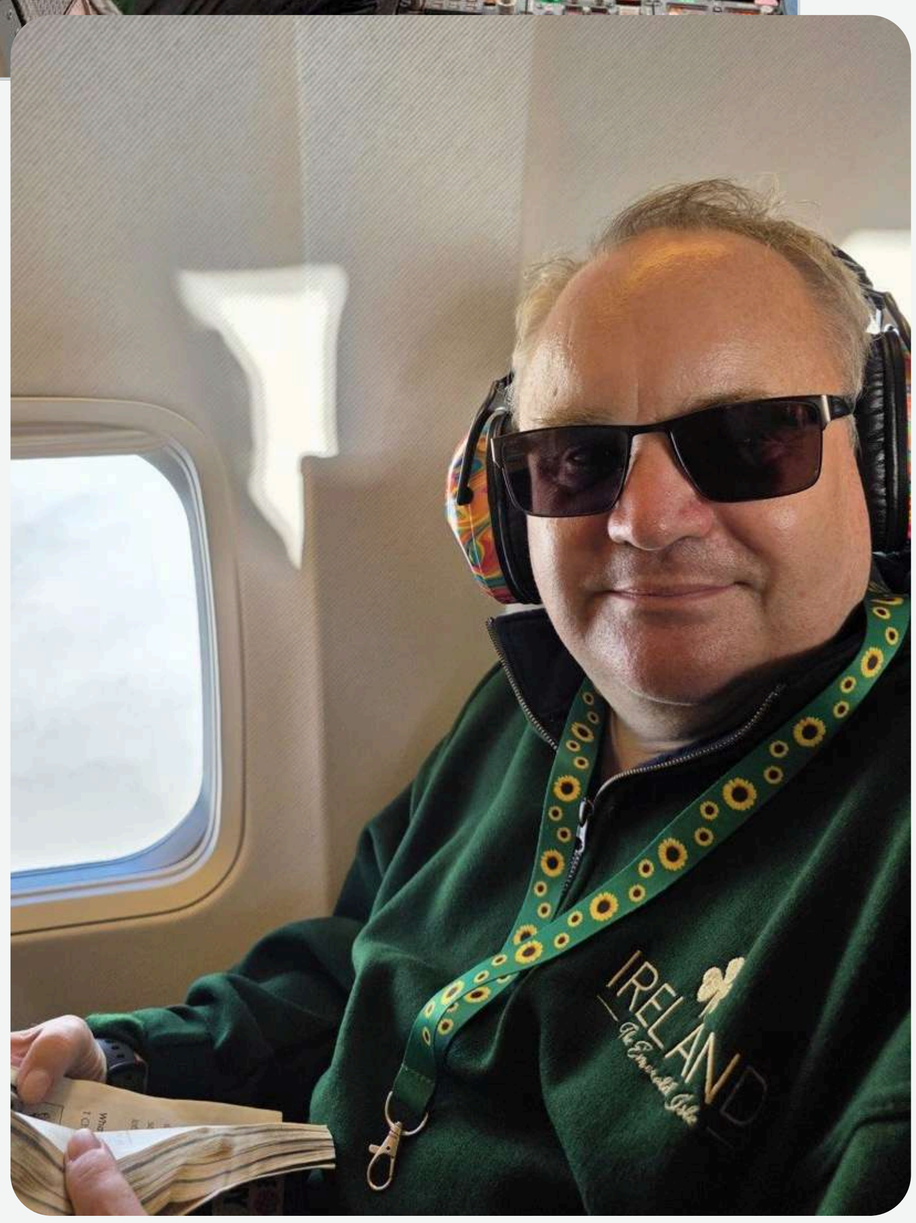
We knew it would take some time and confidence-building, so we gently asked if he'd like to take a little trip of his own.

After lots of preparation, including getting a passport, step by step we finally took the plunge with a short internal flight to Kerry, staying overnight at The Towers Hotel. The trip was an absolute success!

Colm thoroughly enjoyed the experience, declaring at one point that he felt like he was "in the lap of luxury." He especially loved the flight itself and even got to sit in the cockpit.

> “ In the lap of luxury





IN THEIR OWN WORDS

My Volunteering Role in Beaumont Hospital

By Ruán Ó hÓgáin

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen. Through the noble auspices of Aspire Residential I have secured a role as a Voluntary Patient's Assistant in a Hospital. To extend my gratitude to Aspire as an organisation that has helped so many people who like me are Neuro-Divergent I will give you all a taste of my experience in the Hospital. So, I will begin with describing my new role.



In my new role I mainly guide visitors and patients to the different wards in the hospital. Such as the phlebotomy (or blood test department), X-ray department, Breast Clinic, Pulmonary (or Cardio-Vascular) Ward, and Intensive Care Unit or (ICU ward), and the variety of Outpatient Clinics. I also show patients where the Café and toilets are as well as checking if I see a patient looking unsure to ask them if I can help them in any way. Such queries include from small one such as if the vending machine is not working and what to do then to large ones such as if they need a wheelchair. In this case I got to the porter and ask them to bring out a wheelchair for the patient or visitor. Then if they are going to a ward, I help them get wheeled up there. The entire work is very rewarding as I personally value human gratitude over material comfort so that is why I love volunteering in the Hospital.

> **"I personally value human gratitude over material comfort**

On a typical day, I come to the hospital when my shift starts and walk in, then I go to reception and ask if I can get a key to the lockers. I then go to the volunteer locker leave my bag, hat and coat therein and put on my volunteer high-vis. Vest and take out my water canteen, which I fill up in the porter's office along with the volunteer hospital folder and go to the front of the inside hospital to ask the visitors as they come in if they know where they are going.

My Volunteering Role in Beaumont Hospital

There I also meet the other volunteers who are very friendly to me and helpful towards the public. I mainly consider those who go straight to reception as they are seen making a query. Then after taking their query, I guide them to the specificized wards. I also pay attention when seeing individuals standing around if they need assistance, more often than not they may just be waiting for a friend or family member or they may want to have a little conversation and I find we generally have a lot of diverse things to talk about. Every time I satisfy a query I nod and tell them to enjoy the rest of their day. I also take an occasional break and go to the staff canteen where I can get a nice meal for a reasonable price. Then, after I finish my shift, I get my bag, coat and hat from the locker, put my high visibility vest in my bag with my water canteen and get the bus home. It truly is a wonderful experience.

In short, I really enjoy the experience as I deal with people on a personal basis in a wide capacity of their concerns. I get people who want to go from one part of the hospital or another and feel great in satisfying their requests. I also enjoy the journey to the hospital as it cuts across both South and North Dublin and I see numerous sightings while listening to my Cajun music CDs on my discman. The job itself demonstrates how great it is to deal with the public even on a voluntary basis as it is the public that make up the society in which we live.

One thing I have learned from volunteering as a Patient’s Assistant in the Hospital is empathy for others. These people who are patients in the Hospital are normal, decent folk who have hit hard times in the health capacity through no fault of their own. They have been subject to terrible diseases such as paralysis, lung disease, heart trouble, blood clots, physical injury, and even cancer which any one of us could be at some stage of our lives and all they wish for is kind words and compassion which I and the other volunteers provide. I have also learned how difficult it can be for those working in the hospital to deal with various queries and how if I was ever visiting a hospital to bear that in mind. A thing I enjoyed is the many stories the staff, volunteers and patients have about their personal lives in terms of the diversity of those stories. As well as the fact that I am doing good for the community that creates the society I live in.

