



# Annual Report to the Charities Regulator 2023/2024

Neurodiversity Ireland is a registered charity (CHY 23074) (RCN 20206465) and a company limited by guarantee (Neurodiversity Sandymount CLG, Company Registered No 717523).

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## Introduction

Neurodiversity Ireland was founded by neurodivergent parents driven by a need for more inclusive and supportive services for their neurodivergent children. Frustrated by the limitations of the traditional medical model of disability, a neuroaffirmative approach was envisioned, that celebrates neurodiversity and empowers neurodivergent individuals.

Neurodivergent people are those whose brains work differently from the majority of people. This can include autistic people and children with ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, language development differences, tourettes, OCD etc.



Our vision is an Ireland where neurodivergent children and their families have the freedom to live the life they choose, fully supported by their community. We have experienced significant growth since we established in 2022, demonstrating the demand for and effectiveness of our approach.

**At Neurodiversity Ireland, our mission is to provide supports for neurodivergent children, that wrap around the child and are embedded in the local community - and most of all, that are fun!**

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## **What Neurodiversity Ireland has done to further its charitable purposes**

Neurodiversity Ireland is committed to creating a society where neurodivergent children and their families thrive. We provide community-based supports, advocate for systemic change, and promote a greater understanding of neurodiversity.

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Neurodiversity Ireland provides a wide range of supports to neurodivergent children and their families, including:

- OT led play groups after-school and at weekends and camps during school holidays
- School based support - interactive sessions with school staff, learning about neurodiversity, including how to create effective movement breaks for all children and environmental audits with recommendations on how to be a properly inclusive school
- Webinars for parents that connect gold standard experts with parents and carers who are unable to access advice or support due to waiting lists
- Information and advice on neurodiversity and the rights of neurodivergent people, via website, meetings and information campaigns
- Support groups for parents and carers and peer mentoring for neurodivergent children and their families including a WhatsApp Support group
- Information sharing talks for professionals and the wider community
- Advocacy for the rights of neurodivergent children, for example EPSEN submission on inclusion in education
- Participation on the Autism Innovation Strategy Oversight Board

- In partnership with Trinity College Dublin, six occupational therapy students contributed their time to supporting our groups, as part of one of their core modules of study. This actively encourages the future generation of occupational therapists to develop neuroaffirmative approaches essential for supporting neurodivergent children
- Hosted a range of events for neurodivergent children including working with the St Patrick's Day festival on their first ever Relaxed Space
- In conjunction with Dublin City Council's South East Community team, ran a Christmas event where neurodivergent children could meet Santa and take part in Christmas crafts in a relaxed environment
- Delivered a range of corporate talks to enhance the understanding of neurodiversity amongst workers and their families
- Established Ireland's first Neuroaffirmative Knowledge Network
- Provision of additional Neurodiversity Ireland parking spaces in Sandymount
- Provision of a relaxed space at the Sandymount Christmas lights turn on in conjunction with DCC and Limelight Communications
- Autism month National Art competition had a great reaction with over 500 entries and lovely artwork submitted
- Launch of our Inclusive Values and Language Guide for Neurodiversity Celebration Week

### *Lanyards*



We provided over 250 Neurodiversity Ireland lanyards to individuals throughout Ireland and beyond which can be used to help empower neurodivergent people to request assistance or support in their daily lives and is accepted at a wide range of Irish events and at Irish airports, which can help to make outings and travels as stress free as possible.

### *Partnerships*

We have a strong partnership with many departments in both TCD and UCD including TCD OT with whom we are creating an undergraduate module aligned with our values and practices and UCD architecture department with whom we consulted on integrating universal design.



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## Who your charity has helped

Neurodiversity Ireland works to create a more neuro-inclusive society in Ireland. Our focus as a children's charity is to ensure the participation of children in daily life and a more inclusive educational environment.

At Neurodiversity Ireland, we are dedicated to advocating for systemic reform within disability services to better support neurodivergent children. Our vision is for an inclusive educational system where schools are empowered and equipped to be as inclusive as possible, both in mindset and practice.



We foster trust among parents, reassuring them that they are fully capable of supporting their neurodivergent children, by providing access to gold standard advice and information.

We understand the unique challenges our children face and are committed to providing responsive, engaging supports that allow them to participate in the same joyful and playful activities as their peers, as well as targeted supports tailored to their specific needs as they arise.

Here are some examples of how Neurodiversity Ireland has helped neurodivergent children and their families:

### **Sensory Centre**

In Ireland, many neurodivergent children are routinely excluded from social activities such as peer play groups due to their support needs. Our Occupational Therapist-Guided group play sessions offer these children an opportunity to access an extracurricular activity which is child-led, demand-free and inclusive of children with varying levels of support needs. We aim to promote authentic play as well as a chance for children to make friends and be themselves.

Through a combination of play based activities, sensory integration and specialised exercises, our team works with children to target their specific needs emphasising each child's natural abilities, in a way that facilitates interaction and participation in a way that is meaningful and enjoyable to the children.

