



# A Train Walk Organiser's Guide to Approaching the Media



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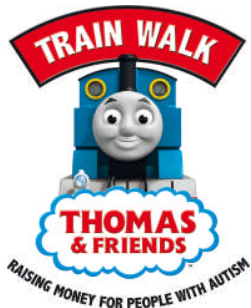


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## Hello and welcome

Fantastic news! You're organising a Train Walk for The National Autistic Society (NAS). Don't keep the news all to yourself...tell as many people as possible and increase the number of people taking part as well as your fundraising target.

This guide will help you contact your local media (newspapers, TV and radio) to gain publicity for your Train Walk and for the NAS.

Contacting your local media is really easy and the NAS Press Office will support you every step of the way.

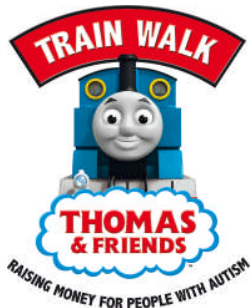
This guide gives lots of information, including:

- Why you should contact your local media
- How to contact your local media
- How to write a press release
- How to take enquiries from journalists
- Facts and figures about autism and the NAS

If you'd like to chat to someone about any of the points in this guide, please call us on **020 7903 3593** or email us at [press@nas.org.uk](mailto:press@nas.org.uk).



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## What you'll need

- Telephone
- Computer
- Or good old fashioned stationery

Contact your local media as soon as possible. Journalists work to tight deadlines so make sure you get your story to them in good time so they can cover it.

### **1-2 months before the event (or as soon as possible)**

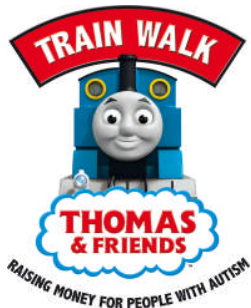
- Contact the NAS Press Office to talk through your plans – we may be able to offer you some tips and advice
- Write a press release to announce your Train Walk
- Include relevant date and event information
- Contact your local newspapers to ask them to announce your Train Walk to the local area or even ask the media attend the Train Walk themselves for interviews and photographs on the day

### **2 weeks before the event**

- Contact your local TV and radio stations
- Think about how you could take suitable photos during the event (for post-event stories in your local newspaper)



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## Putting pen to paper

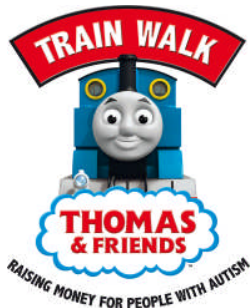
### How to write a press release

A press release is the most effective means of communication with the media. It must be clearly written and well presented. Use the template press release included in this document as a guide (page 7/8).

- Type the press release on paper that identifies the NAS (you can copy and paste the template release below into a new document or blank email which includes the NAS logo)
- Make sure that at the top it says 'Press Release'
- Give your press release a date and a catchy title that explains the story
- Stress the what is special about your story/event
- Remember to point out who?, what?, when?, where? and why? (and how? If appropriate) in the first paragraph which will help catch the journalist's eye if they only have time to read the beginning of your press release
- Make each paragraph concise and to the point
- Quotes add a personal insight into your story and also act as time savers because then the newspaper doesn't always need to interview you for more information
- Include contact details for readers to find out more information about the event and details of how they can join the Train Walk. You could also include a web link to any online fundraising you are doing as well (i.e. Just Giving or Virgin Money websites)
- Use 1.5 spacing, in an easy-to-read font (we recommend Arial size 12) on A4 paper



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## Top tips

1. Grab the reader's attention in the first paragraph
  - Simply sum up your story
  - Write clearly and use 'plain English' wherever possible
2. Got your number?
  - Put your name and telephone number at the end of the release for interviews and photographs (remember journalists will probably call in office hours so think about including a mobile number too)
  - Include the NAS Press Office contact details in case journalists want more information on the NAS or autism
3. Last but by no means least
  - Supporting information should be added at the end of the press release under the heading 'Notes to Editor'
  - Email your draft release to [press@nas.org.uk](mailto:press@nas.org.uk) and we can check it for you and supply you with some helpful 'Notes to Editor' explaining autism if necessary



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## Template press release

### NAS Press Office

Tel: 020 7903 3593

Fax: 020 7923 5708

Mobile (24 hours): 07787 124792

Email: [press@nas.org.uk](mailto:press@nas.org.uk)



## Press release

INSERT DATE

### All aboard the (insert location) Train Walk for autism

**(Insert your name)**, from **(insert town/organisation)**, is holding a *Train Walk*, a family-friendly Thomas & Friends™ themed sponsored walk, in **(insert location)** on **(insert date)** to raise funds for The National Autistic Society (NAS), the UK's leading charity for people affected by autism.