To sum up I am eternally grateful to Aspire and the Hospital for recommending and giving me this opportunity. It is like an adventure every time I go in as I do not know who I am going to meet along the way. The atmosphere is brilliant and the staff are so nice. In short I love My Volunteering Role in the Hospital.

> “ **It is like an adventure every time I go in**

04

IN THIS EDITION

Community

Stories, opinions, artwork
and lived experiences.



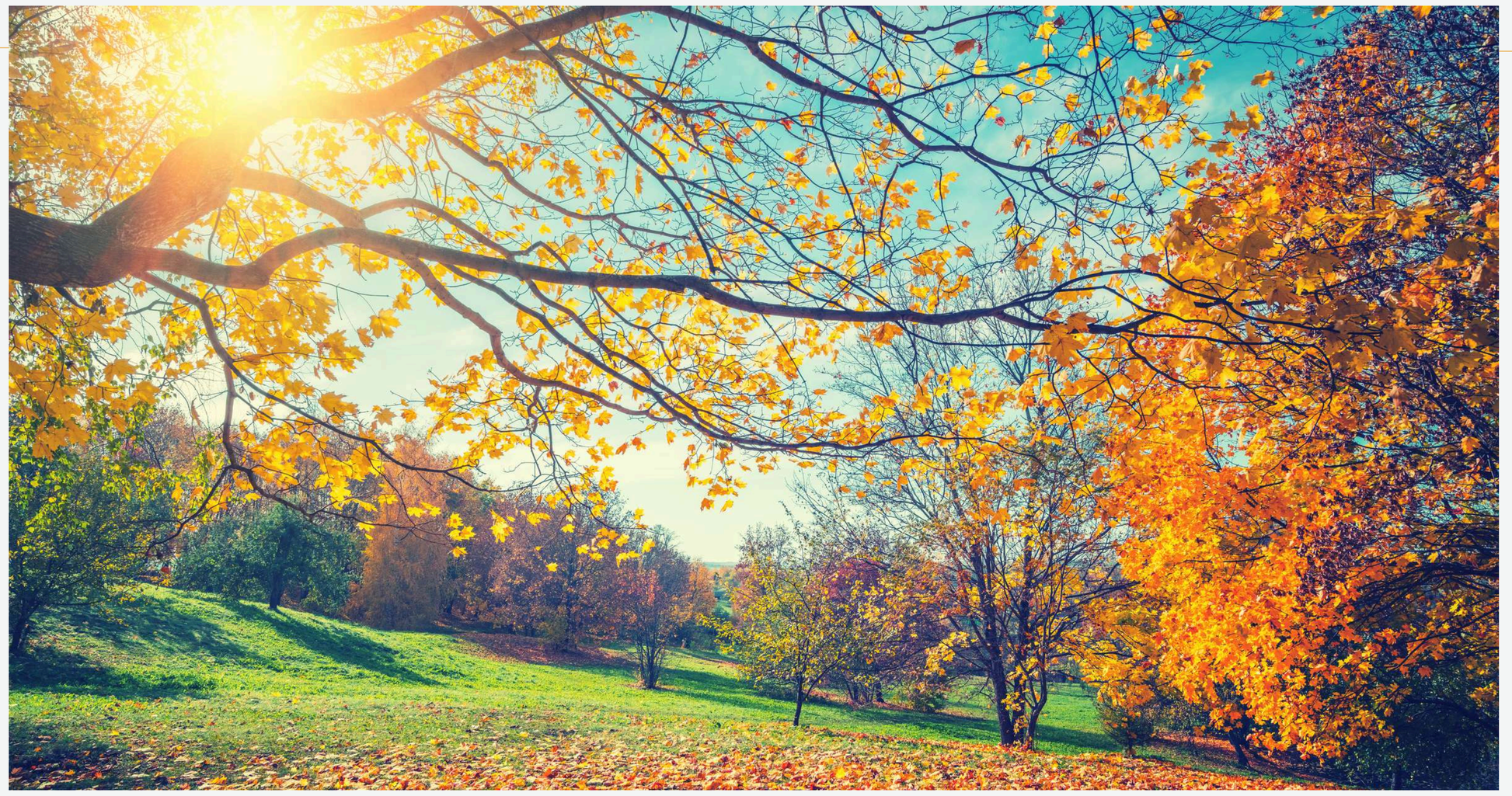
Curracloe by Lois Davies

The views and opinions expressed in individual contributions are those of their respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of Aspire Ireland.

Articles

An autumn update

By William Oliver



Hello again everyone. It is time once more for me to let you know how I have been doing so far. I have finished with the science fiction novella which contained the story Who Goes There? The other stories were also not that great as they were overall nonsensical, and not in a good way. I have just started reading the novel The Name of the Rose by Umberto Eco. The story is essentially a murder mystery set in a medieval Italian abbey. It will to the best of my knowledge also include events of political intrigue and religious fanaticism, but I do not yet know the full details.

The walks in the parks are still going well. We have gained some new members to join us on our treks. So far, they are very much enjoying it, and we enjoy having their company. The park that we have walked through the most is St. Stephen's Green. Other parks include St. Anne's and Albert College Park. I have only in past two months been going to Albert College Park and it is a very lovely place.

The two fledgling trees that were planted in the back garden are very healthy and have attracted the attention of birds and squirrels. I was concerned that the extreme heat of the previous months as well as the recently heavy rain and wind might do damage to them. Hopefully the winter will not harm them either.

A new set of drama classes having started recently. Five weeks have gone past already. The classes are for members age 18 – 25. So far, they are enjoying the experience. Including this week's class there are another 7 classes left to go. My purpose is to mostly get the room and equipment ready and observe while Rosey (drama teacher) teaches the participants the structure of scripts and roleplay. The other assistant named Ryan is essentially our cameraman and he is very helpful. Rosey and I are glad to have him around.

There are two Herons in the garden, a younger one who is recent fledgling and the usual older one who is evidently getting older by the look of his/her feathers. We have also “adopted” a new cat that visits us mostly for food but at other times for simple affection. His fur is grey with a black horizontal stripes along his body.

Thanks to the rain the local park is green and lush again. For a time because of the heatwave the grass looked as though it could catch fire any day due to its dryness. While the summer was indeed enjoyable, I am very glad that the excessive heat is finally gone. While Spring is my favourite month, I am still very fond of Autumn. Naturally my favourite time of Autumn is Hallowe’en which I mainly like for its ambience and atmosphere.



Well, that is all I have to say for this time. I look forward to letting you know how things have gone for me later in the year. Goodbye for now.

My Life, My Script

The Educational Drama

By Ross Kilbride

LEARNING THROUGH DRAMA

We are at Week 5, tonight, in the Drama that's being led and taught by Rosey, with assistance from William and Ryan. I, myself, have found it thoroughly enjoyable, and reinvigorating after not being in the Drama for several years.

I am the oldest student in the class, so I mentor and lead the other students a bit. Rosey is also very good at what she does. We have played a variation of games, a lot of imaginary/role-playing/doing different physical warm-up exercises. At the moment, we are in the process of making a music video, so we have a lot of different meetings to have, to plan and discuss how we plan to do it, and what song to use. I have suggested some songs, and some videos as well to study, to get an idea of what we want to make it. We all have different videos to use as our examples though, so we're all watching and studying each-other's songs and videos, to get a feel for it.