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**We are deeply passionate about creating inclusive spaces and opportunities for neurodivergent children within the community, which is the driving force behind our work.**

Our Occupational Therapy Guided Play Groups provide a child-led, demand-free environment for authentic play, social connection, and self-regulation and promote sensory, emotional, and social well-being through meaningful activities. These groups were possible in part thanks to ReThink Ireland and the DECIDY Disability Participation and Awareness Fund (DPAF).

Our Easter Camps were launched in 2023 and over 90 children attended 8 summer camps in 2023. Our offering of afterschool clubs and OT-led classes was launched in October 2023 and we had 1,250 attendances at our playgroups, with 250 unique children attending.



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## Regulate: Participate! Schools Project

With our Regulate: Participate! Programme, our senior occupational therapists provide schools with practical tools and strategies to create classrooms that are accessible and inclusive for all children. Supports included sensory-friendly adaptations, flexible teaching methods, and responsive communication strategies.

This project was only possible thanks to ReThink Ireland and the DECIDY Disability Participation and Awareness Fund (DPAF).

- 4 whole school bodies took part in our pilot project - called Regulate:Participate!
- 135 touchpoints with educators and our team of OTs & psychologist
- At least 1,300 children benefitted from the whole-school support



“Special” education operates in a silo in Ireland, children with additional needs are removed from class for SET, for movement breaks, or are segregated completely in separate classes or parts of the school.

Our Regulate: Participate! project required whole-school participation, which ensured that knowledge was shared across all staff members, that will transfer from class to class as students progress.

The educators who took part reported unanimously that they had transformed not just their perspective on neurodiversity but also their language around and goals for their students. Education and thereby, educators have an enormous say in people’s life chances.

An infographic with a purple and blue color scheme. On the left, a purple shape contains the text: "100% of participants reported that they learnt something new about supporting neurodivergent children as a result of Regulate:Participate!". On the right, a blue circle contains the quote: "This was probably the most helpful and influential CPD I've ever done. It was hugely informative".



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## Webinars



We believe in the importance of accessible knowledge around neurodiversity, making information and resources available to all families and individuals who need it. This commitment has led us to develop a series of free, interactive webinars designed to educate families, carers, educators, and other interested individuals about neurodiversity.

By offering these sessions free of charge, we aim to remove financial barriers and ensure that vital knowledge is accessible to everyone, regardless of socioeconomic background. By using an online format, our webinars reach people nationwide, including those in rural or under-served areas who might otherwise struggle to access supportive resources. This aligns with our goal of creating a more inclusive and informed society, where neurodivergent individuals are celebrated and supported within their local communities.

These webinars focus on topics central to the understanding and celebration of neurodivergent identities, including strengths-based approaches, advocacy, and practical strategies for supporting neurodivergent children.

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2,500 parents, carers and professionals attended our webinars.

**10**  
webinars held to connect families with international experts

Parents and carers connected with global experts, who otherwise are inaccessible due to waiting lists. Participants obtained practical advice, often on niche topics. Participants then joined our support network

### *Inclusive Values & Language Guide*

We believe that changing society's view of neurodivergent children will shape their futures. We launched our language and values guide to neurodiversity to help achieve this, and to generally educate people on what neurodiversity is.

Read our [Inclusive Values and Language Guide](#)

### *Informative materials*



Anne Rabbitte TD, Minister of State for Disability at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth at the launch of the Neurodiversity Ireland educational videos with the stars of the 'Let's be Friends' animation and booklet, Dahlia Durkan (left) and Erin Rooney. (Pic: Brian McEvoy)

Our educational animation [Let's be friends](#) - sharing stories from our neurodiverse friendships about how understanding and small supports that can allow children to feel safe, comfortable and happy to be themselves. This back to school cartoon campaign aims to give a platform to neurodivergent kids by modelling a real-life friendship between two neurodiverse friends, sharing what makes their friendship special and why they like each other's differences.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkgpoCda95s>

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## How your charity raised and spent funds

Neurodiversity Ireland relies on fundraising and outreach activities (such as education talks to organisations) to fund the supports and services we provide. We have raised funds through a variety of activities, including:



Our flagship fundraiser is the Infinity Ball, a fundraiser that helped to raise over €100,000.

Corporate sponsorships and talks: Neurodiversity Ireland has received corporate sponsorships from a number of companies, including Kilsaran, Energia and Aviva Insurance and we deliver corporate talks on understanding neurodiversity.

Individual donations: Individual donations, either one-time or recurring, are a vital source of funding for Neurodiversity Ireland, donated via our website.

Neurodiversity Ireland received a grant from Rethink Ireland which allowed us to launch our Regulate: Participate! programme with schools, expand our camps and clubs offering and attract international experts as speakers in our webinars.