Based upon the classic Thomas & Friends books and characters, the Train Walk will see local families and friends walk together in a long train to help raise funds for people affected by autism.

**(Insert your name)** said: "Our Thomas & Friends Train Walk is going to be a fantastic day out for all the family. As well as the walk itself, there will also be **(insert extra information about the activities on the day, for example an appearance by the fat controller/BBQ/face painting/fancy dress/ treasure hunt/etc)**. We hope to see as many people as possible having fun and raising vital funds for the National Autistic Society."

Thomas & Friends has long held a special meaning for children with autism and their families and HIT Entertainment, who owns Thomas & Friends, has been supporting the NAS since 2001.

The NAS provides a wide range of advice, information, support and specialist services to people with autism and their families. Whilst autism is a serious, lifelong and disabling condition, the right support at the right time can make an enormous difference to people's lives.

How the funds raised will help the NAS:

- **£25** pays for the first stage of training a Befriender, who can help support families affected by autism
- **£75** pays for three families to attend the NAS Earlybird programme that provides help and support to pre-school children with autism

- **£100** helps pay for a full diagnosis of a child at the NAS assessment centre
- **£500** provides gardening equipment for up to 50 adults at one of our adult centres

For more information about **(insert your name/town/event name)** contact **(insert relevant telephone or email address)**.

Or if you are interested in finding out more about organising your own Thomas & Friends Train Walk, visit [www.trainwalk.org.uk](http://www.trainwalk.org.uk) or call 0845 180 0426

**ENDS**

**The (insert location) Thomas & Friends Train Walk is taking place on (insert date) at (insert time) at/from (insert location). Media are welcome to attend.**

**For further information on Train Walks, autism and the NAS please call the NAS Press Office on 020 7903 3593 or email [press@nas.org.uk](mailto:press@nas.org.uk)**

#### **Notes to editors:**

- Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. It is a spectrum condition, which means that, while all people with autism share certain difficulties, their condition will affect them in different ways. Some people with autism are able to live relatively independent lives but others may have accompanying learning disabilities and need a lifetime of specialist support. People with autism may also experience over- or under-sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light or colours.
- Asperger syndrome is a form of autism. People with Asperger syndrome are often of average or above average intelligence. They have fewer problems with speech but may still have difficulties with understanding and processing language.

The National Autistic Society is the UK's leading charity for people with autism and their families. Founded in 1962, it continues to spearhead national and international initiatives and provide a strong voice for all people with autism. The NAS provides a wide range of services to help people with autism and Asperger syndrome live their lives with as much independence as possible.

The NAS relies on the support of its members and donors to continue its vital work for people with autism. To become a member, make a donation or to find out more about the work of the NAS, visit the NAS website [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

For more information about autism and for help in your area, call the NAS Autism Helpline on: 0845 070 4004 10am-4pm, Monday to Friday, (local rates apply).

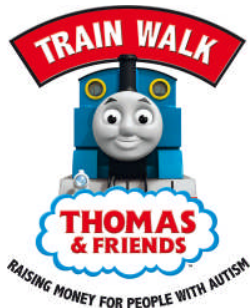
The NAS Autism Services Directory is the UK's most comprehensive directory of services and events for people with autism. Visit [www.autism.org.uk/autismdirectory](http://www.autism.org.uk/autismdirectory) to find autism services and support networks in your area.

