

Autumn 2025 Newsletter



Supporting children's rights
to play, care and learning

Scottish Out of School Care Network

Spring is usually associated with new beginnings but in out of school care I think this is more appropriate for Autumn since this is the time you welcome new families and children into your services having saying goodbye to the older ones earlier in the year.

This autumn SOSCN has seen some new beginnings of its own: Patrick has become a father for the first time; Greig Cavanagh our Physical Activity Co-ordinator has moved on after 14 years, and for me, this will be my last newsletter. I have decided that at my age and stage in life it is time to seek new challenges and opportunities, and I too am moving on after 24 years. I have many fond memories of working in the sector and met some truly inspiring and generous individuals, and I will value the friendships and kindness going forward.

So, what's in this newsletter? We have further SOSCN updates, as well as news from the Care Inspectorate and the SSSC. There is a book review, Achieving Quality Scotland awards and Indigo Out of School Care talk about their family stay and play sessions. We shall also consider how services can support neuro divergent children and staff, as well as implementing quality improvement methods.

Happy reading!

Andrew Shoolbread

Editor



Let's Get Together to Talk About School Age Childcare: Local Networking and Information Sessions Autumn/Winter 2025

This November, SOSCN is touring the country to talk about school age childcare.

Audrey Anderson will be introducing herself to members as our new CEO, alongside our Practice & Training Officer, Patrick Morrison.

Join us for one of our morning sessions, where we'll share updates on our recent work and future plans, as well as discuss national topics and issues affecting school age childcare. We also hope you'll share the amazing work you and your services have been doing.

We'll present a live Inspection Round-Up, highlighting common themes from recent inspection reports, with a special focus on medication management.

Attendees will have the opportunity to network with colleagues, share best practices, raise concerns, and exchange ideas over tea, coffee, and biscuits.

All sessions are 10am - 12:30pm and cost £15 per person* to cover costs.

Refreshments will be provided during the break.

CPL Certificates issued to all attendees.

Booking is on a first-come, first-served basis. Preferred booking is through Eventbrite. If you're unable to pay by card or use the Eventbrite system, please contact finlay@soscn.org to arrange payment by invoice.

We look forward to seeing you there!

[Thursday 13th November - Stirling @ STEP](#)

[Monday 17th November - Edinburgh @ BMA](#)

[Wednesday 19th November - Inverness @ Beechwood ELC \(In partnership with CALA\)](#)

[Friday 21st November - Aberdeen @ Townhouse](#)

[Monday 24th November - Dundee @ DCA](#)

[Thursday 27th November - Glasgow @ STUC](#)

** Partnership event in Inverness is a free event*

SOSCN Membership Survey 2025



We are currently looking for your thoughts and opinions on our work and services. We would be very grateful if you can spare a couple of minutes to complete our membership survey to provide some insight into our work. The survey looks at aspects of our work, including our training, toolkits, and emails, to see what is being used and what we could do better. The survey will be open for the next two weeks and will inform some of the content for our forthcoming in-person networking meetings.

You can access the survey here:

<https://soscn.org/membership-survey#2025>

Follow us on social media

Remember to follow us on facebook and twitter/x for more updates. You can find us at the links bellow:

facebook: [@soscn](#)

twitter/x: [@officialSOSCN](#)

Quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors

The new Quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors launched on 18th September and has been used in inspections from Monday 22 September. The framework reflects a commitment to ensuring that children grow up loved, safe, respected and supported to achieve their full potential. This rights-based approach underpins how services deliver for children and how inspectors evaluate quality. Access the framework here: <https://bit.ly/QualityImprovementFramework>

In partnership with the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland, SOSCN hosted 3 events over the course of the development of the framework with over 600 bookings, and we thank all of you for your participation and feedback. In case you missed one of these, a recording of a similar event can be found on the Care Inspectorate website here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lxwwWN-bY>

AQS- Quality Success for Glasgow Services

Achieving Quality Scotland was SOSCN's quality improvement framework for more than a decade and although it is now under redevelopment we were delighted that a number of Glasgow services completed the assessment in advance of the scheme closing.

