



Trustees' Annual Report

For the period 7 August 2024 to 5 April 2025

Reference and Administration Details

Charity Name: ZigZag Leeds Autism Support

Registered Charity Number: 1209495

Principal Office: 12 Aspen Mount, Leeds, LS16 6RT

Trustees:

Lisa James (Chair)

Fiona Lassey

Nicola Booth

Attia Hussain

Vicky Miller [Appointed 24th July 2025]

Structure, Governance and Management

Governing Document

The charity is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) governed by a Constitution (Association Model), registered on 7 August 2024.

Recruitment and Appointment of Trustees

Trustees are elected by members at the Annual General Meeting, in accordance with the charity's governing document.

The Trustees may also appoint new trustees at any time to fill vacancies or add specific skills or experience needed by the charity. New trustees receive an induction appropriate to their role.

Safeguarding

The charity has established safeguarding policies appropriate for its work with vulnerable families. These policies are reviewed regularly and are communicated to trustees, staff, and volunteers as appropriate. A designated Trustee oversees safeguarding procedures and compliance, and ensures that any safeguarding concerns are addressed promptly and in line with the charity's policies. Trustees, staff, and volunteers receive safeguarding guidance and training appropriate to their roles.

Management

ZigZag is managed by two permanent volunteers - the Chair and a Secretary. Together they manage the day-to-day administration, coordinate activities and events, moderate online support spaces, and respond to enquiries from families and professionals. Several other parent-volunteers attend activity sessions to welcome new families and manage membership applications and renewals during the events.

In early 2024, the former unincorporated association undertook the process of becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, with registration completed on 7 August 2024. Remaining assets were modest and used to settle outstanding costs.

Services for Public Benefit

The trustees have had due regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit when planning the charity's activities.

Our services are open to all parents/carers in Leeds who care for an autistic child or young person, with or without a formal autism diagnosis and those with co-occurring conditions. We also welcome families from neighbouring areas where similar services do not exist.

Many autism services focus only on those with a confirmed diagnosis. ZigZag welcomes families at every stage of their journey, whether they are just beginning the assessment process or navigating life post-diagnosis, we ensure that no-one is left without vital support.

All our services are accessible and inclusive; we host events that are free or affordable by subsidising costs where possible, and provide free online support.

Membership is a nominal £5 per family per year which gives reduced entry to events, and ensures our sessions remain exclusively for members.

Objectives and Activities

The Charity's mission and purpose

Our group motto is 'You are never alone'.

ZigZag exists to ensure that autistic children and their families in Leeds feel understood and accepted, supported and never isolated.

Too often, families face long waits for assessment and diagnosis, limited support services, and the burden of navigating complex and challenging systems such as SEND educational support. Autistic people and their families sadly experience misunderstanding, stigma, and isolation in everyday life.

We listen closely to these experiences within our community and shape our services around what families tell us they need.

Through our services we strive to:

Help families understand and support their child, both in and out of the home.

Empower parents to have the knowledge and confidence to advocate for their children.

Maintain a strong peer-support network that creates opportunities for friendships and a sense of belonging in the community.

Improve quality of life by providing inclusive and accessible opportunities for autistic children and their families to relax, play and socialise in environments where they feel accepted instead of judged.

Promote our core values of acceptance and inclusion. We recognise the strengths and diversity of autistic individuals and aim to create an environment that respects and celebrates these qualities.

We believe that all families, regardless of where they are in the assessment process, deserve access to resources, community, and the opportunity to be heard.

We understand that autism has an impact on the whole family. Our services take into account the needs of all family members, and siblings are always welcome to attend our events.

Core activities include:

Peer support: Providing safe, non-judgmental spaces both in-person and online where members share experiences, advice and support.

Inclusive events: Hosting regular autism-friendly sessions such as twice-weekly trampolining, and monthly sensory and soft play sessions. Events are exclusive to members and held in environments adjusted to meet sensory needs.

Advice, information and signposting: Delivered via our public Facebook page and website, through private online forums, and at parent-support meetings held in venues across Leeds.

Achievements and Performance

Our History and Legacy

2024 was a landmark year for ZigZag, marking its 20 year anniversary as a group providing support to the community of Leeds. From its early days as a coffee morning for parents, it has evolved into the largest autism support organisation in West Yorkshire, supporting thousands of individuals over its history, and sustaining a large peer-support network. To date there are around 2,700 members in our private online support groups and more than 8,000 followers of our public Facebook information page.

