



Quarterly Newsletter

Issue 14, Winter 2025/2026

Message from Chair

Welcome to our Winter 2026 Newsletter and Happy New Year to you all. I am delighted to hand over the coordination of the newsletter to fellow committee member June O'Dea. June will work with Almha Cremen and Adam Greenan, who will continue their roles as editor/proofreader and layout/designer respectively, as they move towards a more manageable quarterly/seasonal newsletter. I hope you will agree that they make an excellent team and have produced a very fine issue together to kick-start the year.



We finished 2025 on a high after our **First Anniversary Event** in Howth Castle on November 17th. It was a great privilege to be hosted by Howth Castle Estate, and we are very grateful for the generous and warm welcome they, including the cookery school, provided us. I am sure the location helped to attract many of the people who hold key positions in the community. Attended by the Mayor of Fingal, 5 County Councilors, three TDs, Adam Harris from AsIAM, Sinéad McGowan of the National Federation of Arch Clubs, we had the opportunity to showcase all our hard work, our achievements and our growing connection with the wider community. We were delighted that Adam Harris was there to present awards to our three new Champions, Suttonians RFC, Howth Sea Scouts and Rebecca Nolan, local Music Teacher. In addition, Sinéad kindly presented our amazing team of volunteers with awards for their incredible service to our community. And our Autism Champions also participated in the event, manning stations where members could talk to them about their organisations and how they could access them more readily now.



The Environmental team had their recently completed mosaic murals on display in the main entrance and were only too delighted to discuss their work with all, including the Environmental officer of Fingal County Council Jennifer Muscheidtl and Local Community Officer Angela Buckley, who made the much-appreciated

effort to come and support us on the night. Adam Greenan once again did us proud, airing his video '**Removing Barriers as a Community**' which gave a great overview of our work. Here is a link to it on YouTube, in case you missed it. [Removing Barriers as a Community](#)



Matthew Taylor Fallon again helped to create a happy atmosphere with his keyboard skills on arrival, and the whole event ended with a fabulous rendition of 'Stand by me' organised by our new Champion Rebecca Nolan.

We completed our **Best Lives Programme**, funded by a HSE grant sourced through National Lottery Funds. We developed the Best Lives Programme as a series of community-based group retreat-style workshops designed to support Autistic Teenagers to help them build resilience and capacity to live their 'Best Lives'. The workshops provided wrap-around support for autistic teenagers in our community by providing up-to-date education around Autism to the key people in their lives, including parents, siblings and grandparents, as well as themselves. We will shortly be seeking feedback from participants, and with additional input from everyone else, we will begin to plan our next grant application for the running of therapist-led workshops later in the year.



On January 14th, I was delighted to be invited to attend the launch by Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, Norma Foley, of **AsIAM's new Strategic Plan 2025-2030** at the Mansion House.

The crux of this well considered plan itself is outlined in the chart below:

<i>Over the next three years we will:</i>	<i>We will work for an Ireland of 2030 where:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the rights of Autistic people and advocate for further legislative protections • Extend the reach of our services to Autistic individuals and their families, centering lived experience and long term wellbeing • Build the understanding of the wider community, to enable them to be advocates in the fields of employment, social inclusion, health and education • Co-create, future-proofed solutions to existing and emerging barriers faced by our community in partnership with Autistic people, families and sector-specific leaders and progressive changemakers • Sustain an organisation that is diverse, majority led by Autistic people and models a flourishing workplace that champions innovation and social impact <p>We will review our progress on these goals every 6 months.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A fair and robust new national Autism innovation strategy is agreed, and is in place on a statutory basis ✓ Every Autistic child in Ireland has access to a school place that meets their needs and enables them to thrive ✓ No Autistic person is more than 100 kilometers from an in-person AsIAM service ✓ Employers embrace a roadmap to systematically and measurably increase high quality employment options for Autistic people ✓ Autistic people are empowered to participate, advocate and lead in every sector of Irish society ✓ AsIAM is represented in key national conversations and fora to ensure Autistic people's needs and priorities are safeguarded ✓ AsIAM reflects the diversity of Ireland's Autistic community in all its forms

The new **Howth Sutton Community Forum** has been established, and we have joined as an organisation to ensure that the interests of the Autistic Community are always foremost in the minds of the wider community. Our Committee Member, Dave Crofts will be our key representative on the Forum, but my understanding is that all members may attend meetings. Another meeting was held on Thursday 29th January in The Old Court House. So do come along to future ones as a member of HSAFC or join as a resident in your own right.