#### **About Thomas & Friends™**

Thomas & Friends™ invites children to enter a world of imagination through the tracks of a train and the words of a story. Thomas the Tank Engine was created by a father for his son over 65 years ago. Today, families in more than 185 countries enjoy fun and adventure with their engine friends while experiencing timeless life lessons of discovery, friendship and cooperation. For more information about the world of Thomas the Tank Engine and his friends, please visit [www.thomasandfriends.com](http://www.thomasandfriends.com)

#### **About HIT Entertainment**

HIT Entertainment is one of the world's leading independent children's entertainment producers and rights-owners. HIT's portfolio includes properties, such as *Barney™*, *Bob the Builder™*, *Thomas & Friends™*, *Pingu™*, *Fireman Sam™*, *Angelina Ballerina™* and *Rainbow Magic™*. HIT represents Chapman Entertainment's *Fifi and the Flowertots™* and *Roary the Racing Car™* in North America as well as *Wallace & Gromit™*, *Shaun the Sheep™*, *Timmy Time™* and Aardman Classics from Aardman Animations. HIT also acts as representative for *The Wiggles®* in the UK. Launched in 1989, HIT's lines of business span television and video production, content distribution, publishing, consumer products licensing and live events and has operations in the UK, US, Canada, Hong Kong and Japan. HIT is a part-owner of US-based preschool channel, PBS KIDS Sprout<sup>SM</sup>. For more information, visit [www.hitentertainment.com](http://www.hitentertainment.com).



## It's who you know

Where to send your press release

If you don't know how to contact your local media you can ask the NAS Press Office for a list of your local media contacts.

Your press release needs to be sent to the right person/place. It will generally be the news editor/news desk but there may be a journalist specifically dealing with fundraising stories.

- It is best to email them first if possible
- Follow up with a phone call to see if they are interested in your story

## Email

- Email your release to the news desk or a named person if you have details
- The email 'subject' should be the title of your release
- Copy and paste the full release into the body of the email
- Don't send your release as an attachment as not all journalists can open these

## Post

- If you haven't got an email address, send your release by post
- Addresses can be obtained by contacting the NAS Press Office

## Say cheese!

The journalist will may want a photo to accompany your story or may want to send a photographer to snap the Train Walk event in action if possible. If you are taking your own photo try to make it as illustrative of your story as possible e.g. wearing your NAS branded T-shirt or posing with props such as a Train Walk branded sign etc.

- Photos should preferably be in email format (ideally as a jpeg file)
- Only email your photo to a journalist if they have requested one
- Do not send a photo with the initial release as it will make the file too large for some journalists to read
- If you are unable to email your photo ask the journalist if they are able to use a hard copy or suggest they visit you to take one of their own

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## And over to you

How to give a good press interview

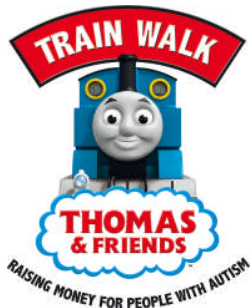
- If a journalist calls to interview you on your event – this is great news
- Don't worry – the NAS press office can help you prepare if you are concerned

### Keep the information below in mind:

- Ask them questions to clarify how they plan to cover your story
- When will the article appear?
- Do they want a photo?
- Would they like to do a follow up piece when you have completed the event?
- You don't have to respond immediately
- Journalists have tight deadlines so will want information quickly, but you might feel more comfortable if you have a bit of time to prepare. If this is the case take down their questions and say you'll ring back after a short period of time – agree the best time to do this
- It's OK to ring them back if you have additional information

For further information call the NAS Press Office on 020 7903 3593 or email [press@nas.org.uk](mailto:press@nas.org.uk)

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## Local radio and TV

You can contact your local TV or radio the same as you would a newspaper – i.e. by calling them or sending a press release.

The most likely slots for your story on local radio and TV are regional news programmes. When you make contact with them make sure you give them the details of the event and describe how it may look on camera – i.e. a train formation of children on a Thomas & Friends themed walk etc.

## Preparation for radio and television

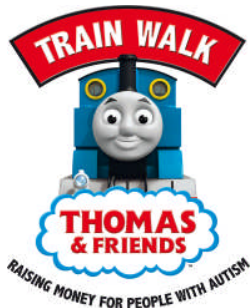
If you secure an interview, ask how long it will be and prepare accordingly. What are the most important things you want the audience to hear/see in that short time?

Radio and TV interviews can be live or pre-recorded. They can happen down a phone line, on location, in a studio or remotely from another studio. Pre-recorded interviews will be edited, live interviews cannot be edited.

