

# **The Autistic Empire**

## **Annual Report 2019**



**This is our world**

**You are not different | You are one of us | You matter here**

# Foreword

The vision of the Autistic Empire is “a community dominated by autistic people where minority stress does not exist, where autistic people can have a safe and supportive environment to engage in self-development and express their most authentic selves, and where we can develop solutions to the very real issues we can have as a people”.



We aim to serve all autistic people, but our target audience is the undiagnosed autistic adult who does not know that they are autistic, or has had it suggested to them and not known what to do with this information. This is not a simple demographic to reach out to, by their nature, autistic people who do not know that they are autistic do not gather in one spot.

We launched the Autistic Empire in September 2018, but we had been working on the idea for almost three years previously. We have been focussing on building our capacity, creating an organisation that other people can get involved with, and building relationships with the existing autistic advocacy groups. We feel we have succeeded and we are well placed to start developing more ground-breaking projects for the benefit of the autistic people.

I am very proud of all of the people who have enrolled with us at Citizens in the last year, and we are working hard to identify the “low-hanging fruit” that would make a difference to our lives. Several of the projects we have delivered this year happened because people showed up, and got to work. I am thrilled that majority of the people currently involved in the Autistic Empire had not known anyone else prior to signing up. That was our goal.

Inevitably, we have made mistakes, and it has taken time to realise where we are going wrong. That is the nature of a start-up. Creating an autistic community was never going to be simple, but we have been heartened by the overwhelming positive feedback we have received when we talk about our work. As we start on our second year, we invite you to join us, enrol as a Citizen, and travel towards our destiny.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a white rectangular background. The signature reads "Sarah McCulloch" in a cursive, slightly slanted script.

Founder of the Autistic Empire

# Achievements

## The Grand Sensory Survey

The world is changing fast, and our understanding of it is changing even faster. Psychology and neuroscience are only just beginning to explore the true diversity of human experience, especially with regards to the senses. Sensory differences are studied under the umbrella of neurodivergence, and yet there's increasing evidence everyone may experience the world in profoundly different ways. In the past few years we've found out not everyone mentally visualises, not everyone has an inner monologue, and the very way we think can vary massively depending on a whole spectrum of factors.

The Grand Sensory Survey was an exploratory survey delving into common sensory differences we are only starting to become aware of. It was conducted between September 2018 and June 2019, and consisted of 65 questions split into categories by sense, as well as sections on interoception, general and mental health, and specific known sensory atypicalities. The survey had 440 total responses, of which 302 were full responses and 138 partials.



You can read our findings at <http://www.autisticempire.com/survey>.

We released several of the findings as infographics on our social media – our finding on aphantasia reached over **92,000** people and was shared **403** times!

We then gave a talk on our findings, *Sense and Sensibility: Findings from the Grand Sensory Survey*, at the Autism Show in London, Birmingham and Manchester.

## Audible Autism



We have now released over **20** episodes of Audible Autism, and achieved over **4,000** downloads.

In 2019, we added a Sound Editor to our production team, producing a cleaner, more professional edit.

We have released episodes on:

- Dealing with social isolation
- Interviews with successful aspies living their best lives
- Sensory experiences targeting ASMR triggers
- Streamed events such as the Autistic Empire launch and talks for World Autism Awareness Week

Check out our archive at <http://www.audibleautism.com>

## AutisticEmpire.com

The website is the core of our offer and we have put a lot of work into making it functional this year.

We have received continuous feedback on the enrolment process as each Citizen joins and we are making it smoother and easier to use for each enrolment.

We have created internal and external news feeds containing articles and information.

We have opened our educational resource, **The Vault**, which covers a range of useful assessments, books, and tools oriented to the needs of autistic people, including:

*Personality tests*

*Skills checks*



*Assessment for common co-occurring conditions*

*Guide to getting through the holiday period*

*Guide to making complaints*

*Identifying emotions*

*Educational resources on sex for people who are anxious or have sensory needs*

We have also built a page dedicated to promoting autistic pride and supporting autistic adults to hold their own autistic pride events.