I am very happy to share with you that I have been appointed to the newly established **Fingal North Local Community Safety Partnership**, which held its first meeting on Wednesday 21st January in the Fingal Chamber. This new body marks an important milestone in the delivery of a more community-focused approach to safety and wellbeing across Fingal. By bringing communities, local services and agencies together, the partnership aims to identify shared priorities and deliver practical responses that make a real difference locally. In the most recent Same Chance Report published in 2025, 48% of Autistic people said that they did not feel safe in their own community. It is for this reason that I put myself forward. So, over the next 3 years, I hope to hear your views and concerns which I will represent to the group.

AnnMarie Farrelly, Chief Executive of Fingal County Council, said: “Safe and thriving communities are built through continued cooperation, shared ownership and practical action at local level. The Fingal North Local Community Safety Partnership will provide a strong platform for agencies and communities to work together in shaping solutions that respond to real needs and make a lasting, positive difference for people across the area.”

I think that's enough from me! I hope to see as many of our members as possible at our forthcoming General Meeting on Monday 9th February (location and time TBC - keep an eye on the WhatsApp group), when we will have some excellent contributions from within our community discussing the challenges of and some solutions to School Avoidance, followed by a talk about recent research into Autism.

Please enjoy this first Winter Newsletter. Well done and thank you to all involved in its creation.

Dates For Your Diary

Every 1st and 3rd Sunday

Litter-picking (Locations vary)

Everyone welcome

All equipment provided

Every Monday 7.00-9.00pm

Adult Pub Club

Harbour Bar, Howth

Thursday 5th February 7.00pm

Monthly Meet-up for Parents of Autistic

Adults

Marine Hotel, Sutton



The poster features a yellow background with green text and graphics. At the top, it says "Litter Picking" in a large, bold, green font with radiating lines. Below this, it reads "Our Environmental Team invites you to join us for Community Caretaking". To the right is a circular logo for "Howth - Sutton Autism Friendly Community" featuring a lighthouse and a tree. Below the main text are five green rounded rectangular boxes containing the following information: "When? Every 1st & 3rd Sunday of the Month", "Time? 2.30pm", "Where? Check our website for different meeting points", "Who? Everyone is welcome!", and "What? All equipment is provided". At the bottom left is a recycling symbol, and at the bottom right is the email address "howthsuttonautismcommunity@gmail.com". A large green tree is illustrated on the right side of the poster.

Litter Picking

Our Environmental Team invites you to join us for **Community Caretaking**

When? Every 1st & 3rd Sunday of the Month

Time? 2.30pm

Where? Check our website for different meeting points

Who? Everyone is welcome!

What? All equipment is provided

howthsuttonautismcommunity@gmail.com




Howth Sutton Autism Friendly Arch Clubs

Social groups for Autistic people of different ages including adults, teenagers, and young children, that provide a safe, inclusive, and fun environment to build friendships & confidence.

Junior Arch Club
 When? Every Friday (termtime)
 Time? 3.30pm - 5pm
 Where? Sutton Parish Hall

Teen Arch Club
 When? 2nd & 4th Sunday of every month
 Time? 2pm - 5pm
 Where? Sutton Parish Hall

BOOKING ESSENTIAL
howthsuttonautismcommunity@gmail.com

Friday 6th, 13th & 27th February
3.30-5.00pm

Junior Arch Club
 St. Fintan's Parish Centre, Sutton

Sunday 8th February 2.00-5.00pm

Teens Club
 St. Fintan's Parish Centre, Sutton

Monday 9th February, Time TBC

General Meeting
 Location TBC

Sunday 15th February 2.30pm

Litter-picking
 Everyone welcome
 All equipment provided

Thursday 26th February 11.00am

Monthly Coffee Morning
 Insomnia, Howth




MORNING COFFEE

MEET-UP FOR PARENTS OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN

Where: Insomnia Howth

When: 11am on the Last Thursday of every month
 All the family are welcome!



howthsuttonautismcommunity@gmail.com

Junior Arch Club

By Samantha O'Flanagan

Junior Arch Club has had a great few months from September to December. The children have really settled in so well, and it's been lovely to see friendships naturally forming through play and shared activities each week.

