



## Year 3 - Report for the Nineveh Charitable Trust

### **Project title: Helping children with autism and related disabilities to learn about and experience the countryside**

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### **Our Project**

Through the publication of a series of children's story books and colouring books, this three-year project is helping a minimum of 6,500 children with autism and related special educational needs and disabilities (hereafter referred to as autism) to experience and learn about the countryside and their rural heritage in several counties in the Southeast and East of England, including Kent, West Sussex, Essex and Suffolk. It is also raising awareness amongst parents and carers, and teachers at local special schools, of the opportunities and benefits of engaging children with autism with nature, the countryside and their rural heritage. Autism and Nature publications are free of charge, and widely distributed with the help of local autism and disability charities, and local authorities.

People with autism, especially children, often feel remote from the countryside. They represent some of the most disengaged individuals in the community, particularly children who live in urban areas that are removed from the countryside. Visits to the countryside or places of historical and cultural heritage may not feature in their everyday lives, and as a consequence they have little understanding and appreciation for, or contact with, life in the countryside. They do not enjoy the many benefits of visiting the countryside, for their education and also their well-being.

### **Summary of progress in Year 1**

Nineveh Charitable Trust funding was allocated to the production of two illustrated story books for children with autism in Kent and West Sussex respectively. Autism and Nature raised additional funding for the Kent project from Kent Community Foundation and the Ernest Cook Trust. For the West Sussex colouring book, additional funding was raised from Sussex Community Foundation, the Short Breaks Team West Sussex County Council and Woodlands.co.uk. The initial award of funding by the Nineveh Charitable Trust was extremely important to our subsequent fund-raising success with both projects.

The main beneficiaries of our colouring books are children with autism of early years, pre- and primary school age. Our motivation for producing the colouring books was to help parents, carers and teachers to overcome some of the barriers to engaging children with autism with the countryside and to increase opportunities for many children to engage with natural places in Kent and West Sussex.

Art therapy can improve communication with children who are visually oriented, and who find the use of words or language difficult. Art has also been reported to be calming and to aid self-expression, to help the development of a child's motor skills and help children to relate to their environment. From the colouring activities in our books, children learn about activities they might undertake and wildlife they might experience in the countryside. In West Sussex for example, Alex and Rosie find fossils at Bracklesham Bay, look for reptiles at Stedham Common, observe bee hives in the orchard at Standen and encounter Belted Galloway cattle grazing at Black Down. In Kent they walk on the boardwalk through Stodmarsh reedbeds, make natural art in Blean Woods, listen to marsh frogs at Dungeness RSPB Reserve and learn about apples at Bough Beech Apple Festival. The colouring books also help children and their

carers to prepare for visits to the natural places featured in the respective countryside guides, as autistic children in particular may lack imagination, and respond well to visual images.

Three thousand copies '*Alex and Rosie's West Sussex Colouring Book*' and 1,500 copies of '*Alex and Rosie's Kent Colouring Book*' were distributed (free of charge) by Autism and Nature, with the support of the Short Breaks Team West Sussex County Council, Kent Autistic Trust and Includes Us 2; we are very grateful for their support.

## **Summary of progress in Year 2**

Covid-19 had a serious impact on Autism and Nature's work programme and its ability to raise funds. Our work programme was completely disrupted in March, with the postponement of our funded work with special schools and potential funders redirecting their funding towards Covid-19 Emergency projects. At the end of March, we made several bids for Emergency Funding to help us to support our community of need – children with autism and related conditions – through encouraging engagement with the natural world. Two of these were successful, which enabled us, for a specific time period, to enter the world of social media (Facebook) for the first time, to reach our community of need in Kent, and also further afield.

Late in the year, we successfully raised the balance of funding for the projects to which we had allocated funding from the Nineveh Charitable Trust (see below). We were therefore able to schedule work on two projects with Nineveh Charitable Trust support. These represent illustrated Alex and Rosie story books to engage children with autism with rural heritage in Suffolk and Essex respectively. These books resemble past Alex and Rosie story books, with text supported by Widgit symbols for children with speech and language difficulties, but with an emphasis on places where children can learn about their rural heritage, for example: a tide mill; windmill; museums of agriculture and rural life; 'ancient' village museums; archaeology; rare breeds centres and so on.