A total of five services and seven sites achieved the awards which had been funded through Glasgow City Council (GCC): C.O.J.A.C., The Glasgow Academy After School Care, Hutchesons' Out of School Care, and Big Voices (Anderston and Garnetbank Out of School Care Services) all received standard awards, whilst Indigo (St Bartholomew's and Castleton Out of School Care Services) received AQS Gold Awards. The funding from GCC enabled services to participate in mentoring, training and networking sessions delivered by SOSCN, as well as undertake the portfolio and visit assessments conducted by Anne Marie Mackin, our independent assessor.

To achieve AQS, services had to provide evidence they were meeting indicators for one preparatory section and 10 quality areas. Literally hundreds of pieces of evidence were required and the necessary work to complete this task was immense, especially since several services were dealing with ongoing recruitment or premises' issues, or wider organisation changes.

We would like to congratulate all the services and once again recognise not only their hard work but also their ongoing commitment and dedication to providing quality care and experiences for children and families across Glasgow.

Quality assurance and improvement- how can you do it?

As we have just discussed, AQS provided a comprehensive framework and system for out of school care services to assess quality and identify improvement areas. Although AQS was a useful tool, not all services could access it, yet that doesn't mean only AQS services should have been looking at quality: it is the responsibility of all services,



Audrey Anderson SOSCN CEO and Colette Bremridge, (Manager) The Glasgow Academy ASC



C.O.J.A.C.: Lucie Byrne, Vicki Ballantyne & Lauren Fairley.



Big Voices Anderston & Garnetbank After School Care: Childcare Co-ordinators & Business Partners Nicola Gracey & Laura Hopkins

and indeed all businesses, to ensure that they are operating to the highest possible standards.

Services need to take a pro-active approach and, fundamentally, ownership of quality assurance and improvement and should not be waiting for Care Inspectorate gradings or assessments to make changes. Looking at recently published inspection reports it is clear under “How good is our leadership?”, inspectors are looking at indicator “3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well”.

So, what is quality assurance and improvement? In the simplest terms: it is having a clear vision of what you want to achieve, what actions you will take to make the vision happen, and measure if the actions are achieving the aims, or whether you need to make specific changes to meet targets. Monitoring, evaluating and feedback are all key to success.

Main steps:

First be clear about WHY you are delivering a service- what are your aims and objectives? What are the outcomes you want to see for children, families and staff? At the stage this is not about what you are going to do (actions), it is about the affects you will have and differences you will make in the lives of your service users and staff. So for example, you might say you “want children to be happy, experience joy, and meet their full potential”.

The next stage is being clear HOW you will achieve this, so for example, you might say you “will employ dedicated and enthusiastic staff who will create a nurturing and stimulating environment”. This is also about making sure policies and procedures, staff training, qualifications etc are relevant and fit for purpose.

The next stage is much more about WHAT you will deliver- so this is your opening hours, number of places, the activities you provide etc.

Monitoring And Evaluating

Once you have decided what it is you are doing and how you will do it, you then need to check to see if your actions and activities are meeting aims- are children happy? Do they experience joy? Are your snacks healthy? Are staff enthusiastic? This is fundamentally the ongoing monitoring and



Hutchesons' After School Care: Pamela McKinnon and Jackie Thomson (Manager)



Indigo Castleton Out of School Care: Chanelle Chambers, Leigh Cavanagh, Leigha Christie, Steph Grant & Daniel Cunningham



Indigo St Bartholomew's Out of School Care:

CC, Jordyn Dodd, LC, Jamie Gordon & SG.

evaluating: are you meeting your aims and objectives? Yes/No. If mostly “no”, you need to consider what changes should be made for the better.

