

TIME FOR AUTISM

FAMILY NEWSLETTER 2025-2026



Welcome, Time for Autism Families!

We are excited to share the latest updates to the Time for Autism (TfA) programme at Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS).

First Visits

With the new year underway, many of you will already have heard from your students and perhaps have even had your first visit. We hope these initial meetings have gone well.

Between November and March, Alison and the team will be in touch to gather full feedback from visits and the programme. If you have any questions or feedback before then, please don't hesitate to contact us at timeforautism@bsms.ac.uk.



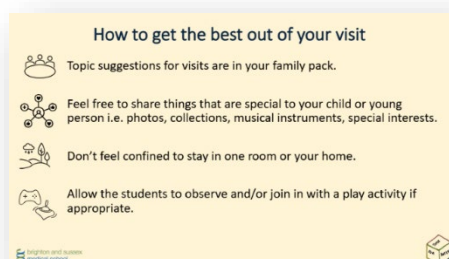
FAMILY WELCOME SESSIONS

At the start of the year, new families joined an online welcome session hosted by Alison Smith. During this session, Fleur Tindal and Jo Spear, existing TfA family members, shared advice on what to expect during student visits.

Alison also ran a dedicated session for existing families, providing updates on the programme and answering any queries.

All of the sessions were warm and welcoming, creating valuable opportunities to share life stories and connect with other families involved in the programme.

We are keen to continue running these events each year and would welcome your thoughts on how to develop them further.



KEY DATES

VISIT 1 WINDOW:

15th Sep '25 – 28th Nov '25

VISIT 2 WINDOW:

5th Jan '26 – 6th March '26

VISIT 3 WINDOW:

7th Apr '26 – 5th Jun '26

TFA STUDENT & FAMILY CONFERENCE

Tuesday 6th January '26

HEALTH PASSPORT

THIS WILL BE RETURNED TO FAMILIES BY THE END OF AUGUST 2026

IN THIS EDITION

FIRST VISIT & FAMILY WELCOME SESSIONS

MESSAGE FROM TFA AMBASSADOR

ANNUAL TFA CONFERENCE

GUIDES FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

SPOTLIGHT ON DR GEMMA WILLIAMS

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

FAMILY RECRUITMENT

UPDATE ON TFA EDUCATION
USEFUL LINKS & FURTHER READING

A MESSAGE FROM OUR OFFICIAL AMBASSADOR DAVID BURNS MBE



Not long ago I found myself admitted to a hospital for a minor procedure. I wasn't overly nervous which couldn't be said for the young male care assistant who approached me and asked,

"Can you tell me your name?"

My reply was a curious, *"Why?"*

"I've never been asked that before," he said. *"It's so I can take you to the theatre."*

"What play are we going to watch?"

He realised I was joking with him and we had a pleasant conversation in the lift down to the theatre. What stayed in my mind was his admission, *"Well I've experienced and learned something new today."*

Being a more mature autistic patient gives me opportunity to have a little fun (perhaps at the expense of health professionals!), but with the honest intention to educate and ensure others learn not to make assumptions and not to fear the unexpected.

I believe 'Time for Autism' offers undergraduate doctors the opportunity to experience the unexpected, to learn not to fear the unknown and to explore and remain inquisitive. It's a safe place to hear from those supporting autistic children and to discover how to build trust with an autistic child – so important if we are going to see improvements in the health inequalities autistic people experience.

This is a programme which changes outcomes. If you're an undergraduate doctor I know your attitude and assumptions will change and you'll approach situations differently. I know because it's already happened for previous participants. If you're a parent or carer, your gift of time to students will be a reward in itself because you are making vital change happen – thank you.

So, soon to be doctors – please participate wholeheartedly and commit yourself to this unique opportunity as I know you can. I promise you too will experience and learn something new.

David Burns MBE



TFA STUDENT & FAMILY CONFERENCE

We are delighted to announce that the **5th Annual Time for Autism Student and Family Conference** will take place on:



 **Tuesday 6th January 2026 at 9am - 1.30pm**

 **Jubilee Building, University of Sussex, Falmer**

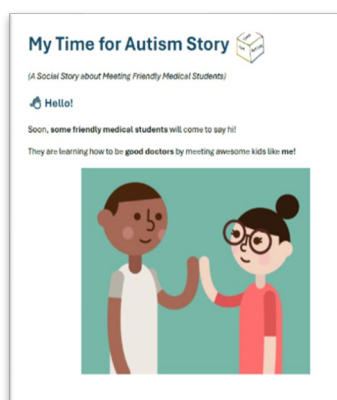
This event is always a highlight of the year, bringing together students, families, and professionals to share insights and learning.