Founded and developed over the years by our Chair, Lisa James, ZigZag has always been proudly parent-led. Today the group is still run by a small team of volunteers all with lived experience of raising autistic children. The majority of the team are also neurodivergent, diagnosed autistic and/or with ADHD, bringing a unique insight and understanding of the lived reality of neurodivergent parenting, and the joys and challenges our families experience every day.

We are proud of the enduring, positive impact we have in our community. Our work has been recognised externally and ZigZag is proud to have received several regional awards over the years and numerous nominations, some including being shortlisted and highly commended. The most recent win was a BBC Make a Difference 'Volunteer of the Year' award presented to our Chair, Lisa James, for her sustained voluntary service to the people of Leeds. In 2024, Lisa attended a Royal Garden Party held to honour grassroots volunteers. The invitation was in recognition of the significant and lasting contribution of her work through ZigZag, and its impact within the local community.

Growth and Development

Demand for ZigZag's services and membership numbers continue to grow each week and month. During a steep rise in new memberships in 2024, with families presenting with a broad range of needs that statutory services do not always fully meet, we explored how we could expand our services and sustain the group's future for the long term.

Building on its strong foundation, we started the process to be recognised as a charity, and on 8 August 2024 ZigZag formally registered as a CIO. This transition was a natural step to ensure its legacy continues for future generations of Leeds families. It secured long-term stability, oversight and accountability through a Board of Trustees, and established a clear pathway for future fundraising and growth.

Achievements this year

ZigZag has always run a busy calendar and in our first eight months as a registered charity we hosted:

- 47 trampolining sessions
- 7 monthly soft play sessions
- 8 parent support meetings
- 2 adult brunches
- Adults Christmas Dinner Dance event.
- Halloween and Christmas events for the family

Community Reach and Demand

Delays in assessments mean delays in identification of needs and access to appropriate support. Waiting lists for child autism assessments are ever-increasing and families are being told to expect a wait of around 10 years for an assessment through the NHS pathway in Leeds. Pre- and post-diagnostic support available through statutory services is very limited or non-existent, and we continue to see a steady rise in demand for our services from parents, and from professionals who support families.

Our large online presence means we have a wide reach into the community. We receive several new enquiries each week from parents reached through information shared on our Facebook page, word of mouth recommendations, and signposting from professionals and statutory services. We are also contacted by professionals looking for autism-specific information or to refer families to us.

Service Delivery and Impact

Between October 2024 to Jan 2025, we collaborated with Leeds Consulting Services (University of Leeds) and in February, they delivered a 5-year business plan and a comprehensive Impact Report. The consultancy approached group members and used the results of a service user survey to quantify data such as member satisfaction, trust and engagement longevity.

Member feedback on service benefits showed that members feel part of a supportive community, and report reduced anxiety and increased confidence, particularly in advocating for their children's needs:

"I'm more confident, understanding my children's needs. I don't know what I would have done without zigzag. For the last 10 years they have helped me so much"

"Peer support, advice, personal validation, unique experience of support"

"Less anxiety in public knowing my child won't be judged at an activity"

"Meeting families who understand what we are going through and being able to place my child in a supportive and welcoming environment"

"Being in a community who understand and can help each other through experiences or just to support each other"

"The support and the activity they provide is immeasurable along with extremely friendly members of staff the group is a lifeline to many families could not get this kind of support from anywhere else"

Data from the report shows:

ZigZag is a consistent source of vital information for families, in contrast to short-term or fragmented autism support services.

Memberships grew significantly during 2024, with 24% of current members joining us in the year ZigZag became a registered charity; almost the same amount as the total sum of members who joined prior to 2019.

A balanced distribution of the age groups of children, with members choosing to stay even after their child reaches 18. This confirms what we already knew: autism support is needed at all stages of childhood into young adulthood .

Frequent user engagement - over 50% of regular, frequent interactions with services, over a third on a weekly basis

83.2% satisfaction rate with the service provided

93.7% likely to recommend ZigZag to others.

75% report that most or all of their needs are being met

ZigZag has a very active online community, and while not all of members come to our in-person events, they are all part of our Facebook community. 38.3% of respondent reported using the private online support groups to answer their questions, get advice or referrals.