Does it differentiate from the Drama I did before? Well, there's only one teacher, rather than about 7 as there used to be. All of them are new students that I didn't know initially, but they're all around the ages I was for the most part that I was doing the former Drama.

We use our free spaces and time to talk about what we did during the week, when we get the chance to, but we don't necessarily have a designated 10 minutes before or at the end of class to share our news.

We will see how the rest of the weeks go, but so far, so good.



Rosie & Jim
SINCE 1997
HEALTHY MADE TASTY





Inside my Life my Script

A look at our drama programme in action

Co-Creation



Participation







Drama



As part of the drama project, participants are working together to create a music video featuring an original song written by one of the group members.

The entire process is co-created by the participants, Aspire staff and volunteers, with contributions from Katie from Rosie & Jim and Laura, a Miss Ireland finalist, as part of her **Beauty with a Purpose** initiative.

ASPIRE
The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland

Rosie & Jim
SINCE 1997
HEALTHY MADE TASTY

My Life, My Script is proudly supported by the Rosie & Jim Charity & Community Fund.

https://rosieandjim.ie/

Personal Story

New directions

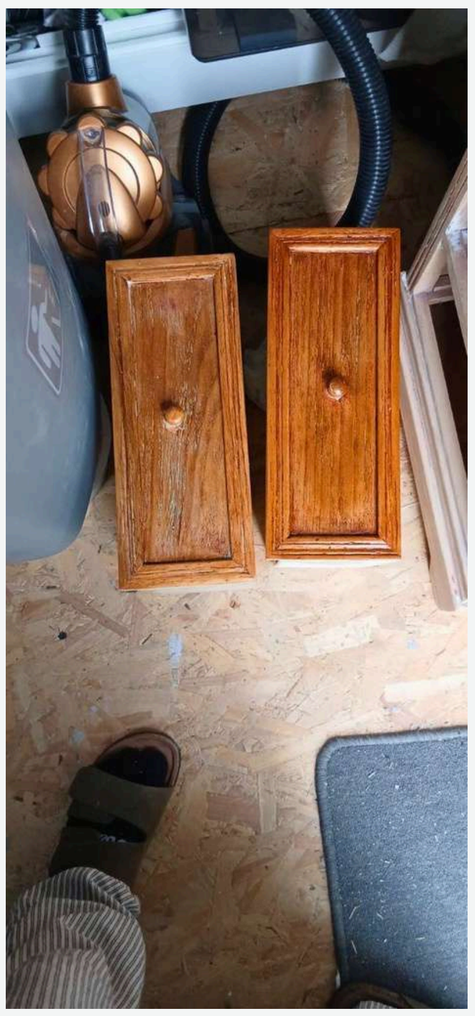
By Luke Coffey

My name is Luke Coffey. Round about 3 or 4 years ago. I was unemployed and I was stuck on what to do, to keep myself busy i had no routine to keep me going.

However it was up until my mums friend she is a French Polisher alongside her partner, while they done a ce scheme in furniture restoration, well before they opened up their own business. My mums friend got in contact with the manager who runs the ce scheme in popintree in Ballymun. Who then got in touch with the managers in the rediscovery and within a month or 2 I got to be part of the team.

Fast forward to now a days from the ce scheme being cut short from reasons unknown. From the year in a half in the R.D.C, I found my big interest in furniture restoration withch I never know i had.

I enjoy it all and im great at giving furniture a new second chance. I now have the opportunity to continue what im passionate about i now have my own work shed in my backgarden....











FURNITURE RESTORATION

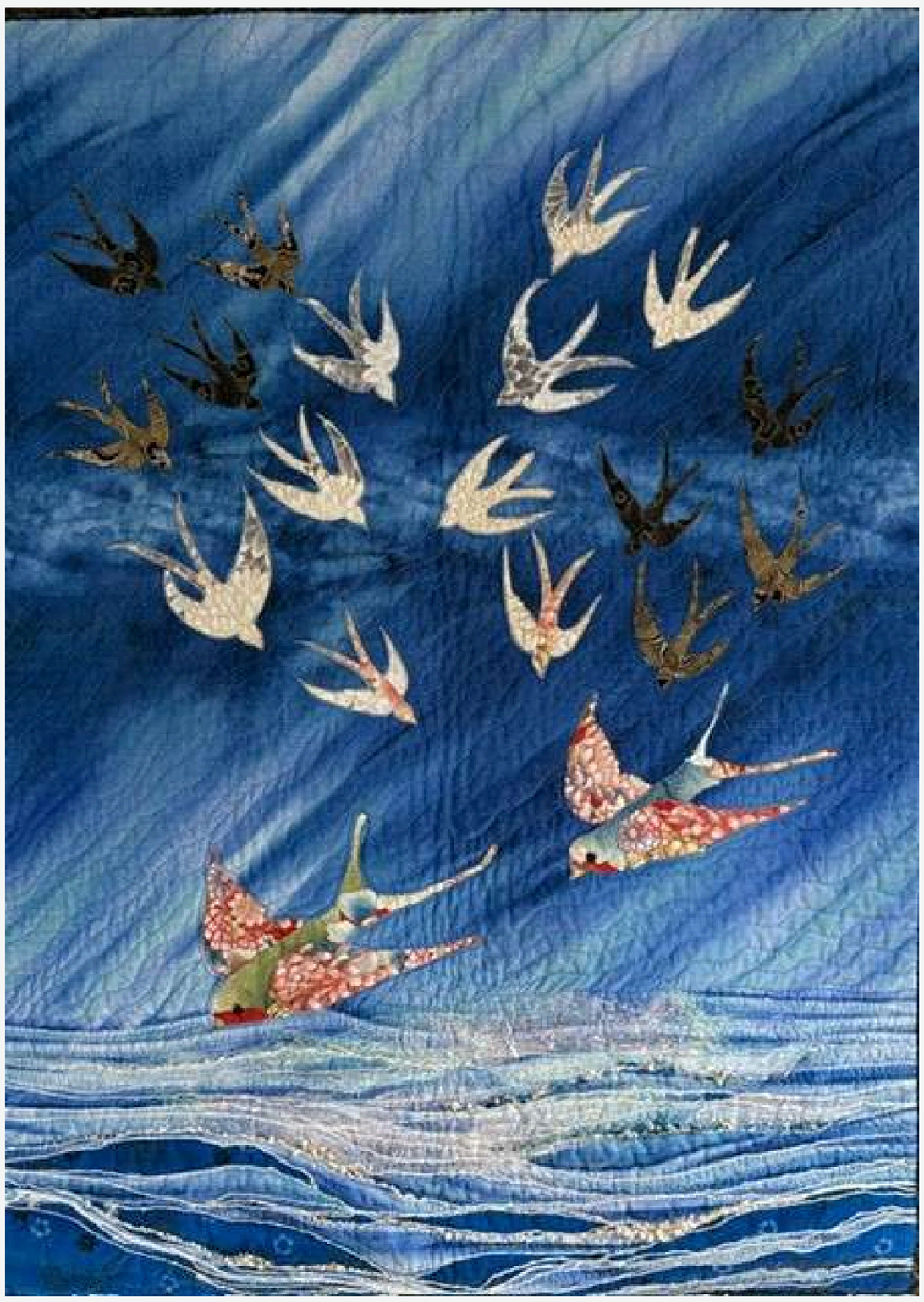
Original Artwork

The art of Lois Davies

Textile and digital work



Summer Song



“

It relates to the Wexford coast and birds in flight and that sense of movement and space that I love. It’s Called “*Curracloe*”