Our guest speakers are:

- David Burns MBE
- Professor Nicola Yuill, Emeritus Professor of Developmental Psychology, University of Sussex
- Dr Jessica Eccles, Reader in Brain-Body Medicine, Brighton and Sussex Medical School
- Plus, an expert by experience sharing valuable perspectives from lived experience
- Professor Bobbie Farsides will be facilitating the event again this year, ensuring a dynamic and engaging programme.
- In addition, we are delighted to confirm that Professor Richard McManus, BSMS Dean and Professor Donna Whitehead Vice-Chancellor of the University of Brighton will be attending as our guests for the event.

 **Full details and invitations will be sent by email shortly**, including how to register for the event.

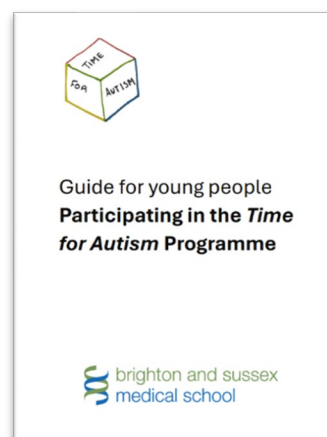
NEW GUIDES FOR TFA CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



This year, we introduced our new guides for the children and young people taking part in the TFA programme. These were developed in response to feedback from a family with older children who wanted a clearer understanding of what was expected of them.

With this in mind, we created the guides to outline expectations and to reassure those taking part that they only need to share what they feel comfortable sharing—there's absolutely no pressure.

We hope these new documents are helpful. As they are brand new, we'd love to hear your feedback. If you or your children have any suggestions, please do get in touch!



☀️ SPOTLIGHT ON DR GEMMA WILLIAMS

This year, TfA is delighted to shine a spotlight on Dr Gemma Williams – a long-standing supporter of our work and a passionate advocate for autistic and neurodivergent communities.



Gemma has been an active part of the TfA family, contributing to past conferences, student preparation sessions, and more recently joining our working group to expand TfA into Education. Her commitment to supporting our mission has helped shape the way we approach autism awareness and inclusion.

About Dr Gemma Williams

Gemma is an academic researcher, consultant, and public speaker dedicated to improving the quality of life for autistic and neurodivergent people. Her work goes far beyond research – it addresses real-world issues at the heart of social justice. Through this work, Gemma strives to amplify autistic voices and ensure that research is ethical, participatory, and grounded in lived experience. Her research interests include:



- Autistic experiences of loneliness and belonging
- Barriers to healthcare for neurodivergent people
- Links between neurodivergence and homelessness
- The role of sensory environments in public spaces
- Reproductive health and autism
- Autistic flow states and wellbeing

Neurodiverse Universe & Beyond the Abstract 🎧

Alongside research and consultancy work, Gemma shares insights through her Substack, Neurodiverse Universe. This includes a new mini-podcast series, *Beyond the Abstract*, brings academic research to life in short, accessible episodes. Recent topics include:

- *What is participatory research?*
- *Ethical concerns in “noise hypersensitivity” research*
- *Menstruation and autism – what do we know?*
- *Autistic sensory processing – what do we know?*



Why We Value Gemma's Work

Gemma's contributions remind us that autism advocacy must be holistic and inclusive, addressing everything from healthcare to housing, from sensory needs to reproductive health. Her expertise and commitment are helping shape a more equitable future for neurodivergent people – one in which voices from the community are heard and respected.

Meet your Cohort 5 TfA Student Representatives

We're delighted to introduce this year's Student Representatives! Acting as a vital link between students and the TfA team, our reps play a key role in shaping and improving the programme.

This year, we were pleased to see such strong interest from our students in taking on the role. With so many keen to be involved, we decided to welcome them all as Student Representatives for 2025-2026.



