

# **Charities call for a Commissioner for autistic people**

**Three charities, ENABLE Scotland, National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism have begun a campaign for a commitment to have a Commissioner appointed in Scotland to represent autistic people and those with a learning disability.**

The campaign is called Our Voice Our Rights and represents 56,000 autistic people and 120,000 people with a learning disability along with their families. The aim is to make Scotland the best country where human rights are respected and everyone has access to the services they need.

Every day the charities say they hear from people who struggle to access education, work, a family life and healthcare, while also experiencing discrimination.

They would like this demand to be met by candidates standing in the forthcoming Scottish Parliamentary election in May, and call upon all political parties to close the gap by appointing a Commissioner.



Stuart Cosgrove

The charities have launched the campaign alongside autistic people, people with a learning disability and families including the broadcaster, Stuart Cosgrove who has an autistic son. He said: “This campaign has the capacity for real positive change – As a family we’ve been lucky in that Jack got his autism diagnosis early on as a child but like all parents I worry about what happens when he grows up and leaves school.

“We of course want him to be independent, have his own place, a relationship, a job, all the usual things that parents hope for, but we also know those are likely to be challenging for him – he’s going to need that bit extra help and support.

“I believe by and large Scotland has a caring culture but establishing a Commissioner at a national level with a legal obligation to look into the different aspects of public life would make a huge difference. It would help Scotland lead the way to creating a society that fully includes and values autistic people.”

Ivan Cohen who lives in Edinburgh and has a learning disability. He is also Convenor of ENABLE Scotland's Scottish Council said: "In spite of years of campaigning there are still inequalities facing people with learning disabilities like myself. The pandemic has been a difficult time for everyone, but I feel this has been particularly tough for people with learning disabilities. I think we can learn a lot from the experiences of learning disabled and autistic people through the pandemic to find how we can be better supported and to make sure that people aren't isolated in the future if something like this happens again.



Ivan Cohen

The challenges we faced during lockdown made it even more clear that we need to make sure real change happens for people with learning disabilities and autism, I think this is one of the reasons we need a Commissioner for Learning Disability and Autism. We also need a Commissioner to make sure autistic people and other people with learning disabilities like myself are listened to, and have a voice to create real change for

our community.”



Nick Ward

Nick Ward, Director of National Autistic Society Scotland said: “We believe a Commissioner would send a clear message that we as a country value autistic people, people with learning disabilities and their families and that Scotland is leading the way in making sure that people get the support they need and we create a more inclusive culture.

“Day in day out we hear from autistic people and families locked in a battle to get access to desperately needed services, a battle which often leaves them frustrated and exhausted and even at crisis point. We believe a commissioner would make the difference: no one should have to fight to get the support they need, to be listened to or to have their human rights respected.”

A website is now live with a series of videos featuring people from across Scotland making the case for change. People are also being encouraged to get involved and to contact the party

leaders to call for a Commissioner for autistic people and people with a learning disability to be included in their election manifestos.