A large part of monitoring and evaluating is about getting meaningful and timely feedback from children, families and staff- surveys, questionnaires, open days, family play sessions staff meetings and chats all play their part here. Remember however, that things should be recorded and noted in some way- this is your evidence to either say “we KNOW what we do is working” or “ we KNOW what we are doing needs to be better, and this is how we are going to change it”.



Create A Quality Improvement Calendar

Creating a quality improvement calendar over the course of a year as part of a 2-3 year improvement plan can help break down the process into smaller and more manageable parts. So for example, you may decide to focus on a specific area every 3 months e.g. child protection procedures, medication management, staff retention, supervision and appraisal etc. and then seek feedback on this specific topic, and work out what needs to improve. Of course, it is vital that any legal or regulatory failings become immediate focus areas and should be prioritised ASAP.

Although this has only been the briefest of overviews it should be recognised that quality assurance and improvement does take investment in terms of time and potentially resources- staff need to be given time “away from the floor” and it should be a “whole service approach”.

In terms of the Care Inspectorate they often mention in reports as to the efficacy (or not) of parental engagement and feedback- it is considered a vital part of the quality evaluation process.

In the next article, Steph Grant, Children and Young People Service Manager with Indigo Childcare in Castlemilk, Glasgow shares how Indigo have built stronger connections with, and between families, through their stay and play sessions. In the article she further elaborates on the processes used to evaluate and improve these sessions.

Reimagining Stay and Play: Building Stronger Family Connections @ Indigo, Through Inclusive Play

Stay and Play sessions have long been a cherished opportunity for families to engage with their children in a relaxed, playful environment at Indigo. However, we faced challenges with attendance and participation. Many parents felt unsure about how to get involved, often opting to sit on the sidelines with a cup of tea or coffee rather than joining in the fun. This prompted us to take a step back and reassess our approach.

We began by asking ourselves some key questions: Were we unintentionally encouraging passive participation? Were we effectively role-modelling play? Was our environment truly welcoming and conducive to shared experiences?

Through reflection and feedback, we made several intentional changes. We reconsidered the role of refreshments. While tea and coffee are comforting, we noticed they sometimes created a barrier to engagement. Instead of placing them front and centre, we integrated them more subtly, encouraging parents to mingle and move freely around the play space.

Next, we focused on role-modelling. The Team created a better balance between welcoming and engaging directly with parents and actively participating in play, demonstrating how simple interactions could spark joy and connection. This helped break down the fear of “doing it wrong” and showed parents that play doesn’t require perfection—just presence.



We also reimagined the physical setup of sessions. Spaces were designed to be open, inviting, and intentionally arranged to promote interaction. Cozy corners for quiet play, collaborative stations for crafts, and active zones for movement gave families a variety of ways to engage based on their comfort levels.

One of the most impactful changes has been the introduction of themed sessions. Themes such as “Inclusion” “Carnival Fun,” and “Family Support” have provided structure and purpose, making each event feel special and meaningful. These themes help families connect not just with their children, but with each other, fostering a sense of community.

Our last three Stay and Play events have seen a remarkable increase in attendance and engagement. Families are not only showing up—they’re staying, playing, and bonding. The atmosphere is warm, joyful, and inclusive. Parents have expressed appreciation for the opportunity to spend quality time with their children in a setting that feels safe and supportive without additional financial burden, and children have been delighted to share their play with their families.

Another successful addition has been the “takeaway” element. At the end of each session, families receive a resource kit—whether it’s a craft, game, or a set of ideas for home play. These kits extend the experience beyond our walls and reinforce the value of shared playtime.

Our refreshed approach to Stay and Play has transformed these sessions into vibrant, community-building experiences. By removing barriers, modelling engagement, and creating purposeful environments, we’ve empowered families to connect more deeply with their children and with each other. We’re excited to continue evolving these sessions and exploring new themes that support the diverse needs of our families.