## **Report on Activities in Year 3**

Sadly, Covid-19 has continued to have a major impact on the work of Autism and Nature over the past year. However, this has prompted us to consider new and innovative ways of engaging our children with the countryside and rural heritage. We successfully completed and published '*Alex and Rosie Explore Suffolk's Heritage*' and this is being distributed by Suffolk County Council Inclusion Services - Health, Wellbeing and Children's Services. '*Alex and Rosie Explore Essex's Heritage*' has also been completed, but printing has been delayed due to home working by staff in Essex County Council Short Breaks for Disabled Children and Young People. However, the pdfs are with the printer, and the books will be delivered and distributed over the coming weeks and months. Nineveh Charitable Trust funds are also co-funding '*Alex and Rosie's Suffolk Heritage Colouring Book*', but this has also been delayed due to the pandemic. However, much of the artwork has been completed and this will be distributed in spring 2022.

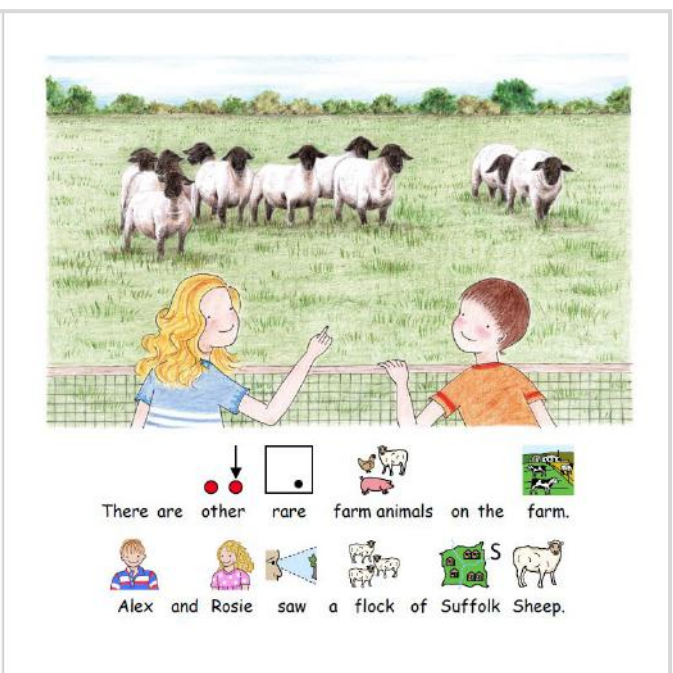
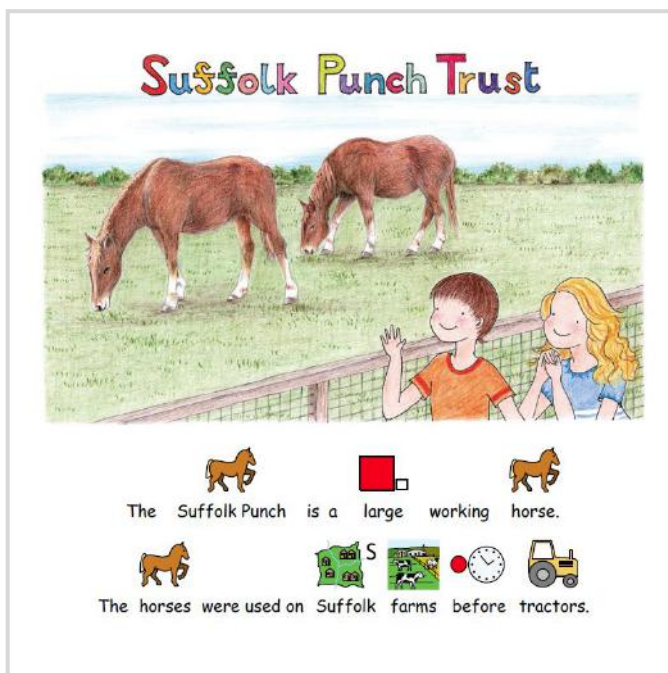
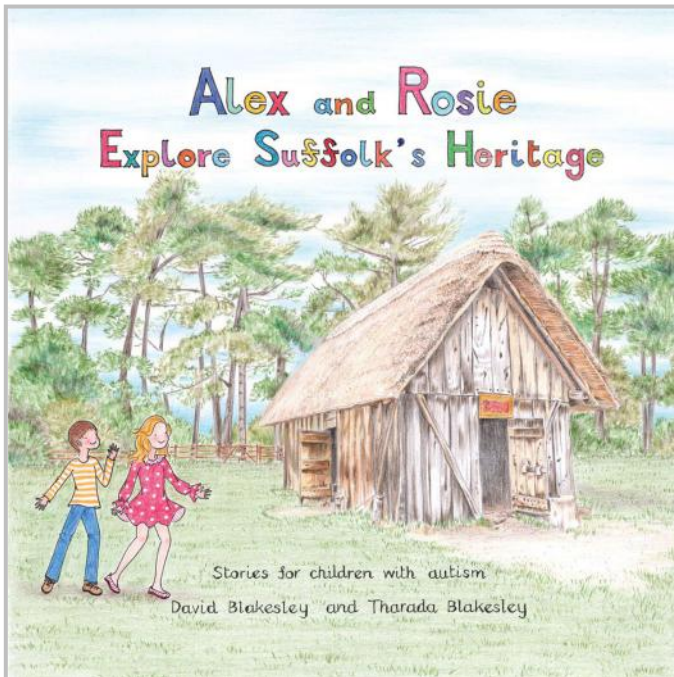
### **Story books for children in Suffolk and Essex:**

