



**The
Advonet
Group**

Providing Independent Advocacy

Autistic Utopia: **Our manifesto**

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Introduction

To mark Autism Acceptance Week and Autism Acceptance Month, Leeds Autism AIM and Yorkshire Autism AIM held an online discussion group on the idea of an 'Autistic Utopia'. The group was attended by autistic adults living in Leeds and facilitated by autistic staff members of both projects' teams.

In the session, we asked people taking part about what would an autistic-friendly society be like, covering the following areas:

- Employment - autistic-friendly jobs and workplaces.
- Transport - fully-accessible buses, trains, planes and cars.
- Public spaces and buildings - shops, parks, city centres.
- Housing - private housing, supported living, student housing.
- Education - universities, colleges, distance learning.

Using the feedback given, we have put together a list of things we would like to see improve for each area in this 'manifesto'. All ideas contributed to this document are from autistic adults in Leeds.

We hope that you find this document useful. If you have any ideas for how services can improve for autistic adults in our area, feel free to send them our way!

We can be contacted by email at leedsautismaim@advonet.org.uk, on Twitter at [@leedsautismAIM](https://twitter.com/leedsautismAIM) and on Facebook at [@leedsautismaim](https://www.facebook.com/leedsautismaim).

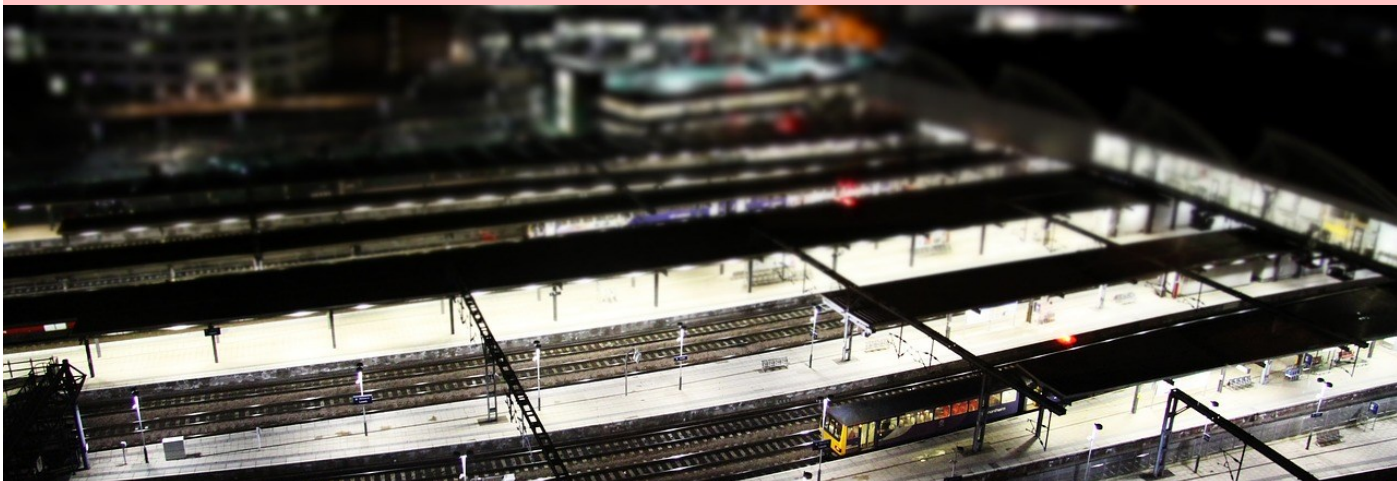
Employment



Employment is a big issue within the wider autistic community. According to the National Autistic Society, only one in six working age autistic adults are in full-time paid employment. Inaccessible workplaces, low pay and access to support in-work are major issues too. Here are some ideas for making work better for us:

- All workplaces should be ones where you can bring your whole self to work, without having to mask.
- Breakout spaces and/or quiet rooms to go to when stressed or overloaded should be in all workplaces.
- Support us to organise workloads and be realistic about what we can do.
- Don't give us several tasks at the same time or expect us to multitask.
- Remove 'ability to work under pressure' from job descriptions, as that can be far too stressful to live up to.
- No hotdesking in offices, as that can be chaotic.
- Make it easier for us to ask for reasonable adjustments, especially without having to involve a trade union. They should be for everyone.
- Having the option to work from home or in the office should be for everyone.
- Having the option to work in a quiet space would be useful.
- Flexibility to move between quieter and more normal parts of workplaces.
- Being in control of your space - lighting, where you sit and noise levels.
- Better public transport provision in Leeds and West Yorkshire.

