

# Press Release

Friday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2009, London, UK



## **The Autism Trust: McKinnon has been let down by this country ...**

The case of Asperger's syndrome-diagnosed Gary McKinnon is an outrage and an affront to all people with autism in the UK. Today's decision to allow a man with a recognised medical condition to be extradited to face charges in the United States due to actions directly linked to that condition is unacceptable. It underlines the problem faced by all families dealing with autism and people with autism in the UK today.

Polly Tommey, Founder of The Autism Trust said, "Mr McKinnon's dreadful situation has arisen due to an apparent lack of understanding of autism and the autistic condition by politicians, by social services and by the wider government organisation. This is not how our country should be acting in supporting vulnerable adults. The message this inaction sends to all other families facing their own challenges is that people in power just don't care."

Last month Polly Tommey and Oliver Jones of The Autism Trust met Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Care Services Minister Phil Hope to highlight the crisis faced by families dealing with autism today. Some good statements were made and plans for support were emphasised ... but when it counts, such as with Mr McKinnon today ... action needs to be taken demonstrably.

Oliver Jones, Chairman of The Autism Trust said: "The lack of a commitment to training public sector employees: from doctors to teachers; from the police to fire fighters and paramedics; and from social workers to local officials is at the heart of the problem. Without proper understanding, life changing problems such as Mr McKinnon's case will continue to arise. We have to see our government commit to addressing this root cause. We also have to see more effective action taken on the ground – going beyond statements of intent. Today there are too many real people, in real families facing real and personal disasters as a result."

Polly Tommey continues: "Case after case of clear discrimination against people with autism underlines why more has to be done to support parents and carers. So many devastating, and in some cases deeply tragic examples could have been avoided if only there was a commitment to the establishment of proper facilities and resources to support people of all ages with autism. The Autism Trust's goal of creating Centres of Excellence to support understanding through training, to provide diagnosis and treatment, and to facilitate people with autism in working and living safely whilst fulfilling their potential has to be given greater support by politicians.

"Mr Brown was clear in his support and aspirations when we met him; we now need to see action through the wider public sector. The Government should be genuinely embarrassed by the image the UK has given to the wider world of autism by its inaction in Gary McKinnon's case."

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Polly concludes: "If The Autism Trust's facilities had been in place now, many more cases like this could be avoided; and many more people with autism could have been saved from the indignity of prison and secure hospitals."

***For further information and to arrange interviews:***

<b><i>Oliver Jones</i></b>	<b><i>Chairman, The Autism Trust</i></b>	<b><i>07802 985053</i></b>
<b><i>Polly Tommey</i></b>	<b><i>Founder, The Autism Trust</i></b>	<b><i>07921 949500</i></b>

## **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***

### ***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.

### **Autism in the UK:**

Autism affects over half a million people and is the cause of often overwhelming stress for families of those with autism. This is not a passing matter; **autism numbers have increased dramatically in the last twenty years from 5 in 10,000 in 1989 to more than 1 in a 100 (100 in 10,000) today.**