



PONTEFRACT

Showcase
& Awards
2024

Diversity & Inclusion – The journey to being a Friendly Racecourse



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RACING POST



Objectives



Raising awareness of Autism and playing our part in enabling the Racing Industry to be more inclusive is hugely important to us all at Pontefract.

The Racecourse has a long association of working with customers and racegoers who have additional needs, as well as with Autism in Racing. Building on both the foundations of the industry commitment to, and our own policies on Diversity and Inclusion, we set out to make every raceday as inclusive as possible with a key focus on developing our relationship with Autism in Racing.

With pressures on Racecourse finances ever present, it was important for us to try to offset as many costs involved as possible.

In order to provide a welcoming environment for autistic racegoers, we wanted to:

- Understand the key difficulties for autistic racegoers,
- Discover what reasonable adjustments our team could make to support autistic customers,
- Train our staff how to welcome autistic families,
- Make every raceday an 'Autism in Racing' Raceday.

Our KPIs were to:

- Welcome autistic racegoers to Pontefract at each of our 16 race meetings,
- Create long lasting relationships with organisations who support autistic adults and children,

Our ultimate goal was to become accredited by the National Autistic Society as an 'Autism Friendly' venue.

Delivery

We made arrangements for Autism in Racing to attend EVERY race meeting. They provided staff and a mobile sensory room. We provided a Quiet Room in a hospitality box, with free soft drinks & activity packs. On days when no hospitality box was available, we partitioned an area of a quiet bar so autistic racegoers could still experience feature days such as Music Nights and Ladies Day.

Sponsor - We secured a commercial sponsor, , to support the campaign and pay for Autism in Racing staff and sensory room. This offset all our costs meaning we simply paid for refreshments & additional staff to ensure smooth running.

Before the start of the season / Staff training

- Richard completed 5 training modules with the National Autistic Society – Understanding Autism; Autism & Communication; Sensory Experiences; Autism, Stress & Anxiety; Autism: Supporting Families.
- A 30 minute 'Autism Training' presentation was delivered to all staff (inc catering and security). This included how we could reduce anxiety and better communicate with autistic customers and training on descriptive language for autistic people and their families.
- The Accessibility Policy was updated to incorporate details on all Autism in Racing racedays.

Employment – We employed 3 autistic members of the Into the Sky group (who meet at the Racecourse each week) to show Autism in Racing guests the locations of the Quiet & Sensory Rooms. Dan, Meg & Matty work in rotation. We also employed the trained support worker of an autistic adult at the main Premier Entrance & hosted art workshops run by autistic artist, James Owen Thomas.

First Raceday - The 1st raceday was Tues 2nd April – World Autism Awareness Day. In addition to the Quiet Room and Sensory Room, we held bucket collections for the NAS, an art workshop with James Owen Thomas, and produced a promo video for our campaign.

Learnings / Feedback - After the 1st raceday, we sought feedback from our autistic guests/staff how the experience could be enhanced. We responded by finding an open space to run, having ear defenders available in packs, adding activities and making refreshments 'self service' rather than staffed.

From the 2nd day onwards, we improved the experience by providing a branded welcome kiosk, Quiet Room with free self serve drinks/biscuits, Sensory Room, enhanced Activity packs, Colouring Wall/Maze, outdoor Quiet space and Sunflower Lanyards.

Data Sharing - Following a data sharing agreement, we can now contact Autism in Racing guests directly. This enables us to manage their day and build direct relationships. By sending a concise email in advance, we can eliminate their stresses, answer any queries, show them a Video walk from the car park to the turnstiles and ensure that they know exactly where they are going and what to expect.

Results



- Pontefract became the first Racecourse in the country to work with 'Autism in Racing' on EVERY raceday.
- Pontefract are the first Racecourse in the country to be officially recognized by the National Autistic Society and given their Autism Friendly Award.
- The Racecourse now employ 4 autistic adults as part of the Raceday Staffing team. These staff also form part of the team providing feedback to continually improve the experience for autistic racegoers. They have also given vital insight to the rest of the Raceday staffing team as to how the Racecourse can best serve the needs of autistic racegoers.
- Following completion of National Autistic Society training, one of the Racecourse Senior Leadership Team is now accredited as a 'train the trainer', ensuring that the Racecourse can continue to carry out ongoing staff training.
- Raceday Staff have been trained on how they might adapt their work areas to accommodate autistic racegoers. This includes ways to create low arousal environments with a reduction of noise, light and smell; slower, concise communication with simple instructions; having easy access to a preferred activity such as an iPad or spinner.
- 114 families were welcomed through the Autism in Racing programme. In addition, we began to develop our own links with families of autistic children and the local autistic community meaning that, in total, we have welcomed over 500 people in total up to the end of August.
- Moreover, we have also welcomed 3 local SEN schools on visits throughout the course of the season to date.
- Furthermore, we now have direct relationships with Zig Zag (Leeds) Autism Group and Millenium Support in Pontefract who specialise in supporting adults with learning disabilities, autism, and complex needs on their journeys through life within the community
- As a result of our commercial partnership with Future Ticketing, the costs of hosting Autism in Racing racedays have been dramatically reduced meaning our only expenses come from the provision of complimentary soft drinks and snacks, and the employment of our welcome team. This is expected to total around £1,000 through the season. Future Ticketing have already confirmed their intention to continue the partnership in 2025.

Supporting Information

[Blog on Autism in Racing](#)

[Autism training given to all Raceday Staff](#)

[Promo film made for the season ahead with Autism in Racing](#)

[Blog / Press Release following NAS Award](#)

William Buick, champion jockey and Ambassador for Autism in Racing said:
“I congratulate Pontefract for their commitment to Autism Friendly racedays. My family has first hand experience of autism and as an Ambassador for Autism in Racing I welcome the way racecourses are embracing the concept.”



Autism in Racing racedays 2024

- Every Raceday in 2024
- Designated quiet space
- Free tea/coffee/soft drinks/biscuits
- Sensory room



- More than 1 in 100 people are autistic
- Autism is a developmental disability affecting how people interact
- Every autistic person is unique and has unique characteristics. If you've met one autistic person, you've met one.
- In general terms, an autistic person can have difficulties in social interaction, communication and flexibility of interests and they are likely to experience sensory information differently

National Autistic Society Training

Helpful Strategies to help autistic racegoers

- Quiet space – is there somewhere an autistic racegoer can go?
- Share Interests – in your dialogue, can you find a shared interest?
- Low arousal environment – Noise? Light? Smell?
- Be prepared – how could a process be made quicker?
- Clear information and communication with time to process
- Preferred item – is there access to a different activity?

Could you help autistic racegoers in your role at the Racecourse

- Sound
- Sight
- Smell
- Taste
- Touch
- Vestibular – balance
- Proprioception – body awareness
- Interoception – how you feel inside

Hyper vs Hypo

National Autistic Society Training

Strengths

- fully committed interests
- accurate perceptions
- integrity
- fairness
- noticing little details

Challenges

- can be overwhelmed
- high levels of stress and anxiety
- can misjudge social situations
- struggle 'fitting in'
- miss what others see

National Autistic Society Training