We were also lucky enough to get some new toys thanks to very kind donations, and they have gone down an absolute treat with the children. If anyone has any donations of small world play items or dolls house toys, we would be exceptionally grateful as these are always very popular with the children.



A real highlight of the term was our visit from Santa - it was a fantastic day and a huge thank you to Santa and Mrs Claus for giving up their time to come and visit us.

A massive thank you, as always, to our brilliant TY students and volunteers who help keep the club running. We truly couldn't do it without them and we're so grateful for all their support.



Teens Arch Club

By Alex Valentine

We've been having great fun at Teen Arch this season. Here's a taste of the upcoming activities in spring!

8th February - To celebrate Valentines Day on 14th February we will have some lovely themed craft activities for all to enjoy. For example, we will have heart-shaped suncatcher decorations to design and colour, and we will be

designing (and sewing) fabric valentine's cards. We also hope to have a special guest speaker for this day - more details to follow!

22nd February - No Teens Club due to the midterm break.

8th March - We will be celebrating International Women's Day. We will be creating a mural of Grace O' Malley, a 16th-century Irish chieftain and rebel also known as the "Pirate Queen". We have invited Daniel Eglinton Carey, a historian at Howth Castle, to talk about the legend of Grace and the connection with Howth Castle. Once the mural is complete we hope to display this on the grounds of the castle.

22nd March - The theme for this week will be jewellery making and will have plenty of materials to make bracelets, earrings and necklaces. We are also very lucky to have a special guest speaker - Jo Harpur - joining us on our jewellery making experience. Jo specialises in handcrafted bespoke jewellery and is located in Howth. She will talk about her own journey and experiences in creating and designing jewellery.

12th April (Easter Mid Term Break) - We hope to hold our Easter Egg Hunt again this year with more details to follow.

26th April - Teens Club will be open again after the Easter Break.

Champions all - a year of steady progress in 2025

By Dave Crofts

After welcoming our very first Champions in November 2024 - Howth Yacht Club, Peninsula Photography and Discover SUP - we have continued our efforts through 2025 to find, train and work with local businesses and organisations to become our next set of Autism Champions in our wonderful community.

We are continuing with our approach of training all our Champions wherever possible on a face-to-face basis using the structure provided in the AsIAM online training but fleshing it out and making it a much more interactive process. This seems to go well with all our aspiring Champions and we are convinced that it is helping to build stickier and longer-lasting relationships as a result.

Howth and Sutton offer great opportunities for sports, recreation and outdoor life and we have therefore, and for the time being, continued our approach of reaching out predominantly to sports clubs and organisations and encouraging them to take

the necessary steps to become Autism Champions. The incredible thing about our local sports clubs and organisations is that, due to the size of their memberships and the number of people who use their facilities, they have incredible reach in terms of developing a greater understanding of autism and the needs of autistic people across the community as a whole.

As a result of this approach, we have been happy to welcome Sutton Lawn Tennis Club, Sutton Dinghy Club and Suttonians RFC to our Champions' ranks over the past year. In delivering the training, we have been highly impressed to learn about what each of these clubs is already doing to support and encourage inclusion and we hope that, with an additional focus on supporting the needs of autistic people, they will be able to further their progress to date.

But our approach has not been confined to just sports clubs and organisations. We have also worked very closely with some iconic organisations who are key members of our community, such as Howth Tidy Towns who completed their training in June 2025 and have since been extremely active in their follow-up, creating visual guides for those volunteering to assist with their very valuable work in keeping Howth clean and green, as well as Howth Creative Writing Workshops who do a great job in encouraging local residents to explore and develop their writing skills.