Artwork Gallery

Movement and observation

Digital works by Lois Davies



Joy



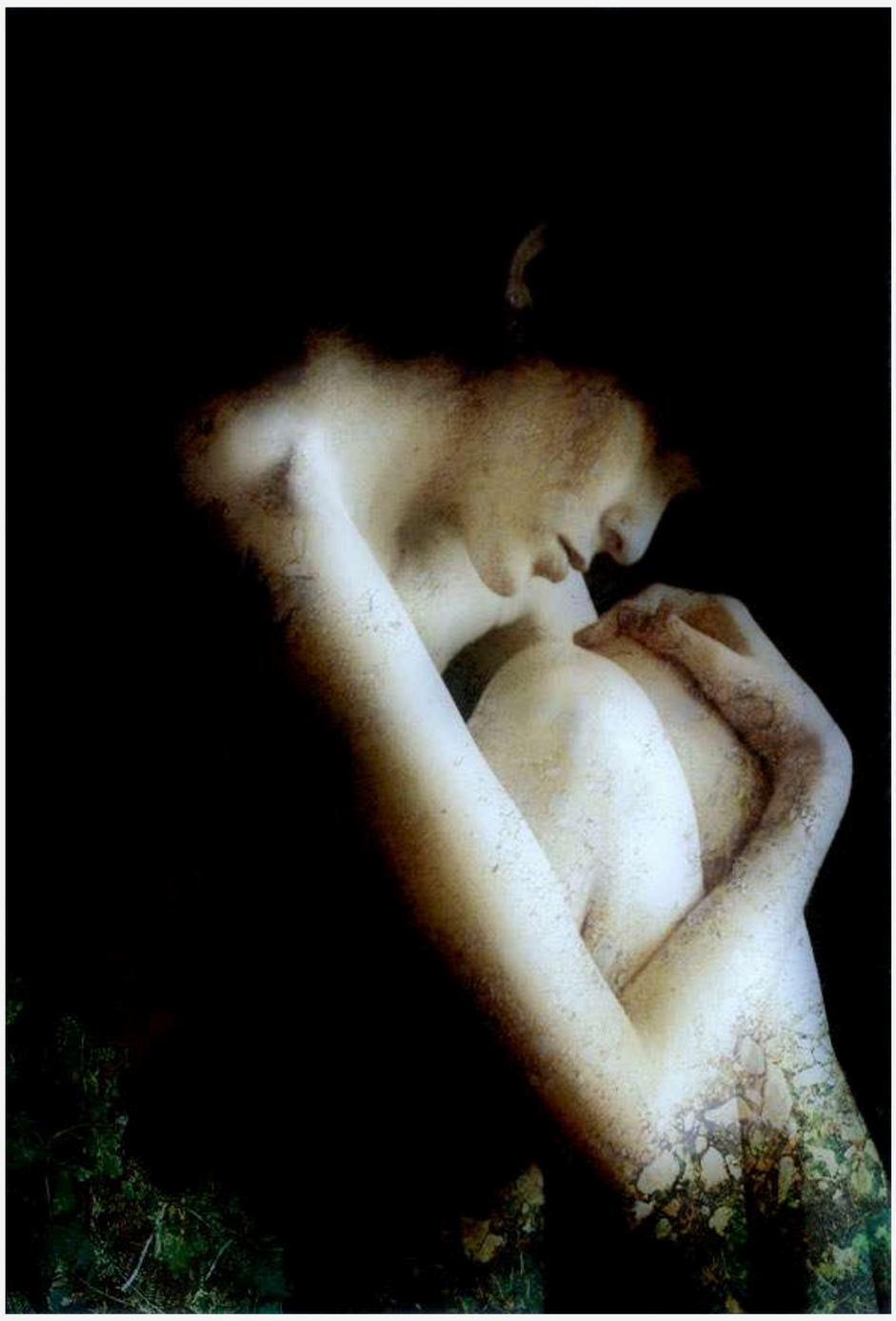
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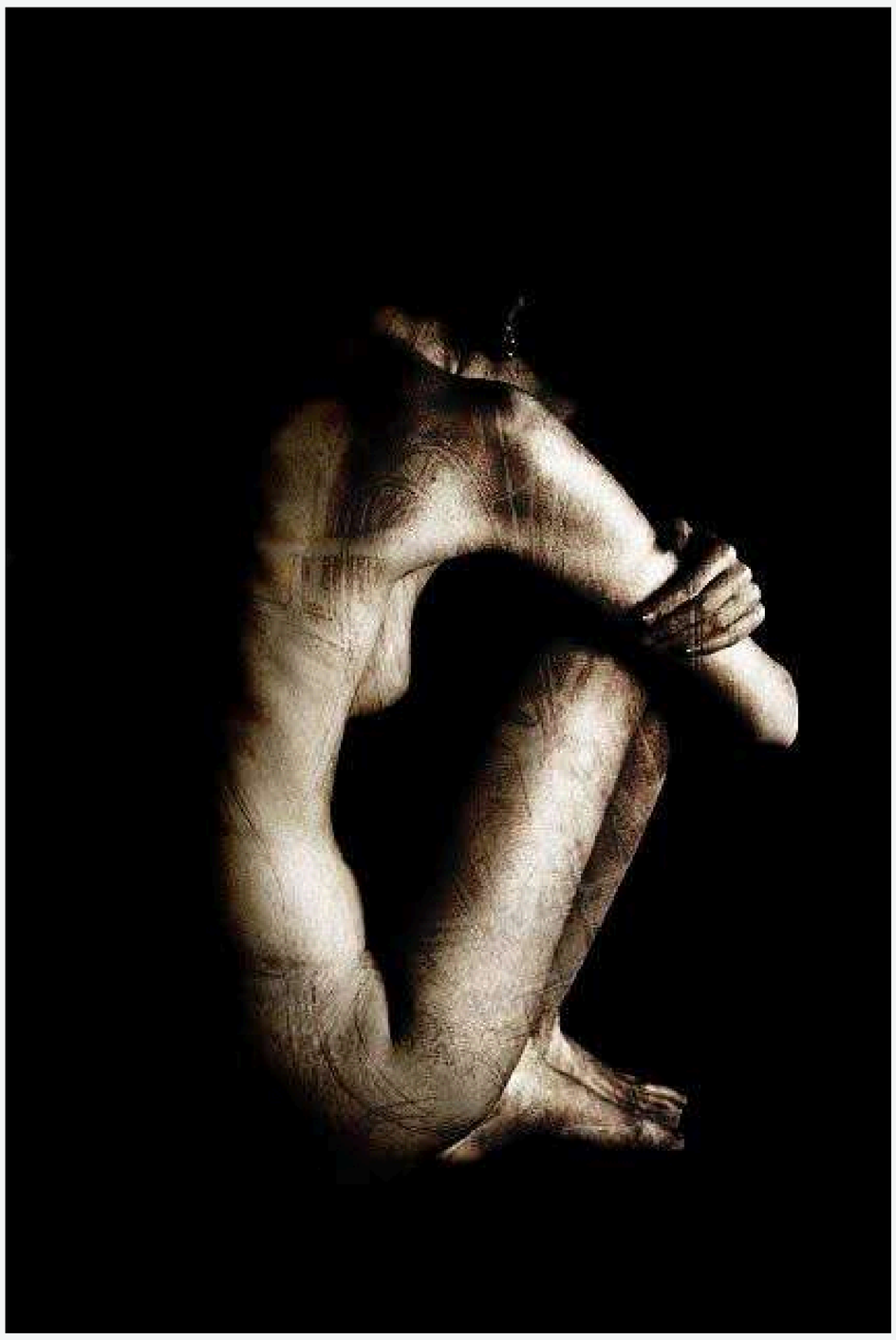
This is called “The Watcher” and relates to being outside of everything and just observing

Artwork Gallery

Fragile, strong and full of feeling

Mixed-media pieces by Lois Davies





I did a body of work a few years ago using photography and mixed media to explore my feelings around communication, how much internalising and need to communicate and the way it presents itself externally, I tried to show the calm outward surface but life's experience underneath.

