



Autistic-led groups: Information booklet

Why we run autistic-led groups

Leeds Autism AIM run a number of regular autistic-led groups. Autistic-led means that they are run by and for autistic people.

All of them are online for the time being. The aim of these groups is to help reduce isolation and increase involvement. Isolation is something often experienced by some autistic adults.

Most of the groups have a peer support element. Peer support is when people use their own experiences to help each other. It also aims to provide a space where you feel accepted and understood.

Some of our groups started at the Lovell Autism Hub. This was a weekly drop-in session that AIM held at the Lovell Park Hub building in Leeds before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Others were set up during the pandemic. A couple of our groups moved from being in-person at the Hub to online.

All of our groups are facilitated by autistic staff and volunteers.

Who can join our groups?

If you would like to join any of our groups, you must:

- Be an autistic adult (aged 18+),
- Live in the Leeds City Council area or be registered with a GP in Leeds and,
- Receive little or no funded support. This means not having hours with a support worker or being given funding to access support services such as Specialist Autism Services or Leeds Autism Services.

If you are self-diagnosed, are actively seeking an autism diagnosis or going through the diagnostic process, you are more than welcome to join our groups.

How to join our groups

To join, you should take these steps:

- Make a referral using our online referral form. You can access it at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/leedsautismaimreferral>
- In the form, please select which of our groups you would like to join.

Once you have filled in the referral form, we will add you to our groups mailing list. On there, you will get updates the day before each group session starts. They will have info for joining via Zoom or Discord, depending on where the group is hosted.

If you want to access a group but can't get in, we are here to help. Email us at leedsautismaim@advonet.org.uk if you need support.

List of our groups on Zoom

Peer Support Group

What is it?: A monthly group where autistic adults can share experiences and receive peer support from other autistic adults. The group is on the first Tuesday of every month from 6pm-7pm on Zoom.

What happens: The group starts with introductions for new group members. Then, we go round the Zoom meeting to ask how everyone is doing.

Women-Aligned Group

What is it?: A monthly group run by and for autistic women and femme-aligned non-binary adults. We meet on the second Tuesday of every month from 5:30pm to 6:30pm. The group is on Zoom.

What happens: On alternating months, there are different meeting formats. One month, we share news and information, then chat. The other month sees the group run a themed discussion on a topic the group chooses. At the start of each group, we do a welcome and introductions for new members.

Coproduction Group

What is it?: A monthly group on Zoom that gives feedback on resources made by the Leeds Autism AIM team and, occasionally, by other services in Leeds.

What happens: We start with introductions for new group members. Then, we go through each resource by sharing it on the screen. The facilitator makes notes of members' feedback.

After the meeting, changes are made to the resources based on the group's feedback; they are then sent to group members before being finalised.

Taking part in our Zoom groups

There are a number of ways to take part. In our Zoom groups.

You don't have to use video and can just use audio or the text chat instead if you prefer.

It is up to you how much you would like to engage with the groups.

You don't have to do introductions or take part in any discussions if you don't want to.



Our Discord Community

Gaming Group on Discord

What is it?: A monthly group playing games on Board Game Arena streamed on a voice channel in our Discord server. It meets on the fourth Tuesday of every month from 6pm-7pm.

What happens: Using the Gaming Group voice chat in Discord, we invite people who want to play to take part. The group chooses a game to play and we go through it before starting.

If you want to play any of the games, you need to set up a Board Game Arena account. You can do this for free, but it's best to set one up on their website at **boardgamearena.com**.

If joining the group, you can just use text to chat. You don't have to play and can even just spectate. For that, you don't need to set up a Board Game Arena account. If you like, we can play a different game using another app or website.

AIM's Online Community: Explained

We run an online community on an app called Discord. On there, we have:

- Chat channels for topics like employment, gaming, music, film and TV, creative work and going out.
- Chat channels for news, Discord suggestions and giving feedback about AIM.
- Audio chats for things such as our Gaming Group.
- Dedicated channels for our Women-Aligned and Coproduction Groups.
- A 'Who I am' chat, where you can introduce yourself if you're a new member and can read others' posts.
- The option to send private messages to members and moderators.

The server is monitored during working hours by AIM staff and volunteers. In our online community, members are there for each other too.

If you have any questions or worries, you can send a private message to **OwenW (Owen)**, **Chris AIM (Chris)** or **LeedsAutismAIM (Luke)**.

To access the server, you need to set up a free account at discord.com if you haven't got one already.

Then, you either need to ask for an invite from our team or join our groups mailing list if making a referral to AIM at tinyurl.com/leedsautismaimreferral. In the mailing list, we send an invite the day before each monthly Gaming Group session.

Once you have the Discord account ready and an invite link, you're ready to join!

Get on the Discord to see what we're up to!

Meet our group facilitators and moderators

Gill: AIM Peer Dev Worker **Luke: AIM Info Officer**



Gill facilitates our monthly Women-Aligned Group with Anna. She is **@Gill Loomes-Quinn** on Discord.



Luke runs our Peer Support Group and Coproduction Group. He is **@LeedsAutismAIM** on Discord.

Chris: AIM Coordinator



Chris looks after our Discord server and facilitates the Gaming Group. His profile name is **@Chris AIM**.

Owen: AIM Manager



Owen is the manager of the whole Leeds Autism AIM service. His profile name is **@AIMOwen**.

Anna: Volunteer



Anna co-facilitates the Women-Aligned Group on Zoom with Gill. Her Discord name is **@Anna A**.

Online group rules

To help make all of our groups as safe, friendly, accessible and welcoming as possible, we have a few rules. These are for all of our online and in-person groups.

- You do not need to turn your camera on or use audio to take part in groups. If you prefer, you can use the text chat or just listen in.
- Please avoid using any offensive or abusive language or bullying. This includes racism, misogyny, ableism, ageism, antisemitism, Islamophobia and making anti-LGBTQIA+ statements. We have zero tolerance of bullying behaviour.
- If people do use offensive language or resort to abuse or bullying, Owen will contact them about this outside the group. If this behaviour is within the groups, the facilitators will ask people to leave.
- If you act inappropriately in a group, it will be handled accordingly and you may be removed. If anyone is called out for something they have said, that will be dealt with privately rather than disrupting a group. For Zoom groups, we will use a breakout room at the end of a session.
- Please avoid interrupting or talking over someone when they are speaking. If you would like to say something in an online group, please use the hands up feature. Then, the group facilitator will take note and keep on top of things.
- On Zoom, if others are speaking instead, please put your microphone on mute. If you are speaking, please try to keep background noise to a minimum.
- If asking a question, please give others in the group time to respond and process what you are saying.
- Try to give in-person group members personal space.
- If you have a pet, you are more than welcome to show them in online groups!
- Please respect group members' privacy at all times. This is for our in-person and online groups. What goes in the groups, stays in the groups.
- Safeguarding rules apply in groups, so if people share anything that may be a danger to themselves or others, we will contact them privately about this. We follow The Advonet Group's policies on privacy: advonet.org.uk/about/our-policies.
- Be mindful of oversharing, especially any personal details.
- If there is something you're unsure about, please talk to any staff/volunteers in the group session.
- Try not to speak too loudly. Being too loud could trigger sensory overload in some group members.