Their responsibilities include:

- Supporting the ongoing development of the TfA programme
- Reviewing and suggesting improvements to documentation
- Gathering feedback from fellow students, including through surveys
- Attending Student Representative meetings to share ideas and concerns on behalf of their peers
- Participating in the TfA Review Group
- Welcoming families and assisting at the Student and Family Conference

Through these contributions, the Student Representatives help ensure that the TfA programme continues to grow and reflect the voices of its participants. Welcome Courtney-Ann, Hannah, Lazaros, Rachael & Sadia!

FAMILY RECRUITMENT

We continue to be thrilled and humbled by the response of local families who are willing to give up their time to teach our students. Alison has recently enrolled the 225th family into the programme.

We are always keen to hear from new families, and we are actively engaging in family recruitment initiatives and expanding our support network. Your referrals and connections are invaluable in reaching out to families who can help with our programme. If you know of anyone who would be interested in joining, please get in touch.

UPDATE ON TFA EDUCATION



Since last year, we have been exploring the exciting possibility of adapting the TfA programme for Education students. In response to the strong interest in this initiative, a dedicated working group has been formed to investigate potential funding streams for a pilot project.

The group brings together expertise from across institutions and disciplines, including Dr Stephanie Daley and Dr Ann White (BSMS and TfA), Dr Christina Hancock (University of Sussex, Education), Professor Nicola Martin (London South Bank University), Christine Goodban (University of Roehampton), Dr Gemma Williams, and our ambassador David Burns MBE.

In the past few weeks, we applied to the Nuffield Research and Analysis Fund to support this pilot. We will keep you up to date as this progresses.

To support our bid for funding to take TfA into teaching training, 3rd year medical student **Fatema Nargis**, reviewed the research evidence on the effectiveness of autism education in teacher training. Here is Fatema presenting her work and a copy of the poster she produced.



The scoping review explored how autism is taught in teacher training programmes worldwide and how effective these approaches are. Across 15 studies, five main intervention themes were identified: autism teaching and learning, lived experience, literature or media-based learning, simulation exercises, and family education. Most interventions improved teachers' knowledge, confidence, skill development, and attitudes toward autism. However, training content and quality varied widely, and most studies used non-standardised tools to measure success, highlighting the need for more consistent, evidence-based approaches in teacher education to better prepare teachers for inclusive classrooms.

We are eager to see how this opportunity develops and will keep you updated as new milestones are reached.

Thank you from the TfA Team

The support from all our families has been truly overwhelming – we couldn't run this programme without you. Together, we're shaping a future of compassionate, informed autism care. If you have any questions, feedback, or suggestions, please don't hesitate to get in touch via our main email. We're looking forward to another fantastic year ahead.

Best wishes

The Time for Autism Team

Dr Stephanie Daley, Dr Ann White, Alison Smith, Francesca Rigby & Rosie Mulgrue
timeforautism@bsms.ac.uk



Local Support Groups, Coffee Mornings, Groups and Clubs:



Amaze run regular, informal support groups across Brighton & Hove and East Sussex for parents of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). For more information visit their website or view the Parent Carer support groups page at www.amazesussex.org.uk



mASCot is a support network for parents with autistic children, whatever age your child is. By becoming a member of mASCot, you will be part of their amazing support network and have access to all the things they do. www.asc-mascot.com



Reaching families is a parent-carer led, grassroots charity in West Sussex which aims to support parents and families of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in their daily lives, in particular through the delivery of information, training and peer support. www.reachingfamilies.org.uk. Click the link for further details about their online and in-person support groups – [Reaching Families Umbrellas Parent Support Group](#)

USEFUL LINKS & FURTHER READING

East Sussex Parent Carer Forum: <https://www.espcf.org.uk/>

West Sussex Parent Carer Forum: <https://westsussex.local-offer.org/services/195-west-sussex-parent-carer-forum>

The Autism Community Research Network Sussex (ACoRNS): <https://www.acorns-sussex.org.uk/>

Autism Central <https://www.autismcentral.org.uk>

Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism:

<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/learning-disability/current-projects/oliver-mcgowan-mandatory-training-learning-disability-autism>

Pulse – The Brighton and Sussex Medical School Magazine (bsms.ac.uk):

<https://www.bsms.ac.uk/about/news/pulse-magazine/index.aspx>