I did these last ones on very fragile Japanese paper but the paper itself is also strong annd the images were meant to float.

All of this before I got my diagnosis, so looking back on them has been personally very revealing.

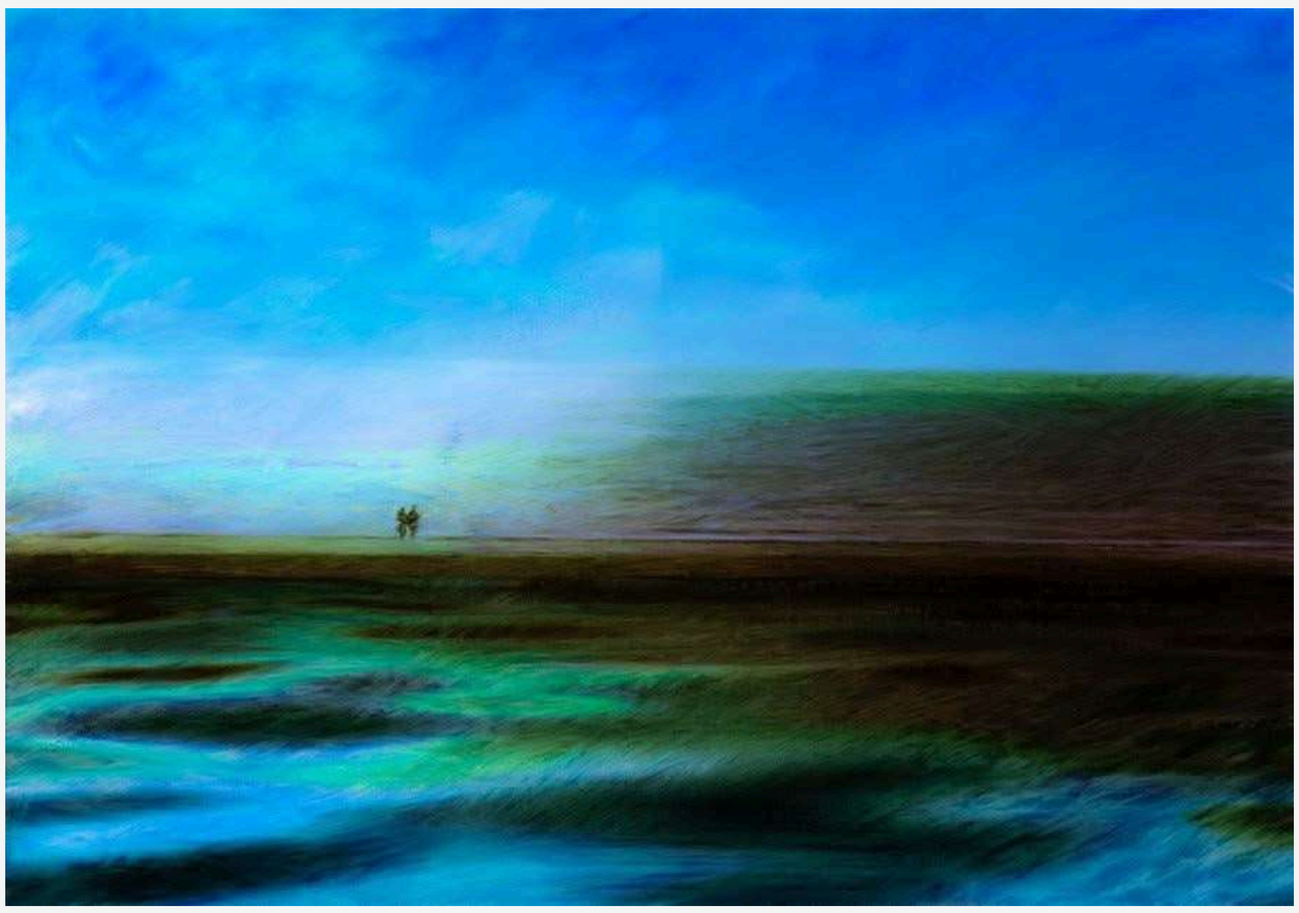
Artwork Gallery

Digital landscapes

Further work by Lois Davies



Narcissus



Curracloe

NEUROAFFIRMING THERAPY

Meeting people where they are

By Lyndsey Redmond

I provide warm, integrative and neuroaffirming therapy for children, teenagers and adults. At the heart of my work is something quite simple: meeting people where they are.

For children in particular, I believe that behaviour is often communication. Sometimes children show us that they are struggling long before they have the words to tell us what is happening.

It might be a child who cannot separate from a parent at the school door, a young person experiencing school-based anxiety or panic attacks, or a child who manages to hold everything together throughout the school day and then completely falls apart when they get home.

It might be a child who is struggling with learning, friendships or social differences. They may be masking all day, trying desperately to fit in and appear okay while underneath they are overwhelmed, anxious or exhausted.

Sometimes what we see from the outside is a child who “won't” do something. But I am interested in what is happening underneath the won't.

Is this something they won't do, or something they simply can't manage right now?

A child who is refusing to go into school, separate from a parent, join an activity, complete a piece of work or talk about how they are feeling is not necessarily being difficult or “bold.”

They may be frightened. They may be overwhelmed. They may not understand what is happening inside their own body. The sensory, social, emotional or learning demands of an environment may simply be too much for them at that moment.

I want children to begin to understand that struggling with something doesn't mean there is something wrong with them.

Rather than asking, “What's wrong with this child?” I want us to become curious about what is happening for this child.

That difference is important.

> “ **Behaviour is often communication**

I work in an integrative way, drawing on CBT and other therapeutic approaches while adapting therapy to the individual rather than expecting the individual to adapt to therapy. For some children, sitting opposite an adult and being asked to talk about their feelings is simply too much.

A child might come into my room for the first time with absolutely no intention of talking to me. And that's okay.

They might come back the following week and still not want to talk. We might play a game, draw, sit alongside each other, laugh about something or talk about something that feels completely unrelated to the reason they were brought to therapy.

They keep coming.

Week by week, trust begins to develop.

Perhaps one day they tell me a tiny piece of something that happened at school. Another week I see their frustration. They might make a joke they would normally keep to themselves, tell me all about something they love, allow themselves to be silly or simply become more comfortable being quiet.

Slowly, I begin to meet the child underneath the mask.