<https://www.indigogrp.com>



Book Review

Andrew Shoolbread

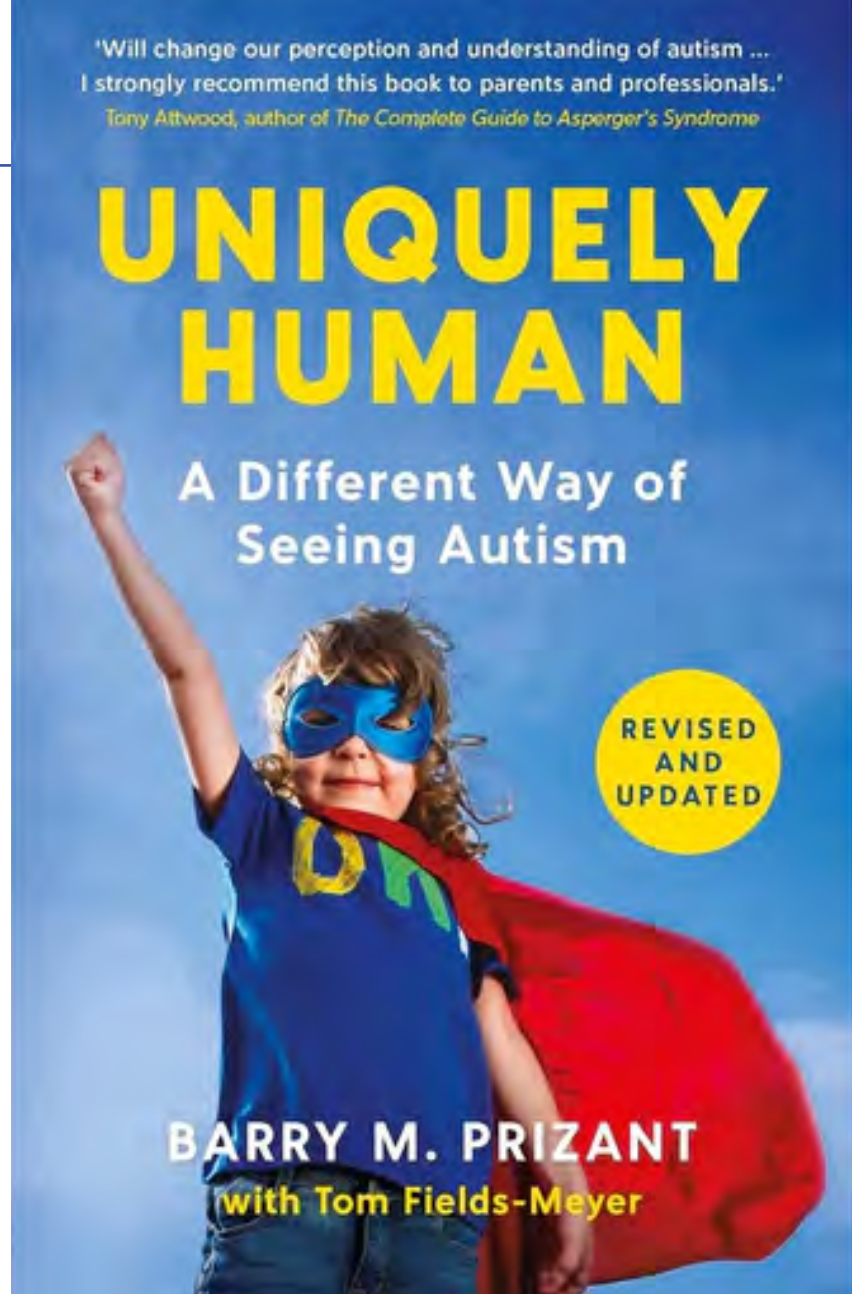
“Uniquely Human. A different way of seeing autism” by Barry M Prizant

With more than half a century of research and experience working with children and older persons on the autism spectrum and related neurodevelopmental conditions, Dr Prizant is well-placed to share his extensive knowledge with a mainstream audience through “Uniquely human, A different way of seeing autism”. The book, a winner of the Autism Society of America’s Temple Grandin Award, has been revised and expanded since its initial publication in 2016, and is a call to see autism not as “an illness but a different way of being human”.

