



BAGSHOT PARK

During my 15 years as patron for the National Autistic Society, I have been fortunate enough to witness the progress and success as a charity first-hand, and I have no doubt you will continue to go from strength to strength. This success would never have been possible without the hard work and commitment of so many individuals, dedicated to raising awareness and improving the lives of autistic people and their families, friends and carers across the UK and beyond. I am tremendously appreciative of all your hard work. Together we can make the world a better place for autistic people and help them to reach their full potential.

There has been so much to celebrate over the last 15 years. A particular highlight of my time as patron has been visiting the National Autistic Society's schools, including Helen Allison, Robert Ogden and Thames Valley, as well as the opening of Bristol's Anderson School in 2012. I am grateful for the opportunity to meet and connect with both pupils and staff. Providing autistic pupils with access to an education that suits them is so important, and it was wonderful to be able to observe it first-hand.

I am delighted to learn that, in my 15th year as patron, Buckingham Palace is to receive an Autism Friendly Award following on from Windsor Castle which received the award in both 2016 and 2018. I am immensely proud of this award. It is wonderful to be able to set a good example to other facilities across the UK, who I hope will follow suit. Minor changes in environment such as dimming lights and creating quieter spaces can make such a difference to autistic people, and I am overjoyed that they will be able to visit Buckingham Palace.

I have greatly enjoyed having an active role in organising and participating in National Autistic Society events and campaigns. Events that stand out are the high tea party, which was held at Buckingham Palace, to mark the 50th anniversary of the National Autistic Society, and the event held in celebration of your Too Much Information and Transforming Lives campaign.

I am also extremely thankful for all our volunteers, who dedicate hours of their free time to our charity. Whether you work in our offices, produce creative content, teach, or drive our school buses, I would like you to know that your hard work does not go unnoticed. Our annual Volunteers Week, which takes place in August, aims to celebrate the contributions and achievements of our fantastic volunteers. You may have seen this year's 'Three Cheers for Volunteers' short film on the National Autistic Society's website and social media channels.

In addition, I would like to thank the National Autistic Society's members and branches across the UK for the support they offer people locally. You play a pivotal role within our work, enabling autistic people to access the practical support they need on a day to day basis.

The National Autistic Society is your society and it is a society that works for autistic people. I encourage you all to be proud of who you are and the contribution each of you have and continue to make to improve the lives of autistic people and those close to them.

HRH The Countess of Wessex GCVO