Ask questions when you are first contacted which will help you feel more in control, for example:

- Is the interview live or pre-recorded?
- How long will the interview be?
- Where will the interview take place?
- Who is the interviewer?
- When will it be broadcast?
- Who else have they spoken to and what have they said?

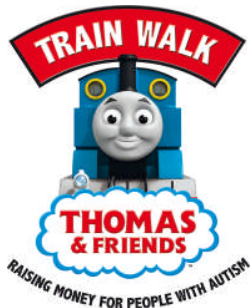
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## Guidelines

- Prepare 2, at most 3 main points including how the audience can join your event or find out more information
- Be clear about what you can/are prepared to talk about. For example, you may be asked personal questions such as; why you're supporting the NAS and whether you know anyone who has autism
- Short answers work better than long rambling ones (be concise and to the point, but get your message across)
- Try not to get sidetracked by the interviewer and stick to your main points
- Treat all media interviews as a free advertisement: state that you are i.e. fundraising for the NAS and how listeners can join/sponsor you
- Don't agree to an interview down the phone without adequate preparation – call the NAS Press Office for more advice if you need it
- If you are going to be on TV think about dressing appropriately – i.e. wearing a NAS branded t-shirt

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## After the event

After your event you can contact your local media to let them know about the success of the Train Walk and also include how much money you raised.

This is also a good idea if you are holding a private Train Walk and want to raise awareness about the fundraising without having to invite your local community to join your event.

There are two formats you can use to contact the media with details about your Train Walk after the event:

1. Send a 'letter to editors' to your local newspapers to thank all the people who supported you (if this is printed it will appear in the 'Letter to editors' section of the paper where the readers comments appear) – please see the template below
2. Adapt the template press release in this guide (page 7 & 8) to the past tense and include information about the success of your event (you can also send images of the Train Walk in action to illustrate your story)

### Template Letter to editors

Dear Sir

I just wanted to say a very big thank you to everyone who came along to our Thomas & Friends™ themed Train Walk on [insert date]. Thanks to your wonderful generosity we raised £[insert amount] for The National Autistic Society (NAS).

Everyone had a fantastic day out and the money raised will help the NAS continue to provide vital services to local people affected by autism.

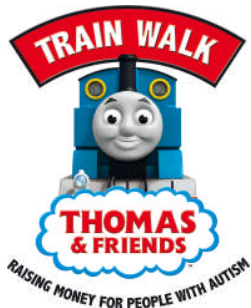
Thomas & Friends has long held a special meaning for children with autism and their families and has been supporting the NAS since 2001. Whilst autism is a serious, lifelong and disabling condition, the right support at the right time can make an enormous difference to people's lives

Thank you again.

[your name]

[your address]

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## Autism facts and figures

The following information will help if you are asked about the NAS and autism. If you are doing a newspaper or radio interview have this in front of you for information.

- The National Autistic Society is the UK's leading charity for people affected by autism. We champion the rights and interests of all people with autism and aim to provide individuals with autism and their families with help, support and services that they can access, trust and rely upon and which make a positive difference to their lives.
- For more information about autism and for help in your area, and for further information on any of the NAS services, call the NAS Autism Helpline on: 0845 070 4004 10am-4pm, Monday to Friday, (local rates apply), or visit the NAS website [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

## What is autism?

- Autism is a serious, lifelong and disabling condition. People with autism can find it incredibly hard to make sense of the world. Everyday life can be confusing, meaningless or even frightening. Understanding and communicating with other people is particularly difficult – which can leave people very isolated.
- Autism is a spectrum condition which affects each person in a different way.
- There are over half a million people in the UK with autism – that's around 1 in 100.
- While autism is incurable, the right support at the right time can make an enormous difference to peoples' lives.

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## Your simple PR plan

A quick reminder of how it's all done

1. Read through this document
2. Contact the NAS Press Office to talk through your plans and any questions
3. Draft a press release to announce your Train Walk
4. Send your press release to local media contacts asking them to announce your event and attend the Train Walk
5. During the event organise some photographs of the Train Walk in action – preferably with some NAS/Thomas & Friends branding to illustrate your story
6. After the event contact your media with a Letter to Editors or press release telling them about the success of your event (along with any images if the media are interested)

The NAS Press Office is able to provide support and feedback on all press releases and media communication for individual fundraisers if required

The NAS cannot guarantee that your story will be featured by your local media

The NAS Press Office

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