With increasing numbers of children and adults being diagnosed with neurodiversity, this book provides a comprehensive overview of what it means (and what it doesn’t) to be autistic and how neurodivergent individuals can be better supported to achieve success in mainstream/ neurotypical-dominant environments. In essence the book is an appeal to see beyond the label of autism and what we think it means, and to take an individualised approach tailored to the specific needs of the autistic person. In his introduction, Prizant says “the best way to help a person on the autism spectrum change for the better is to change ourselves- our attitude, our behaviour, and the types of support we provide.”

Essentially the book demystifies, and “demythifises” common held perceptions about autism whilst promoting theoretical and practical guidance with advice how to support individuals. Throughout the book, examples of practical support from Prizant’s own practice are used to emphasise the success his suggested approaches can have. It is both theoretical and practical but not unduly academic despite being well-researched, making it is accessible to many.

One slight criticism would be that the latter half of the book is heavy on case-studies which are overly repetitive, therefore, it may be preferable to focus on the initial chapters which are predominantly practical in nature. This minor quibble aside, for anyone looking to learn more about autism and how people on the autistic spectrum can be better supported, this would be a worthwhile purchase and addition to their library. It’s unlikely to be THE definitive book on the topic but it is a great starting point.



Reframing Behaviour - Discussion & Learning From “Uniquely Human”

Andrew Shoolbread



Each children's unique needs should be at the heart of the care they receive, regardless of any diagnosis (or labels) they may, or may not, have, and seeing beyond behaviours and considering their cause is at the heart of GIRFEC and a trauma-informed approach.

For those of you who have participated in SOSCN's related training you will know that we ask childcare workers to stop thinking of "antisocial or inappropriate behaviours" as being "challenging" and consider them as "distressed behaviours" or a form of "non-verbal communication". We believe it's more meaningful to consider behaviour as a symptom than a cause: displayed behaviours may be the body's correct and natural response to certain environments, experiences, activities or relationships.

This is the very same approach that Prizant advocates in his book- he says the first thing we should do when supporting autistic/neurodivergent people is to listen to what they have to say. We need to ask the simple question WHY... are they displaying certain behaviours, thought patterns etc.?

He continues, "There is no such thing as autistic behaviour. These are all human behaviours and human reactions based upon a person's experience." He further states that it is not helpful to call behaviours demonstrated by autistic people as being "autistic", "abhorrent" or "non-compliant", it's simply human behaviour which may seem strange in a neurotypical-dominant world.

The questions we should be asking are:

- What is motivating the behaviour?
- What purpose does the behaviour serve?
- What is this person feeling?
- Does it actually help the person, even though it looks different?

According to Prizant, autistic/neurodivergent people experience more feelings of discomfort, anxiety and confusion than neurotypical people, and they have greater difficulty learning how to cope with these feelings and challenges. Therefore, emotional and physical dysregulation should be considered a core, defining feature of autism. (That said, it must be remembered we ALL experience dysregulation from time to time, but possibly not at the same intensity or rapidity as an autistic or neurodivergent person.)

What causes dysregulation?

- Problems in communicating
- Environments that are chaotic
- People who are confusing because they move or talk too quickly
- Unpredictability and unexpected change
- Excessive worry about things that are uncertain.

Added to this could be sleep deprivation, digestive problems, allergies and sensory sensitivities to touch and sound.

The behaviours which an autistic person displays may appear odd to neurotypical individuals but in fact they are often the strategies that an individual may employ to feel better regulated emotionally and physiologically. It's important to remember that if this is a coping strategy, it also means that the individual is feeling dysregulated. And again, we need to remember that coping strategies and rituals are employed by all of us at different times to help us get through the day or certain situations- so it's really not so unusual after all.