Howth Sea Scouts

Our other very notable Autism Champions are Howth Adventures who were the first to be trained and recognised as Autism Champions in 2025 and have since implemented a wide range of what we call “accommodations” which make it easier for autistic people to access their services and Howth Sea Scouts who completed the training later in 2025 but who have already made great strides in making their organisation even more inclusive to their current and prospective future members.



Rebecca Nolan (Music Teacher)

In November 2025, we had our first-year anniversary event at Howth Castle and we were delighted to have all of our Champions present, each with their own stand, promoting what they do and the progress which they are making as Autism Champions. It really was great to have all our Champions together in one room and to see them sharing ideas and what they have done with each other. This really is what a strong community looks like!

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Calling all budding yogis!

By Gus Bernstein and Mary Crofts



Do you know your Updog from your Downward-facing Dog? Or your Eagle pose from your Camel pose?

If not, don't worry, there's plenty of opportunity to come and learn these moves - and many more - at our monthly Autistic Yoga session. We've teamed up with Jayne at Core Healthy to run a session on the second Thursday of every month and are now in our fifth month. Jayne is an experienced Yoga and Pilates teacher and guides us through a series of activities each time which help you to stretch both your body and your mind! There's a really pleasant, supportive and encouraging vibe to the sessions and we now have a core of about 6 "regulars", some of whom are accompanied by a parent or a friend. Each session starts at 5pm and we're finished by 6pm. There really is no pressure and each participant is encouraged to do what they feel comfortable doing. So, if you need the odd rest or just don't want to do one of the poses, you can decide to sit it out and re-join whenever you feel ready.

The studio does however have space for more to join us and, if you're feeling interested in giving it a go, just come along to our next session which will be on Thursday 12th February at 5pm at the Core Healthy studio at Sutton House on Shielmartin Road in Sutton. We ask each participant to pay €10 which you can

either pay in cash or via a sum-up link which we can provide. As well as Jayne, both of us (Gus and Mary) will be present both to answer any questions which you may have and to assist Jayne as necessary during the class itself.

So come and give it a try, whether you're completely new to yoga or if you have previous experience. You'll be very welcome either way. Gus put together a visual guide with all the details required to get to the studio and to give you a full picture of what to expect on arrival. We will re-post this on our various WhatsApp groups in the coming days. Looking forward to seeing you!

Disneyland Paris Guide

By Laura Stanley and Sally Anne Kelly



Laura and Sally Anne both recently took trips to Disneyland Paris with their families. Here they share some hints and tips to help if you're thinking of booking a holiday there. We both have three kids, so a trip to Disneyland Paris was high on our wish lists for some time.

Dublin Airport Rule Changes

First things first make sure to have your important flyer lanyard for Dublin Airport. BEWARE - rules have recently changed. Pre-booking Fast Track is now essential for

Important Flyers before travelling through Dublin Airport. We were turned away at fast track with our important flyer lanyard and told that if we hadn't prebooked we wouldn't be allowed through. All details can be found here but note there is now a limit on the number of people who can avail of Fast Track with the important flyer - not ideal for larger sized families.

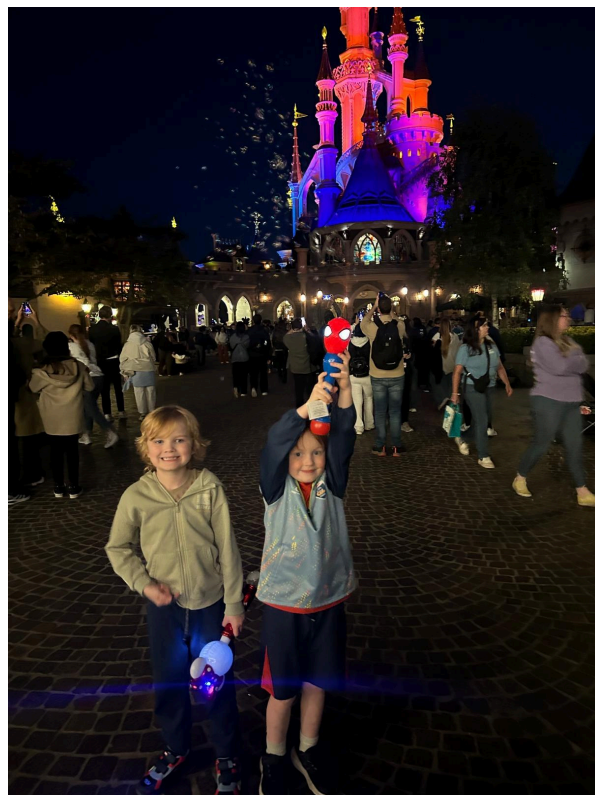
<https://www.dublinairport.com/accessibility/autism-non-visible-disabilities>

