



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

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Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2010  
RC/DC

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Polly Tommey".

Thank you very much for your recent letter, regarding your *Autism Campaign 2010*.

While autism is much better understood now than ten years ago, there is clearly still much work to be done in raising awareness of autism both in the medical profession and in society as a whole. It is clear that this lack of awareness means that many of the estimated 500,000 people with autism in the UK routinely struggle to get the services they need. As a result, outcomes for people with autism are poor. The National Autistic Society estimates that only 15 per cent of adults with autism are in full time work, and their children are three times more likely to develop mental health issues.

Even while in Opposition, the Conservative Party has worked successfully to make a real difference to improving the lives of adults with autism. It was my colleague, Cheryl Gillan MP, having won the Private Members' Bill ballot, who chose to introduce the Autism Bill in Parliament, and I was pleased that the Bill won a large majority in February 2009 with Conservative support. It should be noted that this was despite members of the Labour Government, including Andy Burnham, now the Health Secretary, and Phil Hope, the Care Services Minister, attempting to stop the Bill getting a Second Reading.

In my view, the Autism Act 2009 is a long-overdue piece of legislation. As you will be aware, the Act places a legal obligation on the Government to publish an Adult Autism Strategy by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010 for improving outcomes for adults with autism, as well as producing statutory guidance for local authorities and their partners to take a strategic approach to meeting the current and future needs of adults with autism in their local area. This means, in practice, that local authorities and Primary Care Trusts need to collect information on the number of adults with autism in their locality and what their needs are. This strategy was published on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2010. Going forward we must ensure that these new duties on local authorities are translated into meaningful action on the ground so that adults with autism get the services they need and do not continue to slip through the net.



The Conservative Party has also developed a range of policies aimed at helping make life easier for children with disabilities and their families. A future Conservative Government will aim to make a real difference to the lives of families with children with disabilities by increasing the number of health visitors; simplifying the assessment process for accessing services; making it easier for parents to access respite care; looking carefully at ensuring that we accurately assess children's eligibility for Special Educational Needs statements; and putting more power and control into the hands of parents and young people with disabilities themselves so that they can ensure that they receive the right care and support to best suit their needs.

While these measures will not solve every problem that people with autism may face in their lives, I believe they will make life feel less like an uphill struggle to get the same services and enjoy the same life chances as all their peers. And we will certainly continue to build on this work in the months and years ahead.

I would like to wish you all the best with your campaign and thank you, once again, for writing.

Yours  
David

**David Cameron**