With this in mind, instead of trying to make a child comply to our wishes and perhaps norms, we should:

- Listen
- Observe
- Ask why
- Change our approach
- Learn what triggers a child's dysregulation
- Help them develop ways and strategies of coping when feeling dysregulated.

When it comes to communication, Prizant says it helps if communication is direct, unambiguous and also uses visual clues since most autistic people are stronger using visual ways to express and understand language than communicating purely by hearing and speaking.

Undoubtedly this is only a brief overview but if there is one thing to take away, it is to remember to see the child and look beyond the behaviour to consider what might be the cause, and to remember what works to help regulate one individual may not work for all. After all, we may be human but we are also unique, or, "uniquely human"



Scottish Social Services Council

Supporting your continuous professional learning

The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) has lots of resources that you can use to support your continuous professional learning (CPL). As this newsletter focuses on neurodiversity, ADHD and autism, we're highlighting a selection of resources available to support your learning and development in these areas.

The CPL website for the Early Learning and Childcare Workforce

This website has lots of information and learning resources to support you including:

- quality assured learning resources and events to support professional learning
- guidance to support your practice
- resources to support your wellbeing and the wellbeing of the children and young people you work with
- our National Induction Resource for people new to their role
- a search function to help you find flexible and part time professional learning, development and training opportunities in your area.

There are modules that may help you in developing your skills and knowledge in relation to neurodiversity, ADHD and autism including:

- building confidence in identifying and responding to additional support needs
- understanding the social factors which may impact children's outcomes in early years
- supporting parents to engage in their child's development
- supporting the development and progression of children's early language and literacy.

There is a specific module on Building confidence in identifying and responding to additional support needs that helps you develop confidence in your knowledge about practice and legislation. It also helps you to work with parents and other professionals effectively. The module has videos including a play worker who discusses how they view their autism as a tool and another of a parent's reaction to a child's diagnosis of autism.

The modules are easy to access and use. The only things you need are a smartphone, tablet, PC or Mac with an internet browser and speakers/headphones and an email address.

There is no specified timescale to work through the modules – you work at your own pace.

Each module is attached to an optional MyLearning Badge. A MyLearning Badge provides a way of:

- recognising your learning
- achieving continuing professional learning (CPL)
- generating evidence that may be used towards SVQ or other awards.

[Visit the Continuous Professional Learning \(CPL\) website for the Early Learning and Childcare Workforce.](#)

