

Supporting Young People with Autism

On Monday 8th August in Glasgow, The National Autistic Society (NAS) hosted a talk for Coder Dojo Mentors with an aim to further understanding of the condition. The speaker was Callum McCrosson.

History of Autism

Callum first took us through the history of Autism and the society. NAS was founded in 1962 by a group of parents, as a reaction to the lack of existing support for parents of children with Autism. Not only do NAS offer support for those with Autism and their families, but they also actively try to counter an ongoing misunderstanding on the topic, which can manifest itself in rather damaging and real ways. We need only look at the current resurgence of Polio within the United States as a result of the anti-vaccine vs Autism opinions voiced by the now disgraced former UK doctor Andrew Wakefield.

Triad of Impairments

We were then led through the most common difficulties faced by those with Autism. It was at this stage Callum revealed that he has a form of Autism known as Asperger's. His reasons for revealing this were to make us aware that on the surface there may be no physical signs that someone is dealing with the challenges of Autism. These challenges have been grouped into the term the 'Triad of Impairments'. First we have Social Communication. This can include an inability to maintain eye contact, non-typical expressive language, difficulty processing speech, and a tendency to focus on their their own interests. Secondly, there can be difficulties with Social Interaction. People with Autism may have difficulty initiating social interaction and may be very comfortable to float on the edge of groups. Finally, we have Social Imagination. This may include being less able to recognise dangerous situations, struggling to forward plan, and reacting poorly to unexpected change.

Throughout the evening, Callum frequently used the term 'neurodiverse'. It was coined in 1999 to describe people with Autism. Conversely, the term 'neurotypical' can be used to describe non-Autistic people.

Callum was warm and funny throughout and really gave us a unique opportunity to speak with someone, extremely candidly, about what it's like to have Autism, and to try and gain a better understanding of the daily challenges a neurodiverse person may face.

Tips For Mentors

To close, I'm going to list a few tips we can take away from the evening on how best we can support neurodiversity.

- Use clear communication
- Be explicit
- Give time for comprehension
- Ask questions to confirm understanding
- Work at a suitable pace
- Provide structure of lesson plans where possible to allow the student to forward plan

Autism is a grossly misunderstood and complex condition that, thanks to Callum and NAS, we now have a greater appreciation and respect for. The more we can understand about the challenges faced, the better we can help support those with Autism.

[Find out more](#) about autism and the work that the National Autistic Society do.

[David Anderson](#), CoderDojo mentor