They discover that this is a space where they don't have to perform. They don't have to give me the “right” answer. They don't have to make eye contact, explain everything or pretend that they are okay.

And often, when a child feels safe enough, the talking comes.
Not because it has been demanded of them, but because they are ready.

That is what meeting a child where they are means to me.

When a child is experiencing separation anxiety, school-based anxiety, panic, masking, after-school restraint collapse, learning difficulties, social differences or difficulties with how they feel about themselves, I want to understand the whole child rather than focusing only on the behaviour that other people can see.

- What does their day actually feel like for them?
- What are they having to manage that we might not see?
- What happens in their body when things become too much?
- What are they working incredibly hard to hold together?
- And what might they need from the adults and environments around them?

Sometimes the child who appears to cope beautifully in school comes home and falls apart because home is the place where they finally feel safe enough to stop holding everything in.

Sometimes the child who cannot separate from a parent isn't trying to control the situation; separation genuinely feels frightening.

Sometimes the child who says “no” isn't being defiant. “No” might be the only way they currently have to communicate “I can't do this right now.”

When we begin to understand the why underneath a child's behaviour, we can respond with curiosity and compassion rather than shame.

I want the children I work with to understand themselves — their emotions, their bodies, their strengths, their differences and the things they find difficult.

Most importantly, I don't want a child growing up believing that they are the problem simply because an environment, expectation, learning situation or social world hasn't always fitted their needs.

> **“That is what meeting a child where they are means to me.**

I also work with teenagers and adults, including people who are beginning to understand themselves through a neurodivergent diagnosis or identification later in life.

For some people, finally having an explanation for experiences they have struggled with for years can bring many different emotions.

There may be relief, but there can also be sadness, anger, confusion or grief for the younger version of themselves who didn't have that understanding.

You may find yourself looking back at school, friendships, relationships, work or family life through a completely different lens. You may begin to recognise how much energy you have spent masking, trying to fit in, pushing yourself through situations that were overwhelming, or wondering why things that seemed easy for other people felt so difficult for you.

Therapy can offer a space to gently make sense of those experiences and begin to understand yourself with greater compassion.

Whether I am sitting with a child who isn't ready to say a word, a teenager exhausted from trying to fit in, a parent trying desperately to understand what their child needs, or an adult making sense of themselves following a diagnosis, my starting point is the same:

You don't have to arrive at therapy knowing what to say or how to explain everything.

We can begin exactly where you are.

My role isn't to change who you are or make you fit more comfortably into somebody else's idea of who you should be.

It is to create a safe, compassionate and collaborative space where we can become curious about what is happening, understand what you need, recognise your strengths and find ways forward that feel right for you.

Because sometimes the most powerful change begins not with asking, “How do we fix this person?”

but with asking,

“What are they trying to tell us, and what do they need us to understand?”

LIVED EXPERIENCE

A late diagnosis, a different lens

By Alexandra Wiltshire

In 2020, during the COVID lockdown, while I was watching Hannah Gadsby describe her experience as an autistic queer woman in her brilliant piece Nanette, something special clicked inside of me. She was late-diagnosed, and despite having a different experience than mine, there was an undeniable familiarity in the information that she shared, one to which I could relate deeply. I felt like I was seeing myself clearly for the first time, from a perspective that was entirely new and, at the same time, very known to me.



Alexandra

I asked my girlfriend, who is now my lovely wife, if she thought that I could be autistic too, and she said that she recognised several of those elements in me and in my life. It was like I was being seen clearly for the first time as well. We hugged, and with the support of that one person, it began right there and then my saga towards a confirmation. My family, my (former) therapist, my friends - everyone else discouraged me from looking into it. Moved by their misconceptions of what it meant to be autistic, they were certain I was “too bright” and “too well-functioning” for that.

As usual, I pushed through what the majority thought and got my assessment anyway - a long process, until I finally received the result. I had invited autism into my life, I was prepared for a positive answer but, ironically, ADHD came crashing the party. Probably because I took my tests in a second language (even though I was fluent), I scored very close to high abilities in many things, even surpassing average in a couple of them, but they overlooked it. This third diagnosis came a bit later, after working for a few months with a different and specialised neuropsychologist, in my own language. She identified it in me very quickly (and couldn’t believe my giftedness had gone unnoticed by other professionals as, to her, it was very obvious, and probably the main reason why autism had been dismissed for so long as a possibility).

A late diagnosis, a different lens

In the beginning, I hungrily listened to other women speaking about their own experiences being late-diagnosed neurodivergent, and I cried every time - spontaneous relief tears. Finally, the answers I had been looking for, all of the reasons why I felt so different from everybody else, and why I had been marginalised my whole life. Everything explained, and guilt was lifted from my shoulders, as I started to understand that all of the frustrated experiences I collected, personally and professionally, were not inherently my fault. The world simply had not been designed for people like me, and held almost no space for the type of differences that I had no choice but embracing for the slightest chance at happiness. To the normative, patriarchal world, my existence, expressing my neurodivergent traits within my gender was deemed unacceptable.

Everything great I had to offer, like my fierce critical views and leadership skills, for example, somehow were perceived as undesirable, confrontational, unpleasant, unwanted. The same qualities that were admired and elevated in cisgendered men closed doors for me and brought me down even within my own communities, which were usually critical of patriarchal rule and allegedly working with diversity in mind.

> **“ I felt like I was seeing myself clearly for the first time.**

The external reality after my diagnosis antagonised my inner experience completely. While I felt happy and celebrated the breakthrough, the world seemed to tighten its noose around my neck, making my gifts feel even more like a curse. Ireland is understandably protective of its culture, but after eleven years trying to belong without success, a great grief took over my life. Latin, woman, queer, forty plus, recently discovered neurodivergent AND disabled, it seemed there was no place for me, anywhere I looked, despite my talents, background and formal education. I was discriminated against at work, the same place that initially supported my assessment. Talk about a mid-life crisis! The weight of the world not being inclusive enough suddenly started to crush me.