<b>Income</b>	
Fundraising	<b>181,630</b>
OT Camps	<b>57,383</b>
Donations	<b>108,384</b>
Sponsorships	<b>12,006</b>
Grant income	<b>57,800</b>
Amortisation of Grants	<b>2,500</b>
	<hr/>
	<b>419,703</b>
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Neurodiversity Ireland is grateful for the support of the community, corporations and the government. Their fundraising efforts have helped to provide critical services to neurodivergent children and their families in Ireland. These funds have been used to cover the costs associated with the various camps and initiatives to support neurodivergent children and their families.

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## Where the benefits of the charity's work were felt



The benefits of Neurodiversity Ireland's work are felt by neurodivergent children and their families all across Ireland. Neurodiversity Ireland provides a range of supports that help neurodivergent children to live fulfilling and independent lives, now and in the future.

Here are some specific examples of how Neurodiversity Ireland's work has benefited neurodivergent children and their families:

- Neurodiversity Ireland's parent/carer support Whatsapp group has provided a lifeline for almost 1,000 parents and carers of neurodivergent children. The group provides a safe and supportive space for parents and carers to share their experiences and advice, to share information and to ask for help.
- Neurodiversity Ireland's webinars on particular issues touching on neurodiversity have helped many neurodivergent children and their families by empowering parents and carers with the knowledge they need to support their child.
- Neurodiversity Ireland's in-person meetings, from coffee gatherings to informative Educational Advice evenings attended by Schools and NCSE members help to provide a wealth of information and support to parents facing the difficulty of getting their child an

educational placement. The feedback we receive is consistent in that we are providing support to parents and carers that they did not have previously and that we have created a community of parents who share information and gain support.

- Neurodiversity Ireland's work with communities, schools, and sports clubs to implement neurodiverse inclusive policies has made a real difference to the lives of many neurodivergent children. These policies have helped to create more welcoming and inclusive environments for neurodivergent children.
- Neurodiversity Ireland's work to establish and expand the Neurodiversity Ireland Sensory Centre will continue to provide much-needed support to neurodivergent children and their families. The centre will provide support for children who may have differences with speech and language, sensory processing, and who may benefit from occupational therapy supports.

### Confidence

After joining our groups, one young girl found more **confidence** and **security** - she initiated her first interactions with peers. She was much more prepared for primary school—a big step that felt possible thanks to the support she'd found amongst her new friends at NDI. Her time in groups made new experiences feel a little less overwhelming and supported her new transition to school.



### Friendship

Before joining NDI, one child faced challenges such as exclusion from school classes and peer social events. Following attendance at our groups, this young girl has built a group of friends and has been invited to class birthday parties. Her anxiety after social events has eased, and her family love watching her happily interact with her pals. Many families reported similar outcomes, expressing the **joy** they feel seeing the **friendships** that have blossomed following our groups.



### Happiness

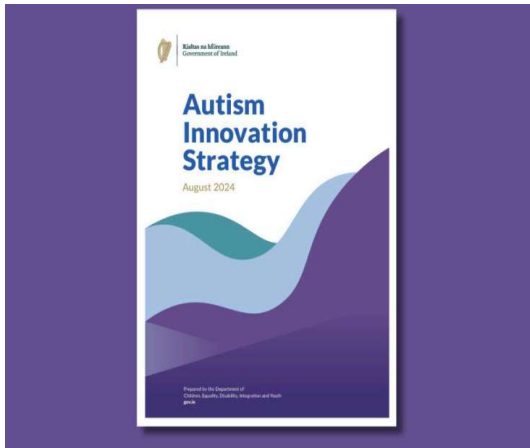
Multiple families reported their children can't wait to attend our groups, a place where they feel fully **accepted** and celebrated. For parents, it's a huge relief knowing they can be themselves without judgement. The groups give them a chance to breathe easy, knowing their child is **happy**, learning, and developing in a space made just for them. The shift in their children's happiness brings joy to the entire family.



### Fun

Every week, the fun is contagious. Children leave the group full of smiles, and their **enthusiasm** has even led to siblings and parents asking to join in the fun! For the children, our groups are a time to be active, connect with others, and feel part of a group in a way that just isn't possible at home or school. Whether it's the thrill of getting out, playing together, or **connecting** with friends and supportive staff, these sessions have become a highlight of many families' week.





Neurodiversity Ireland is a vital resource for neurodivergent children and their families in Ireland. Our work has a positive impact on the lives of many neurodivergent children across the country.

In addition, Neurodiversity Ireland's work also has a broader impact on society. By raising awareness of neurodiversity and challenging the stigma still associated with it, Neurodiversity Ireland is helping to create a more inclusive and understanding society for everyone. We recognise that neurodivergent children have challenges, and we seek to constantly learn how best to support them and their families in their local communities where possible.

### **Acknowledgements**

We are incredibly grateful to our dedicated staff, volunteers, partner organisations and the families and children who have participated in our programmes. We are also grateful to our generous donors and in particular, Rethink Ireland whose generous funding allowed us to expand our supports.

**Website:** <https://neurodiversityireland.com/> -

**Instagram** <https://www.instagram.com/neurodiversityireland/>

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