Getting There

Laura flew to Beauvais and Sally Anne to Charles De Gaulle. Beauvais is 90mins by car/transfer to Disney. We booked a private transfer with RE Transport and the cost was €270 return for a private transfer for a family of 5. This is very expensive, but we booked last minute and flights to CDG were very expensive so overall it worked out better for us. Sally Anne had a far shorter commute of only 30min from CDG to the park. Sally Anne booked a transfer with Magic shuttle transfer at a cost of €140 return, but we were unlucky with our flight arrival time so had to wait nearly an hour for a shuttle which then stopped off at another airport terminal and several hotels before our one. This was not ideal with impatient children, and we ended up being on the shuttle for nearly an hour and a half. I think the extra cost of a private transfer would be worth it to avoid this! There is a train from the airport that is very quick but depends on if that's suitable for your family and also a bit of a walk from the station to the hotel with your luggage.

Where To Stay

Laura stayed on site in the Newport Bay for 4 nights. One family room for 5 people. It was great. Pool was a nice thing to have (although not really needed as you're so busy in the parks). There are 2 big advantages of staying onsite - one is the option to walk to the parks/Disney village and the second is the magic hour in the morning - if staying on site you can enter the parks one hour before the public. Disney have a fantastic 'priority pass' for families with additional needs - more on that below; because of this advantage the magic hour is not really needed. Sally Anne stayed on site at Sequoia Lodge. As one member of the family was under two they could stay in a four-person room and get a travel cot (however the travel cot was very hard and uncomfortable!). Sequoia lodge has the same benefits as Newport Bay being walking distance to the parks and having the earlier entry. They found the swimming pool good to have for a bit of a more relaxing afternoon if needed.



Priority Pass

You can apply for your priority pass up to 1 month before your arrival. Disney accepts several documents as proof of eligibility, but the one best known to us is an in date ASIAM card. You can apply online (see link below) and then collect your pass when you arrive in Disney - either at your hotel if staying in a Disney Hotel or at City Hall in the park. If you forget to apply before you arrive it can all be done on your arrival day too. The pass is fantastic. It allows the pass holder plus 4 others priority access to most rides (all the ones with the long queues). It allows the pass holder plus 2 others access to reserved areas for the fireworks and the parades. You will still need to queue/wait for some rides but the longest line we had was 20mins for Crush's Coaster. Without the pass it would have been an 80mins wait time for this ride. Some other benefits of the pass are being able to use the priority queue for the security entering Disney village which can be long at times and also the priority queue for restaurants.

See details here:

<https://www.disneylandparis.com/en-ie/guest-services/priority-card>



The App/The Parks

Make sure to download the Disneyland Paris App before you arrive on your phone. It's a fantastic resource. You can see wait times/map the areas you want to visit, book character meet and greets etc. There are 2 parks - Disneyland Park and Walt Disney Studios. The Disneyland Park is larger, and we spent more time here overall. Both are next to each other and parkhopping in one day is quite easily done. They are far smaller in size than the Florida parks. There is a Frozen ride opening in the Studios Park at the end of March, so this is sure to draw big crowds. There's lots of places to eat in both parks as well as in Disney Village. Food is expensive and quality is only ok but there is plenty of choice and options. We brought a lot of snacks from home which saved time and money for afternoon snacking. Food can be ordered through the app for collection which saves a lot of time as queues for some of the restaurants can be long.