## **Social media**

Our social media exploded as a result of the findings of the Grand Sensory Survey.

We gained a thousand Facebook followers in a week!

All social media is organic, no advertising or third party promotion.



1840 followers on Facebook



680 followers on Instagram



200 followers on Twitter



## AUTISTIC EMPIRE CERAMIC MUGS

### Great for...

- Sipping during awkward silences and to avoid eye contact
- Holding when you don't know what to do with your hands
- Drinking tea or coffee, made exactly the same way, at the same time every day



### From our Grand Sensory Survey:

Autistic respondents were over 5x more likely to not experience hunger (18%)



[autisticempire.com/survey](http://autisticempire.com/survey)

# Events

## Launch Event



Our launch event was held in London in September 2018. **15** people attended in person and **17** tuned in via the livestream.

Three speakers spoke about the need for the Empire, our vision for it, and our plans for the Grand Sensory Survey.

We then produced a podcast recording of the event which remains available for download.

## London Autism Show

The Autism Show is an exhibition and trade fair for parents of autistic people and professional that runs in London, Birmingham and Manchester. In June 2019, the London Autism Show made stands available to autistic-led advocacy organisations.

We ran a stall for both days of the show, distributing leaflets and talking to **hundreds** of people about our work. We gave away **90** pamphlets and **200** flyers. We only stopped because we ran out!

This was a very successful event for us, which **paid for itself** in merchandise and Citizenships sold.

Several of the autistic adults who came up to our stall told us that they hadn't realised that there were autistic-led organisations, and we were very happy to correct them!



## London Autistic Pride



Autistic Pride is a worldwide autistic-led celebration of ourselves as autistic people, which runs on June 18<sup>th</sup> every year as part of Pride Month.

We were honoured to be asked to sponsor London Autistic Pride, which has been held in Hyde Park every year since 2014.

**60** people attended, the largest event yet!

Odai, a Council member and Audible Autism co-host, gave a well-received talk on his experiences of being autistic and the work of the Empire.

We are keen to support London Autistic Pride next year and to support other autistic people to hold their own pride events.

# Structure

The Autistic Empire is a membership organisation, open to all autistic adults over the age of 18, who can take out Citizenship and contribute to our community as we form and build the Empire.

In the last year, we have recruited Citizens from **5** countries on **3** continents despite very little advertising.

We did not achieve our recruitment target this year due to significant technical problems in developing the enrolment process. We hope to have a smooth and simple process in place by the end of 2020 so we can really develop our community.

Because our Citizenry is internationally located, we have had to make good use of digital technology to communicate across continents, which has been very successful.

Our base of operations remains in London, UK, and the far-flung nature of our Citizenry means that we have struggled this year to hold offline events. As our community grows, we hope to be able to start to build local communities in geographical areas.



The Autistic Empire is overseen by a Council of volunteers, which is intentionally very diverse in terms of background and skills. We hold monthly Council meetings in London and Skype, to discuss our plans and allocate tasks and projects to anyone who wishes to be involved based on their interests and skills. We hold six monthly strategy meetings to set our development plan for the next 12 months.

We have a paid role in our Communications Officer, which is a part-time position to manage our social media and promote our work. We continue to develop the specifics of this role and how it functions to make best use of our limited funds.

We have been steadily developing our structures to broaden our projects beyond the Council and give it a more strategic focus in the coming years, and will be looking to recruit more volunteers in 2020 to fill some gaps in our skillbase.



# Publications



In the last year, we have developed our branding significantly, and have produced leaflets, business cards, and badges.

We also contributed a chapter on our vision of autism and what it means to be autistic to a forthcoming English translation of *Talento Autismo* by Asia Dimitrova, a Citizen.

We also produced an exclusive interview for the Autistic Empire with the producer of *Pablo*, an award-winning Northern Irish children's television series about an autistic child and his imaginary friends.

**AUTISTIC?  
Great.**

The Autistic Empire is an autistic social organisation built by and for autistic adults to form community based on autism as a civic identity and to provide practical tools and services for all autistic people.