Transport



Many autistic adults in Leeds would like transport in the city and beyond to be accessible and reliable. In our discussion, we raised these ideas:

- Free public transport.
- Disabled bus passes should be usable 24/7.
- Make bus pass application rules and the application process more relaxed. The same should apply when applying for a blue badge (parking).
- Provide timetable changes well in advance to reduce anxiety.
- Have more staff available online, by phone and in person to answer questions or deal with antisocial behaviour.
- Motability cars should be more widely available.
- Disabled/wheelchair spaces on buses and trains should be prioritised for disabled people over parents with buggies.
- Driverless cars should be invented and be made widely available.
- Driverless vehicles like those on Greater Manchester's tram network should be in place for when Leeds gets a light rail network.
- Separate quiet cubicles on buses should be in place, like quiet carriages on trains. Staff will be needed to ensure they are being used properly.
- Greater recognition of autism alert cards by transport staff.
- Clear rules onboard public transport about talking loudly and playing loud music.
- All buses need a screen displaying name and location of their next stop.



Public Buildings and Spaces



Making public buildings and spaces more accessible is on the wishlist of many autistic adults. Here is what was suggested to make that happen by our group:

- Clearer signage for no-smoking areas and designated smoking areas.
- Clearer signage for anti-littering notices and loud music.
- Make places more easily-signposted and labelled.
- Have arrows pointing towards exits in shops to make it easier to go in and out.
- Use signage to stop people standing in front of doorways, lifts and escalators.
- Reintroduce social distancing measures to bring back social boundaries.
- Consider personal space at all time.
- Ensure autism service dogs are recognised by shops.
- Don't use fluorescent lights in public buildings.
- Have 'autism hours' in shops at more realistic times. Also, introduce autism hour adjustments on a full-time basis.
- Make it easier to access doctors' appointments.
- Stimming should be accepted in public.
- Include vaping in no-smoking areas as well as other strong smells.
- Make adjustable hearing aids and noise-cancelling headphones more widely available to autistic people.
- Ensure autism alert cards are recognised by all retailers and services.

Housing



Access to safe and accessible housing is something many in the wider autistic community need. Here are some suggestions from our group discussion for making this a reality:

- The process of getting housing and dealing with housing services should be easier:
 - Should have an autistic-friendly pathway with dedicated worker.
 - Applying for help completely baffling; too much information and phone calls required.
- Many adapted living spaces are only equipped for older people, not younger people. This should be changed.
- There should be child-free zones or better spaces for children to play in.
- There should be a housing association for neurodivergent people – maybe a bit like a halls of residence you find at universities.
- Develop dispute resolution services for disputes with neighbours.
- Autistic-led training and consultancy for housing organisations - Leeds Autism AIM have done this for services in the Leeds area.
- Have self-contained housing for autistic people that isn't a house share.
- Make use of assistive technology such as Alexa in each room of a house.
- Give plenty of advance notice for routine inspections of rental properties.
- Make sure that support for moving into supported living is easier to come by.



From primary school to postgraduate studies, there are barriers in place for many autistic people in education. Our group suggested how they can be removed:

- Train teachers how to help advocate for people who are unable to speak up about being bullied.
- Make sure that they have something in place to support the victim and punish the bully; have this in place from an early age.
- Have a quiet space for students on campus.
- Reasonable adjustments such as having your own room, extra time for exams, dimmable lighting and a silent clock can all be helpful.
- Safeguarding of autistic students needs to be in place, as some of us are vulnerable to bullying.
- Be mindful of everyone learning in a different way.
- Have practical tasks in lieu of exams for some students; with exams, it feels like you are being put under the spotlight with extra pressure to contend with.
- Options to drop certain subjects e.g. PE.
- Universities need to put in more peer support for students e.g. societies for neurodivergent students.
- It would be helpful if more teachers/lecturers had autism acceptance/awareness training. This is because it can be stressful to explain our needs to them, plus there is the fear of being dismissed when approaching them for help.



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