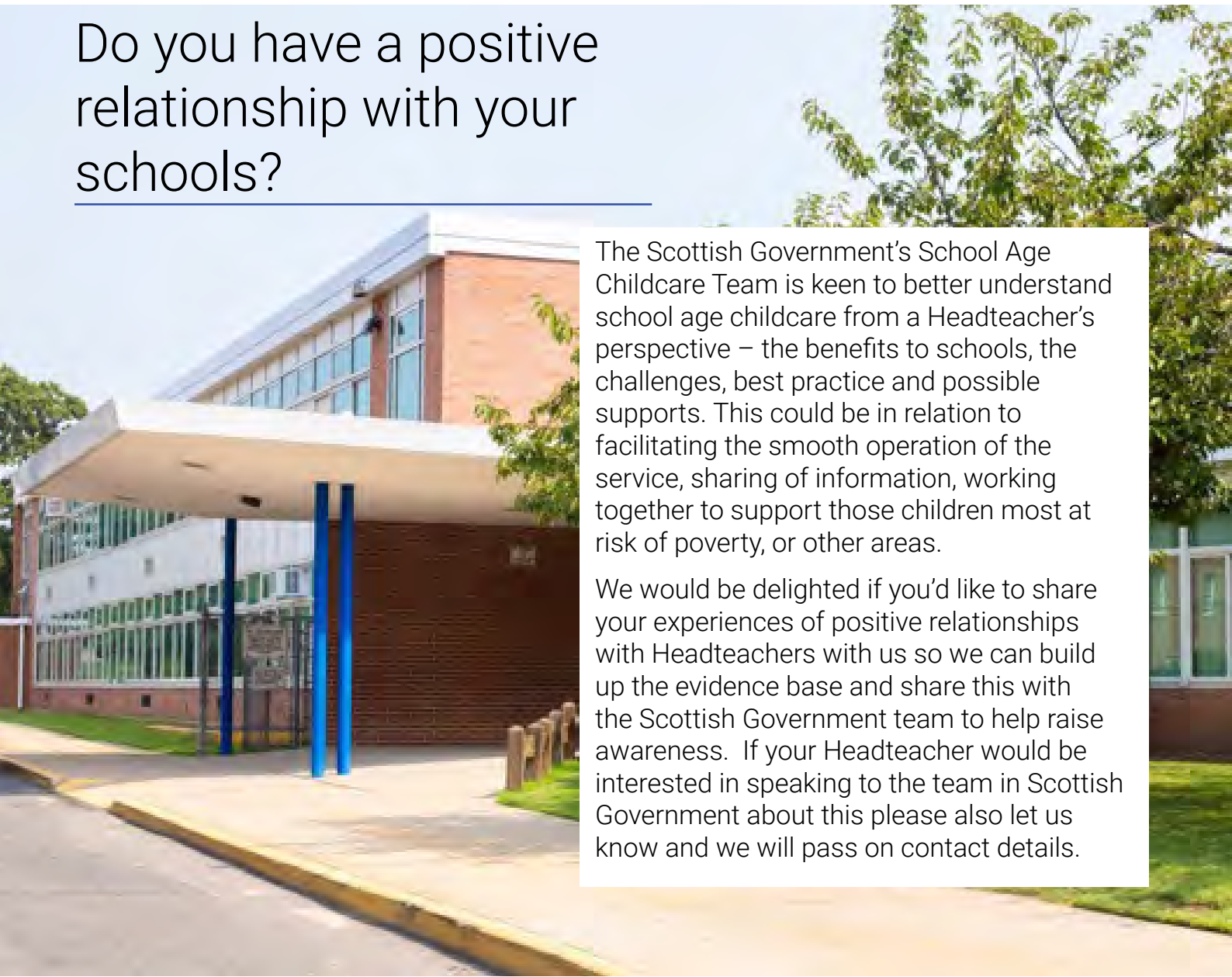
Understanding Autism app

There is also an app that provides guidance to people who want to have a basic understanding of autism. You may find this particularly useful if you do not work in a setting that provides specialised services for people with autism.

The app has short videos showing how people provide support. You will also find links to external resources that can help you to develop your knowledge about autism.

[Visit the Understanding Autism app](#)

Do you have a positive relationship with your schools?



The Scottish Government's School Age Childcare Team is keen to better understand school age childcare from a Headteacher's perspective – the benefits to schools, the challenges, best practice and possible supports. This could be in relation to facilitating the smooth operation of the service, sharing of information, working together to support those children most at risk of poverty, or other areas.

We would be delighted if you'd like to share your experiences of positive relationships with Headteachers with us so we can build up the evidence base and share this with the Scottish Government team to help raise awareness. If your Headteacher would be interested in speaking to the team in Scottish Government about this please also let us know and we will pass on contact details.

Thank you for reading.
Please get in touch
if you have any
comments or would
like to find out more
about anything in this
newsletter.



Scottish Out of School Care Network © 2025

SOSCN takes no responsibility for the content of external websites

Company No. SC200662.

SOSCN is a charity registered in Scotland, No. SC020520

SOSCN is a Living Wage employer

soscn.org

info@soscn.org

We acknowledge the support of the Scottish Government through a
CYPFEIF and ALEC Fund Grant, and CSRS Fund.

