



**Living Well**  
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Supporting Health and Wellbeing

## Reflecting on Autism Acceptance Week 2023

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Last week was **Autism Acceptance Week 2023** which involved a week of celebrating, fundraising and raising awareness of Autism across the UK. With this in mind we wanted to share an article written by Matthew Hunter, an employee at Healthwatch North Tyneside (part of the Living Well North Tyneside Partnership), who has had a recent Autism diagnosis. Matthew has shared his thoughts and reflections about his diagnosis and some of the challenges and positive aspects he faces whilst living with Autism.

### *Autism by Matthew Hunter*

I write this article on March 28th 2023, during World Autism Acceptance Week 2023. Whilst this is my first year being involved in efforts to support and promote this vital awareness week through Healthwatch, this is not my first experience of Autism awareness by any means.

To explain what I mean, it is worth looking back to the beginning of last year's autism acceptance week, 28th March 2022. During this time, I was in the process of receiving mental health treatment for the conditions of Social Anxiety and Depression which I had been diagnosed with the previous year. I was making good progress with this treatment thanks to an extremely supportive Community Psychiatric Nurse and Psychiatrist. Social anxiety and difficulties with social skills and communication is something that has impacted me for most of my life, at least since I was a teenager. For the vast majority of my life, these challenges had been explained by my physical disability (Albinism, a visual impairment condition) or experiences from my past. It was only when I met my psychiatrist that an alternative explanation for my situation was offered, that being **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**.

Following suggestions from my psychiatrist, and the unique challenges and viewpoints I experienced during and after a house move, I decided to add my name to the list to receive an Autism diagnosis as an adult. It was a momentous moment for me, to open myself up to the possibility of a new identity, one which at the time I only had limited knowledge of and had lived my entire life without knowing. I would be lying if I said I felt entirely positive about this, but that is where Autism Acceptance Week comes in.

So back to March 28th 2022, a few weeks into my research and understanding of Autism, and the beginning of Autism Acceptance week 2022. This week was undoubtedly my most productive in terms of research. Whilst my previous research had uncovered many challenges associated with Autism, and I won't shy away from discussing these as they do exist in my life and in the lives of many other autistic people, Autism Acceptance week confirmed to me that this is not the only side to Autism, and in fact there are multiple major positives too. Did you know that attention to detail, focus, new unique viewpoints and in depth knowledge and passion for subjects and hobbies are all attributes associated with

Autism? Thanks to knowledge I acquired from information shared during Autism Acceptance Week 2022, I began to quickly and easily identify the positives in myself and my potential new identity.

Jumping back to the present day, March 28th 2023, I have recently had my Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis confirmed, and as much as it may sound unexpected to say, I couldn't be happier! I am now able to see the long list of benefits this identity has. I am proud to be passionate about my work at Healthwatch and my hobbies, and I am delighted that my unique viewpoint leads to me bringing new ideas to the team and to social interactions. I do not wish to underestimate the challenges associated with Autism, I just want to reach out to anyone who is currently experiencing these, like I have many times, and say that whilst it may be difficult at times, Autism can also be empowering and a part of your identity to be proud of!

#### Related Links

- [NHS information about Autism](#)
- [Autism Acceptance Week 2023](#)



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