



**Press release 29 March 2017: for immediate release (page 1 of 2)**

## **Autistic residents working to make Hackney ‘autism friendly’**

A group of autistic residents and carers are working with Hackney Council and local health services to make the borough more autism friendly.

As World Autism Acceptance day approaches on 2 April, the group is urging more autistic Hackney residents to get involved.

Being autistic is a different way to be human. It is a lifelong atypical way of experiencing and relating to the world.

It is a different way to think and process information. A borough more accepting and supporting of its autistic residents would enable a better well-being for autistic people.

Currently the group is working with the Hackney Autism Alliance board to draft the borough’s first ever autism strategy.

An autistic Hackney resident involved in the group said: ‘Autistic people face discrimination and bullying. Autism is not a mental illness but autistic people are at higher risk of mental ill health such as anxiety and depression often brought on from the frustration of not being accepted.’

Panda Mery, another autistic resident, said: ‘There are simple changes organisations and people can make to improve the lives of autistic people. Celebrating differences, designing new services with autistics, tackling bullying, offering mentoring, improving the environment and staff attitudes can all help.’

‘Although the strategy will be for residents in City and Hackney, an autism-friendly Hackney will also benefit people who work here and visitors,’ he added.

Richard, another group member, said ‘It’s good finding information about autism and the rights of autistic people.’

‘We have five great autistic representatives on the board who are already getting managers in Hackney to view autism constructively,’ said Amanda Elliot, who works for Healthwatch Hackney and is parent of an autistic young man.

Simon Galcynski, director of adult Services for London Borough of Hackney and co-chair of the Hackney Autism Alliance strategy board said: ‘Listening to people’s lived experience first-hand brings a real understanding of what a difference an autism friendly Hackney would have on the lives of autistic residents and carers. Working together will help us to develop a strategy and action plan that reflects the needs of the people it is for.’

Contact [info@autistichackney.org](mailto:info@autistichackney.org) or visit [www.autistichackney.org](http://www.autistichackney.org) for more information.



Picture captions – please note that all pictures are high resolution.

**Picture 1: Autism Card**

The group is helping to develop a voluntary Hackney Autism Card which autistic resident can use to help communicate their needs in different situations.

**Picture 2: David ‘Panda’ Mery**

David ‘Panda’ Mery is an autistic resident on the Hackney Autism Alliance Board: *‘There are simple changes organisations and people can make to improve the lives of autistic people.’*

**Picture 3: Richard**

Autistic resident and Hackney Autism Alliance Board member said: *‘It’s good finding information about autism and the rights of autistic people.’*

**Picture 4: A few members of the Autism Alliance user and carer engagement consultation group** (there are more than 20 members who contribute to the group)

(from l-r) Joanne Blackwood, Improvement and Innovation Officer for London Borough of Hackney, autistic resident David ‘Panda’ Mery, Parent-carer Amanda Elliot of Healthwatch Hackney and autistic resident Richard.

**Picture 5: David ‘Panda’ Mery wearing ear defenders**

Explaining why he uses ear defenders, Panda said: *‘Hackney can be very noisy at times. As I’m hypersensitive to noise I always carry ear defenders and often wear them.’*