Buggies

Depending on the age of your children you might want to consider bringing a buggy. We actually brought 2 and they were used by all 3 children, often as a chance to relax and pull over the hood for a few quiet minutes! it was great to have at the end of the day too when everyone was tired to walk back to the hotel. There is the option to rent buggies in the parks for €30 a day plus a deposit. They are big buggies so would suit a slightly older child, but they are basic ones that don't look overly comfortable. We did see people with small wagons as well so might be worth

checking what size ones are allowed in the parks if you have multiple children who might get tired with the long days.

Overall

We all had the best time. Even more magical than we had imagined and hope to visit again. It was a truly inclusive holiday. Disney goes out of their way to make all members of a party included and experience the Disney magic.

Visit to Howth Primary School

By Bredeen Keane



On Tuesday 13th January, members of HSAFC accepted a very welcome invitation from Scoil Mhuire Howth Primary School, extended by the principal Ms. Mary Downes, and her SEN team, to view the ASD facilities opened in September 2025.

The ASD class, in line with the Department of Education policy, caters for 6 children and is staffed by 1 teacher and 2 SNAs. The children on roll are in the junior age range. The facilities include a beautiful, bright, modern classroom, with a dedicated soft-play outdoor area, a quiet, calming space off the classroom, and a modern sensory room, Spraoi, close by. It is evident that the SEN team and school management have equipped all spaces thoughtfully and purposefully in line with best practice.

The inclusivity in the special education provision was heartening to hear about. Spraoi welcomes any child in the school community with sensory needs, and the children in the ASD room are integrated into the mainstream classes with their peers, at times during the day, in accordance with their abilities.

Class teacher Ms. Claire Mannix, Deputy Principal Ms. Aisling Heerey, and class SNA Ms. Emer Samfy were so generous with their time to us. Their professionalism, warmth and dedication were uplifting. All credit to the entire Scoil Mhuire school community in which our Autistic children are now an integral part.

The SEN team are not resting on their laurels, however. They are committed to purchasing a sensory pod for the ASD room. This is a calming, interactive, safe space. It provides a cocooned haven that helps children with sensory overload. A lot of fundraising will be needed in order to purchase this very expensive piece of equipment. The SEN team would greatly appreciate any financial help towards this endeavour.

The Committee of Howth Sutton Autism Friendly Community would like to thank the staff and management of Scoil Mhuire Howth Primary for our most informative and enjoyable visit.

Guíimid gach rath orthu as seo amach.

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Fingal Volunteer Appreciation Night 4th December in The Grand Hotel in Malahide

By Nicola Jordan



Attending from HSAFC were Gill Molyneux, Stephen Cleary, Samantha O'Flanagan and Nicola Jordan.

There was a beautiful reception on arrival and dozens of volunteer groups giving off a wonderful sense of encouragement knowing how many amazing volunteers there are, not only in our community but in the communities surrounding us.

On the night there was well earned praise expressed for all volunteers. We are very proud to say that HSAFC was awarded with not only individual volunteer awards but also with our much deserved **Level 1 Fingal Managing Volunteers Award**.

It truly was an appreciation night and a reminder of how valuable volunteers are to not only a community but society.

We look forward to 2026 being another successful year for HSAFC as we work hard to receive our Level 2.

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Christmas Carolling

By Aisling Murphy



The Howth/Sutton Autism Community got festive in early December for some sweet carol singing in Supervalu to raise some funds for the organisation. They cheered up shoppers on a wet and windy day, with some festive carols and a huge thank you to Supervalu for accommodating us. Thanks also to those members of Howth Gospel Choir who came along to help on the day. Howth Gospel Choir also did an amazing fundraiser for us singing in Donaghmede Shopping Centre and we really appreciate their support.

We continued our carol singing, spreading the Christmas joy to The Harbour Bar, The Abbey Tavern and to Howth Yacht Club. What a fun night was had by all and a huge thank you to all who supported us.

Would you like to contribute to the next newsletter?

We want to hear about:

- Any courses or webinars related to Autism you have done,
- Any books or films related to Autism that you've watched and would recommend
- Any places you have visited that you found Autism Friendly that others might enjoy too
- Any activities an autistic adult or child you know has enjoyed
- Your/ your child's special interest
- Anything that you would like to share with the rest of the community in our next newsletter.



Howth Sutton Autism Friendly Community CLG