This report reflects both the reach of our organisation and the continued need for inclusive, accessible support in our community. When access to support services often feel like a revolving door of short-term interventions, ZigZag remains one of the few constants in families' lives.

Digital Reach and Engagement

Our online community remains a vital hub for information and support. Between August 2024 and February 2025, our online presence demonstrated significant reach:

We maintained a growing online community, of over 8,100 followers to date with demographic data showing strong engagement from women aged 25 - 54 in the Leeds area.

Engagement: The Facebook page received over 22,000 visits and generated 4,700 content interactions (likes, shares, comments) during this period.

Traffic: Our posts generated over 1,700 link clicks, successfully signposting families to external resources, booking systems, and further support.

Financial Review

ZigZag has transitioned successfully to obtaining charitable status while continuing to provide essential services to families and children in need of support.

The charity's main source of income came from donations, including a significant one-off donation of £5,000. We will focus on maximising use of donations and ensure spending is necessary, proportionate, and represents good value in delivering the charity's services.

The trustees recognise that future growth and expansion of the charity's activities will depend on securing additional funding and plan to explore fundraising opportunities and grant funding to support this.

Reserves Policy

As a parent-led charity with no paid staff or premises, and no significant overheads, the trustees have not set a formal reserves target. At the year end, the charity held £4,568 in cash funds. The trustees will keep the charity's financial position under review to ensure sufficient funds are available to help provide or subsidise activities and maintain the charity's reach across West Yorkshire.

Plans for Future Periods

Community Reach and Meeting Demand

In response to increasing demand and long waiting times for autism assessments, we plan to focus on strengthening early and pre-diagnostic support so families are not left without support and help while waiting for statutory services.

We will continue to build on our growing online presence to share clear, accessible information and reach families earlier. This includes creating simple digital resources to offer practical strategies to help support parents during the waiting period, and signposting them to relevant support. We will continue to listen to what families say they need, and regularly review and develop existing online and in-person advice to make sure we continue to meet those needs.

To help manage demand more sustainably, the trustees plan to review how enquiries are triaged and responded to, aim to gain a better understanding of patterns of need, and prioritise support where appropriate. We will also seek additional funding to help maintain, and where possible increase, our capacity to respond to enquiries and deliver services.

We will continue to work closely with professionals and partner organisations to improve signposting, reduce duplication of support, and help ensure families can access appropriate help at the earliest opportunity.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of services, the trustees recognise the need to strengthen our volunteer base. This includes recruiting additional volunteers, developing clear role descriptions, and providing appropriate induction, safeguarding training, mentoring and wellbeing support to enable volunteers to carry out their roles safely and effectively.

With much of the day-to-day running of the charity currently managed by a small core volunteer team, we aim to support more volunteers to take on coordination and support roles. This will reduce pressure on the core team, ensure services continue to be delivered consistently, and enable us to develop and expand services in response to growing demand.

signed on behalf of the charity's trustees:

Signature: 

Full Name: Lisa James

Position: Chair

Date: 4th February 2026



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Charity Name	No (if any)
ZigZag Leeds Autism Support	1209495

CC16a

Receipts and payments accounts

For the period from	Period start date	To	Period end date
	07/08/2024		05/04/2025

Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Endowment funds	Total funds	Last year
	to the nearest £	to the nearest £	to the nearest £	to the nearest £	to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
Donations, legacies and grants	5,425	-	-	5,425	-
Members' subscriptions	185	-	-	185	-
Member Activity Costs	105	-	-	105	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	5,715	-	-	5,715	-
A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total receipts	5,715	-	-	5,715	-
A3 Payments					
Printing, postage, stationery and computer supplies	19	-	-	19	-
Outreach costs	278	-	-	278	-
Event costs	850	-	-	850	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	1,147	-	-	1,147	-
A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total payments	1,147	-	-	1,147	-
Net of receipts/(payments)	4,568	-	-	4,568	-
A5 Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	-	-	-	-	-
Cash funds this year end	4,568	-	-	4,568	-

Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B1 Cash funds		4,568	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
	Total cash funds	4,568	-	-
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	OK	OK	OK
		Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B2 Other monetary assets		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B3 Investment assets			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
		Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
		Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
B5 Liabilities			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	
Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of all the trustees	Signature	Print Name	Date of approval	
	L James	Lisa James	05/02/26	