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With images **to come**

Autism Unlimited cuts the ribbon on groundbreaking new diagnosis and support centre

Leading autism charity Autism Unlimited has officially opened its new assessment and diagnosis centre in Dorset.

The Chris Page Centre (CPC), based at the charity's Portfield School in Parley, Christchurch, seeks to ease lengthy NHS referral times for autism pre-assessment and diagnosis and can also provide adults, children and families with support, as well as signposting to other organisations through its Community Connect provision.

Now accepting referrals from adults across the country, the CPC has been made possible by a legacy from the estate of the late Chris Page.

Chris's son Nicholas was a student at Portfield School and Chris later became a Trustee and driving force at the charity.

The official opening of the Chris Page Centre was conducted by the internationally acclaimed opera singer and Autism Unlimited Patron Sophia Grech, who herself was diagnosed with autism at the age of 45.

Sophia said: "Diagnosis provided so many missing pieces of my jigsaw, helping me to understand who I am and giving me the clarity I always sought. It also gave me a sense of new-found peace as to why I had struggled on a personal level and my behaviour was 'different' to others.

"Since my diagnosis so much has changed, both in my daily life and career. Positive changes which have greatly enhanced my life and the way I feel.

"It therefore gives me a huge sense of pleasure to officially open the Chris Page Centre, which will help many autistic people to receive the answers and support they need to reach their own potential and live their lives to the very fullest."

Clinical research shows that early diagnosis, intervention, education, and support can literally change lives. However, with NHS diagnosis waiting times at around three years, many people are forced to endure long periods of isolation due to their social, educational and behavioural difficulties.

Siún Cranny, CEO of Autism Unlimited, said: "We are immensely proud to open The Chris Page Centre, which works with experts in the field of assessment and diagnosis and will make a huge impact on many people's lives.

"Once diagnosed, people can understand themselves better and realise they are not alone in the way they feel.

“They can set their own goals and be confident in knowing that they have the coping techniques and systems to achieve them. Their loved ones and professionals working with them can also learn how best to support them.

She continued: “Autism Unlimited continues to stand alongside autistic people on their journey, providing education, support and pushing for their voices to be heard.

“We are now looking for more specialists to bring their expertise to the centre and for members of the public to offer fundraising support to grow it as a source of diagnosis and support for the whole autism community, including children.”

The centre launch was attended by special guests including executors of the Chris Page estate.

Executor, Angela Westwell, said: “Chris was a quiet, extremely modest man with a passion for helping others. This centre is a very fitting legacy for Chris and his family and he would have been truly thrilled to see it open.”

Entertainment was provided by Autism Unlimited student and musician Leon Lunn, 15, and singer Nevaeh Dunmore, 12, from Horndean Technology College in Hampshire. Students from Autism Unlimited’s mobile barista unit The Brew Crew provided refreshments.

More information on referral to the Chris Page Centre is available from:

<https://www.autism-unlimited.org/support/diagnosis/>

Autism Unlimited would like to hear from autism professionals interested in working with the CPC. Please contact: Donna.wearn@autism-unlimited.org

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Picture captions: **to come**

Information for Editors:

Autism Unlimited employs nearly 500 people across the South of England and provides support to autistic people through education, residential care and supported living.

The charity also owns and operates Portfield School in Parley, near Christchurch, which provides specialist teaching and care for students aged 4 to 19, who hold an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis (ASD).

Media information from Debbie Granville at Deep South Media on: 07884 657782

email: Debbie.granville@deepsouthmedia.co.uk