The Autistic Empire is built on five principles:

- ✓ Autism is an ordinary variant of human neurology
- ✓ All autistic people are one people
- ✓ We do not need a cure: we want solutions
- ✓ Autism does not disable us: societies disable us
- ✓ Autism does not excuse us from civility or personal development

**THIS IS OUR WORLD**

[www.autisticempire.com](http://www.autisticempire.com)

Citizenship in the Autistic Empire entitles you to a Citizenship Certificate you can put on the wall, access to our Forum, and gives you the opportunity to contribute to the development and expansion of the Empire. This is somewhere you belong. This is our world.

**42**

42 is a Q+A system where Citizens and guests can submit questions on any topic and benefit from aspie wisdom. Was this person flirting with me? How many aspies drink alcohol? What can I do to sleep better? All questions and answers are publicly available, searchable and sorted by popularity, so everyone can benefit from your efforts.

**THE VAULT**

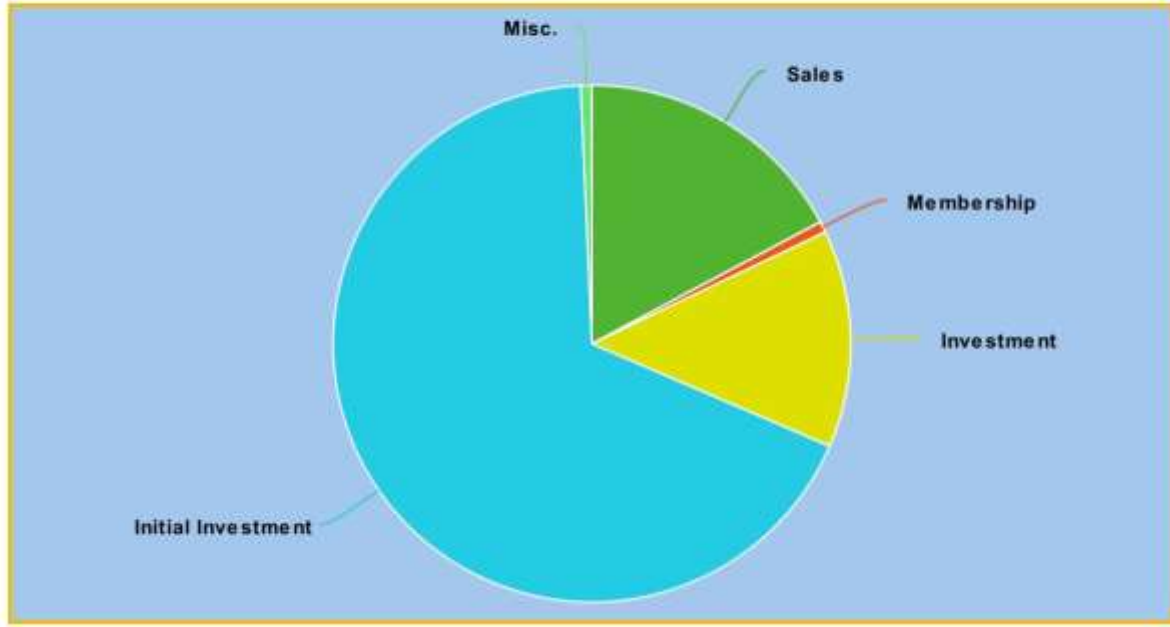
The Vault is an archive of helpful resources and tools made by autistic adults, for autistic adults. Guides, templates and tools that we wished we had - so now we do.

