

# Press Release



Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2009, London, UK

## Gordon Brown to meet Autism Campaigner, Polly Tommey

Following an intensive media campaign during Autism Awareness Month in April, Polly Tommey, a mother from London with a son with autism has achieved her objective of arranging a face-to-face meeting with Gordon Brown. The meeting, to be held in Downing Street on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2009, was confirmed by the Prime Minister's office yesterday after a series of prior meetings were attended by Polly with senior Downing Street advisers and Phil Hope, Minister for Care Services.



Her campaign through The Autism Trust charity was undertaken on behalf of the thousands of mothers of children with autism in the UK. To gain Mr Brown's attention, Polly arranged to have her name and telephone number plastered across poster sites as part of an intriguing series of messages throughout the country and appeared on television and radio programmes in response to the huge public interest generated.



Many parents of children with autism engaged by lobbying Downing Street directly with emails and telephone calls and the Prime Minister responded by writing to Polly specifically recognising her concerns and acknowledging that "... people [with autism] often do not get the support they need and deserve" and stating that more needs to be done to provide this support.

Polly, accompanied by Oliver Jones, the Chairman of The Autism Trust, attended the initial meetings with Greg Beales, Mr Brown's special adviser on health, followed by a meeting with the Care Services Minister, Phil Hope and his team of autism experts and advisers. It was clear from each of these meetings that Polly's message on the extent of the crisis being faced by so many families was being heard and that the need for better, longer term solutions for the children with autism today as they grow up requires a new approach due to the high numbers now affected.

Polly commented, *"Mr Brown responded quickly and constructively to our initial campaign and his team have impressed us with the growing recognition of the importance of autism and the devastating impact the condition can have on people with autism and their families."*

*"However more needs to be done and a real understanding of the scale of the challenge of autism remains to be grasped as does the vital importance of working with both existing and new organisations and charities in the sector. This is what I will be explaining in detail to Mr Brown when we meet next month."*

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Since Polly commenced the campaign, the Department of Health has issued a major consultation document on the future for adults with autism: 'A Better Future'. This document is welcomed as it represents a major step forward by government in seeking to address some of the many problems that exist today. However, ideas and plans have to be turned into reality and that will never come soon enough for Polly who has been dealing with many desperate and deeply frustrated parents for over ten years through her publishing network and help line.

*Polly stated, "As The Autism Trust, we welcome Phil Hope's consultation document and also the chance that we have been offered of working closely with Gordon Brown and his team. We can see that we should be able to contribute significantly to the range of solutions that are required as we all move autism much more onto the political agenda in the UK."*

*"However, attitudes towards autism have to change, the awareness of key people in our society has to evolve and everyone involved has to move fast as autism is a real problem that simply isn't going to go away. Delivery in response to these encouraging proposals is everything now as that will determine the ultimate judgement of parents ... our children need better support now."*

Polly Tommey is remarkable and determined character who has dedicated her life to supporting parents who face overwhelming demands, struggling to cope with autism and the lack of support currently provided.

To quote Polly in concluding: *"This campaign has been all about strength not weakness ... it's been about demanding support instead of simply hoping for it ... and it's about how we, the parents and the mothers in particular, are still having to deliver where our governments have failed."*

*"Our campaign will continue to be centred on ensuring that children with autism are treated as well as anyone else. This is a serious issue that must be addressed. This is not negotiable - it's about my son's future and those of all other children with autism today – it is fundamental."*



**Left: Polly with her son Billy delivering her original letter in to Mr Brown in late March.**

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## Notes for Editors

***The Autism Trust (registered charity Nr 1117657)***

[www.theautismtrust.org.uk](http://www.theautismtrust.org.uk)

The Autism Trust's focus is on building inspiring, sustainable and real futures for the many children with autism in the world today: ***A Safe Haven for People with Autism***

The objective of The Autism Trust is simple: to create a future with purpose for children everywhere with autism. We aim to do this by developing a worldwide network of innovative, high-quality environments: Centres of Excellence in Autism.

### ***Polly Tommey***

Polly Tommey is a mother dealing with autism. She is also the founder and Editor-in-Chief of The Autism File. Polly has been producing what is now the leading retail magazine on autism in the UK, USA & Canada (with a current issue circulation of over 40,000 copies) from her family's house in Hampton, West London since 1999. Polly is also the Founder of The Autism Trust, a UK registered charity focused on building an inspiring and sustainable future for children with autism in the UK when they leave full time education.

Polly is regarded as one of the leading figures in autism in the UK as a campaigning and influential journalist and is featured regularly as a sector expert in the media. She is currently directing an investigative television documentary on autism to be broadcast in 2009. Polly also presents a regular radio programme: Autism Issues From Around the World on Autism One Radio; she is Secretary of the Autism Human Rights & Discrimination Initiative; and is a regular attendee and presenter at conferences worldwide. She is married to Jonathan Tommey who runs The Autism Clinic and they have three children, one of whom has autism.

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