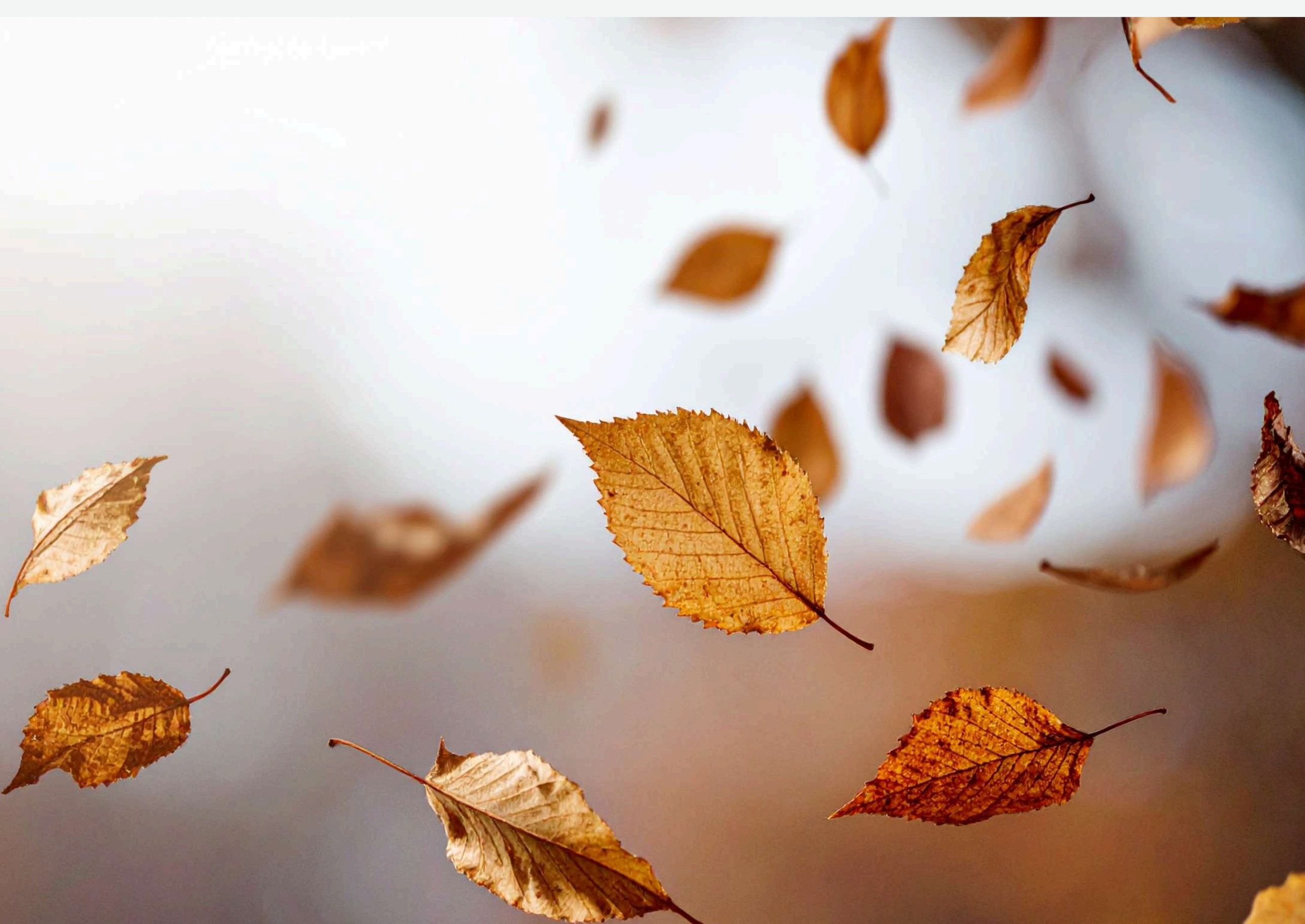
Before perimenopause, I had been able to hold it together, but that was no longer true. Away from any possibility to work due to a depression resistant to treatment, writing became my sole focus, and a life saver. I’ve finished a manuscript, a memoir, reviewing my life experiences from the neurodivergent perspective, and I am really proud of it. Somehow, it helped me digest the sad realisation that intellectual potential and functional performance were two very distinct subjects. Besides, having a lot to offer but having those very same things constantly rejected created an aching that had no solace. Writing seemed like the only way out.

A late diagnosis, a different lens

Against all odds, I keep trying to make my life possible, searching for publishers as I can, surviving as I can, counting almost exclusively on the support of my wife. She is only one person, but she makes a whole lot of difference. For so long, before meeting her, I felt utterly alone - unlovable even. Despite difficulties, my life is a miracle and I insist to live it. I won't allow the system to defeat me, although it has been a close call at times. Years later, I found the social groups directed to autistic adults held by Aspire. A refreshing space, another place to breathe where my existence went unchallenged.

I know I won't be able to change the world, but I would like to at least make some kind of positive contribution to my immediate surroundings, becoming a recognised pillar and a strong voice in my communities.

Maybe one day that will be possible.



FUNDRAISING / COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

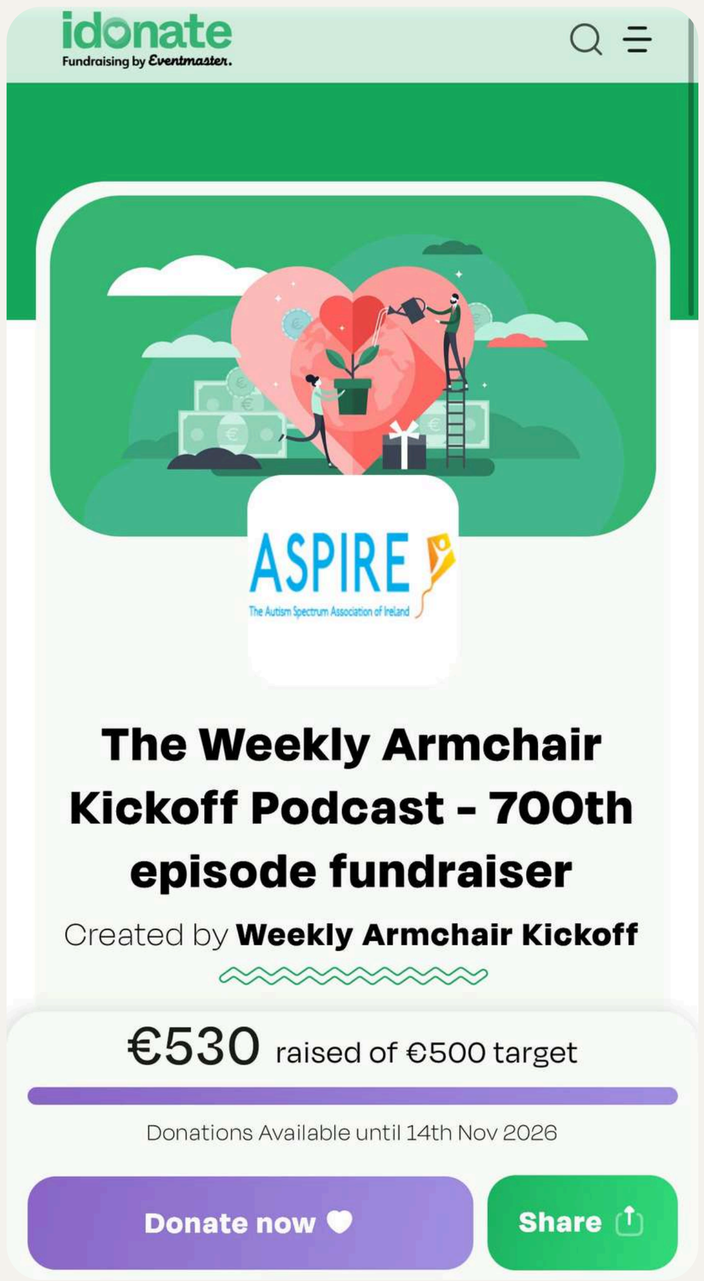
Weekly Armchair Kickoff Podcast Fundraiser

To celebrate their 700th episode, the Weekly Armchair Kickoff Podcast hosted a 12-hour charity livestream on 7 November, raising €530 and exceeding their €500 target. A huge thank you to Keane Franey, the organisers, guests and everyone who supported the event!

€530

RAISED

Weekly Armchair Kickoff



Missed the livestream? You can still support our work through Laura's Beauty with a Purpose fundraiser.