**ENROL NOW**

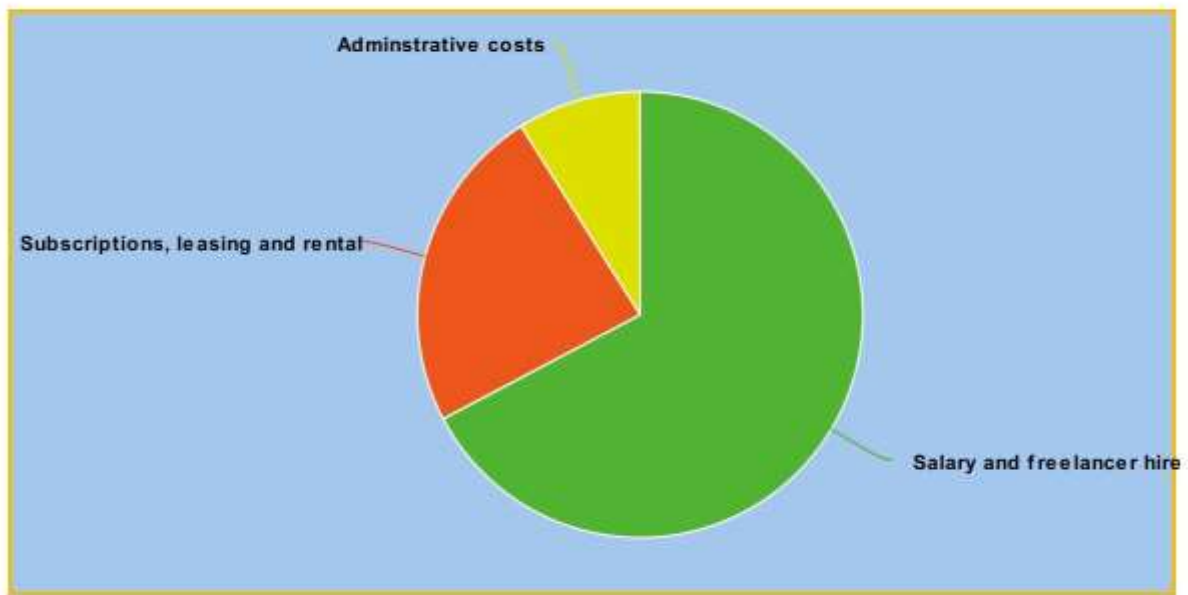
[www.autisticempire.com](http://www.autisticempire.com)

# Finances

Income July 2017-July 2019



Expenditure July 2017-July 2019



## **Explanatory key:**

*Initial Investment:* Financial support from our founder.

*Investment:* Financial support from others.

*Membership:* Annual fee for Citizenship of the Autistic Empire (currently £9 a year)

*Misc.:* Miscellaneous revenue.

*Sales:* Our shop currently offers a variety of technological solutions such as weighted blankets, no-tie shoelaces, and a variety of branded merchandise such as t-shirts and mugs.

*Salaries and freelancer hire:* Website development, graphic design such as logos, leaflets, business cards, shop management, communications work.

*Subscriptions, leasing and rental:* Subscriptions to our social media management software, G-Suite applications, website hosting, and podcast hosting, webcam.

*Administrative costs:* Printing, business insurance, company registration, office supplies, bank charges, expenses for volunteers at events.

For the last two years, much of the income of the Empire has been derived from the financial support of our founder, with a significant revenue stream from our shop, a generous investment from an anonymous supporter, and a small income stream from our membership. In the initial start-up phase, we offered Citizenships to many of our early supporters for free, and missed our recruitment target, so this was not as significant an income stream as we had anticipated.

There were significant one-off costs in our start-up phase, including website development, graphic design and branding, and investment in equipment. We also had significant staffing costs as we worked towards our launch and had to bring in outside contractors to meet our skills gap.

In 2020, the Council is focussing on moving towards a sustainable funding model and expect our overall expenditure and income to fall substantially, as we have reduced both our monthly outgoings and our regular staffing needs. We will be looking to build our membership stream and develop our sales stream to become more profitable (as our staffing cost made this an overall loss-making venture).



We also want to develop our shop as a platform for autistic artists and organisations to promote and sell their work.



*The Autistic Empire is an autistic social organisation built by and for autistic adults to form community based on autism as a civic identity and to provide practical tools and services for all autistic people.*

This annual report could not have been written without the belief, support, and hard work of the dozens of people who have given up their time and resources to help erect this organisation. The Autistic Empire is built on their shoulders and "if we have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." We'd like to thank everyone who has shared our vision and continues to work to make it a reality.



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