Beauty with a Purpose

Laura Coffey · Miss Ireland finalist

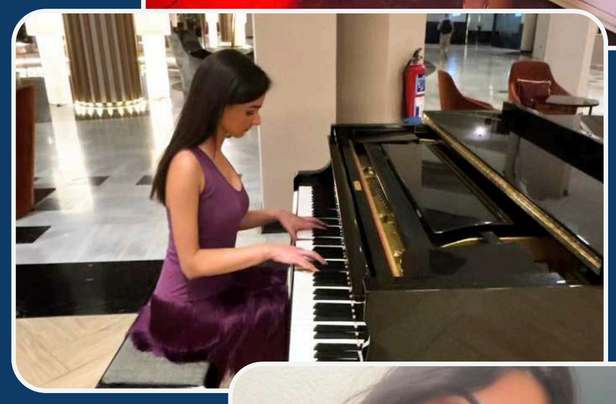
Laura Coffey, a secondary school teacher, ASD Class Lead Teacher, SNA and Miss Ireland finalist, is supporting the autistic community through volunteering, fundraising and advocacy. Her Beauty with a Purpose project includes volunteering with our drama programme, organising a charity raffle for sensory resources in schools and collaborating with us on two free online sessions.

Two free online sessions Limited Spaces

Poetry Class **Emotional & sensory regulation workshop**

Register for Zoom details:
communications@aspireireland.ie







Support Laura's fundraiser

ACCESSIBILITY IN PRACTICE

Accessibility must work in practice

Belfast Pride accessibility feedback / Steven Murray

> **A quiet zone should be quiet, usable and welcoming.**

For an event of the size and profile of Belfast Pride, the accessibility provisions on the day were disappointing and highlighted a number of areas where more consideration could have been given to disabled and neurodivergent attendees. While having accessibility measures in place is important, those measures need to be practical, clearly defined and located in an environment where people can actually benefit from them. For attendees who may already find large, busy and noisy events overwhelming, the availability of an appropriate quiet and accessible space can make a significant difference to whether they are able to participate comfortably.

The Quiet Zone was particularly disappointing. It was also being used as the child-changing zone and consisted of a single 3m x 3m tent. Two tables inside the tent were being used for storage, leaving no seating available for people who needed somewhere to rest or regulate. There were also no volunteers or staff present to provide support or explain how the space was intended to be used. More concerningly, the tent was positioned on the edge of a square where loud family aerobics and dance activities were taking place. This meant that the designated Quiet Zone was exposed to significant levels of noise and activity, undermining its purpose as a place where attendees could step away from the sensory demands of the wider event.

Accessibility should be considered as an integral part of event planning rather than as an additional provision added on afterwards. For an event attracting a large and diverse audience, there should be sufficient quiet space, appropriate seating, clear separation from high-noise activities and trained volunteers available to support attendees. Belfast Pride has an opportunity to build on its existing accessibility efforts by consulting more closely with disabled and neurodivergent people when planning future events. A genuinely accessible Pride should not simply provide a space labelled as a Quiet Zone; it should ensure that the space is suitable, usable and welcoming for the people who rely on it, as many smaller local Prides in Ireland already do.

The power of the right environment

Gustavo Lazarin

> ***“ I've always believed in the positive power of being in the right environment***

I’ve always believed in the power of the right environment to shape an individual’s quality of life. And this applies to any human being, whether you are neurotypical or neurodivergent.

Where we spend our time, how we are treated and whether we feel comfortable being ourselves can make a considerable difference.

But what happens when most environments are designed mainly around neurotypical needs? When ordinary activities require you to manage overwhelming noise, unclear expectations or constantly adjust how you communicate?

Simply participating can take considerable energy, leaving less for the things that matter to you.

Society is taking steps towards more inclusive spaces, but change happens gradually. Sensory-friendly hours at some supermarkets and cinemas, for instance, are not available everywhere or every day, but they show that environments can adapt.

So what I usually say to people I work with through coaching is to notice which places help them feel comfortable, safe and able to be themselves, and which leave them depleted. Where possible, spend more time in the first and less in the second.

But of course, we do not always have that choice. Work, transport and essential appointments may require us to spend time in places that drain us.

This is where self-regulation tools can help, whether that means taking a quiet break, moving your body, using a sensory item or recognising when you need to leave. The key is to explore what works for you, without expecting every tool to help in every situation.

These tools do not remove society’s responsibility to create accessible spaces. They can, however, give you more options: a better understanding of what supports you, what adjustments to ask for and when to step back.

Step by step, you can build your own collection of tools and supportive environments, giving you greater freedom to pursue your aspirations and goals.

Visit our STORE

Shop, support and
make a difference

aspireshop.sumupstore.com

Aspire - The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland

Friends of Aspire

Thank you to all the incredible individuals and organisations who generously supported Aspire this year. Your kindness and dedication have made a tangible difference in the lives of many. We're also immensely grateful to those who have supported those we have referred to them, for their unwavering commitment and passion for making a positive impact in our community.

A) Accenture, Accenture Song, Adam Sweeney, ADHD Ireland, Ahead, AIB, Alex Koster, Anne Weber, AsIAm, AUsome Training, Autism Services Group, Axis Capital

B) Ballymun Job Centre, Blue Firefly, Botanic Pottery

C) Carmichael, Cartoon Saloon, Chambers Pharmacy, Christian Sweeney, CourCon/CCL

D) Dani Burns, DBS, Debbie Whelan, Disability Federation of Ireland, Dublin City Council, Dublin Northwest Partnership, DWF Foundation, DWM Cards, Dyslexia Ireland, Dyspraxia Ireland

E) Employability, EU Engineer, Excel Recruitment, EY

F) Fiona O'Donnell Mindfulness, First Aid Supplies, Forum Connemara CLG

G) Get a Gardener, Google

H) HIQA, Houses4Autism, HSE

I) IKEA Business Network, In Good Co/McKenna, Inner City Enterprise, Innovate Communities Ballymun, Inside EU, Irish Barista Academy, Irish Cancer Society, Irish Social Enterprise Network

J) Jasmina Troshanska

K) Kate Naessens, Kennedy Health & Safety Group, Kilkenny Animated, Killester Basketball Club

L) Lighthouse Studios, Little Fitness

M) Market Pharmacy Smithfield, Michael Bowe, Middletown Centre for Autism

N) National Talent Academy for Animation, National Talent Academy for VFX, Neuropride, Northwest Partnership

O) O'Sullivans Accountants, Outside the Box

P) Phoenix Radio, Photo Museum Ireland, Pobal

R) RBK Accountants

S) Screen Ireland, SERI (Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland), Sharp Group, Skerries Mills, Snowflakes, South City Partnership, Spade Enterprise Centre, Specialisterne, Spillane World Markets

T) Tennis Ireland, Tesco Community Fund, The Rediscovery Centre, The Wayfinding Centre, The Wheel, Third Space Cafe, TTM Training, TU Dublin, Tusla

V) Voices for Autism Advocacy and Action

W) W.A.L.K, Wicklow Gift Shop, Wolfe Group

Y) Yellow Harbour, Your Local Pharmacy Ballinteer



"Curracloe" by Lois Davies

ASPIRE
The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland

Until next time.

Thank you to everyone who has shared their time, stories, artwork and support with Aspire this season.

Let's remain connected:

089 465 2026
info@aspireireland.ie

This newsletter was made by autistic people, for autistic people and the community

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Arna chomhchistiú ag an Aontas Eorpach
Co-funded by the European Union

pobal
government supporting communities

This project is co-funded by the Government of Ireland, through the Department of Social Protection, and the European Union.

HSE

The End