The Nineveh Charitable Trust funding allocated to the production of two illustrated story books for children with autism in Suffolk and Essex was supplemented by additional funding for the Suffolk project from the Suffolk Community Foundation (Suffolk Giving Fund and Private Fund – JA). For the Essex story book, we raised additional funding from the Alan and Fay Cherry Fund and the RSM Community Fund (administered by Essex Community Foundation); the Eastern Counties Educational Trust Limited; and Fowler Smith and Jones Trust. The initial award of funding by the Nineveh Charitable Trust was extremely important to our subsequent fund-raising success with both projects.

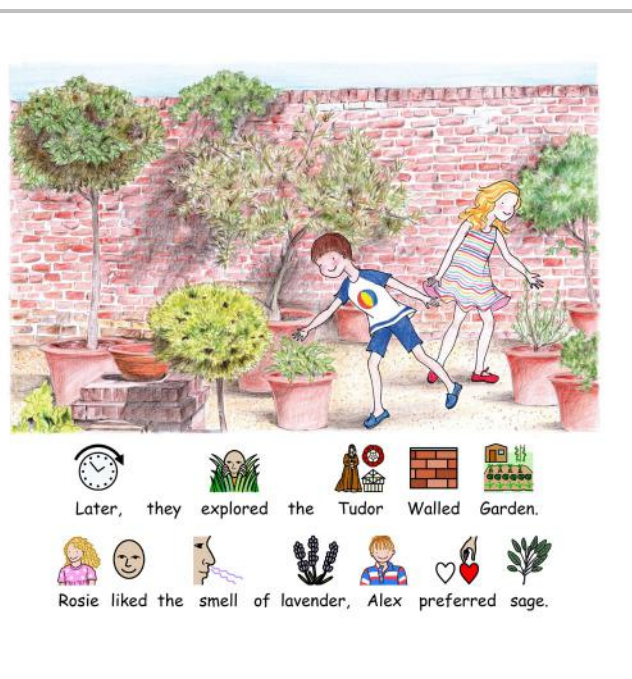
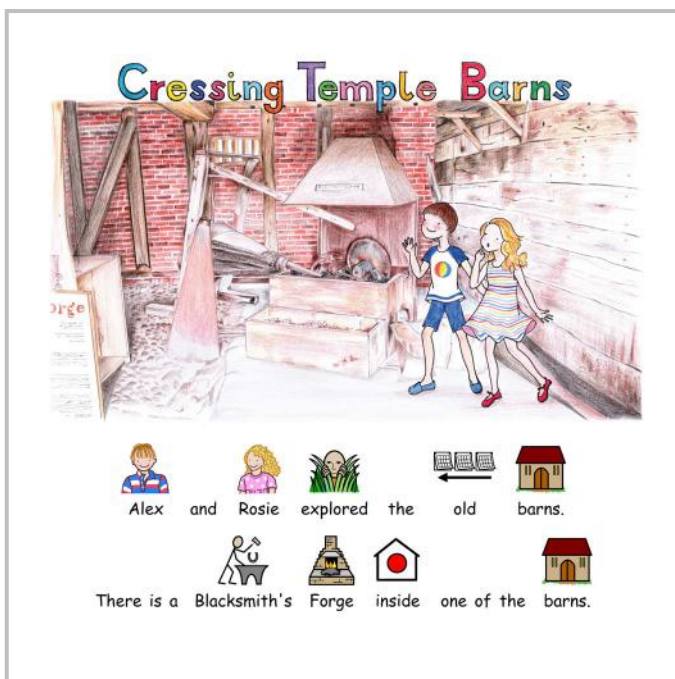
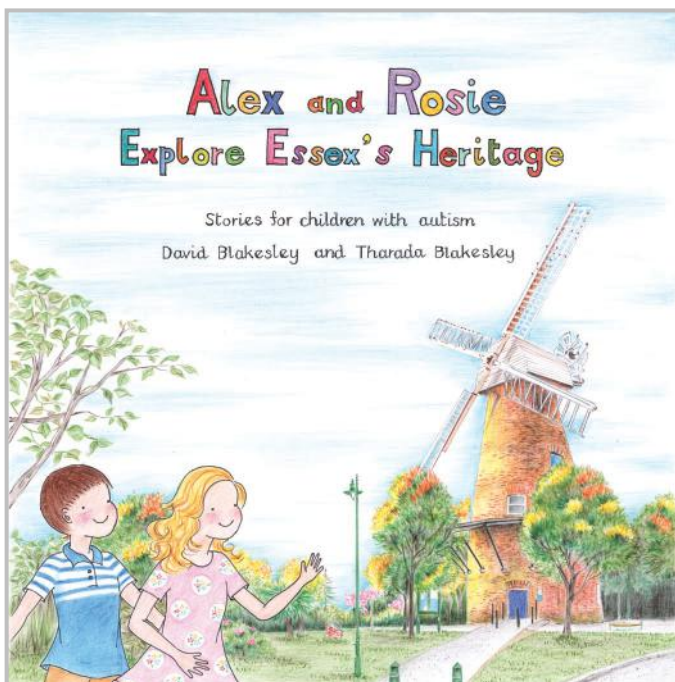
As mentioned earlier, the main beneficiaries of our story books are children with autism of early years, pre- and primary school age. Our motivation for producing the story books was to help parents, carers and teachers to overcome some of the barriers to engaging children with autism with rural heritage and the countryside and to increase opportunities for many autistic children to engage with these places in Suffolk and Essex. Our stories help adults to prepare children with autism for a visit to a particular place; they help children to learn about what they might see and activities they might undertake. Parents and

teachers are able to use the symbolised text and illustrations to explore topics and ideas with their children; for example, the fictional characters in our Suffolk story book explore an Anglo-Saxon village at Stow; learn about rural life in the past at the Museum of East Anglian Life; and the preservation of rare breeds at the Suffolk Punch Trust. In Essex for example, the children smell the scent of herbs in a Tudor walled garden at Cressing Temple Barns; explore an old windmill at Rayleigh; and visit several enormous Tudor barns used to store and thresh sheaves of wheat. The symbols and illustrations reinforce ideas and encourage autistic children to communicate more.

One thousand copies of 'Alex and Rosie Explore Suffolk's Heritage' are being distributed (free of charge) by Autism and Nature, with the support of the Activities Unlimited; and 2,000 copies of 'Alex and Rosie Explore Essex's Heritage' will be distributed (free of charge) with the support of the Essex County Council Short Breaks for Disabled Children and Young People (who are also co-funding the print run).



Excerpts from our illustrated story book for children in Suffolk



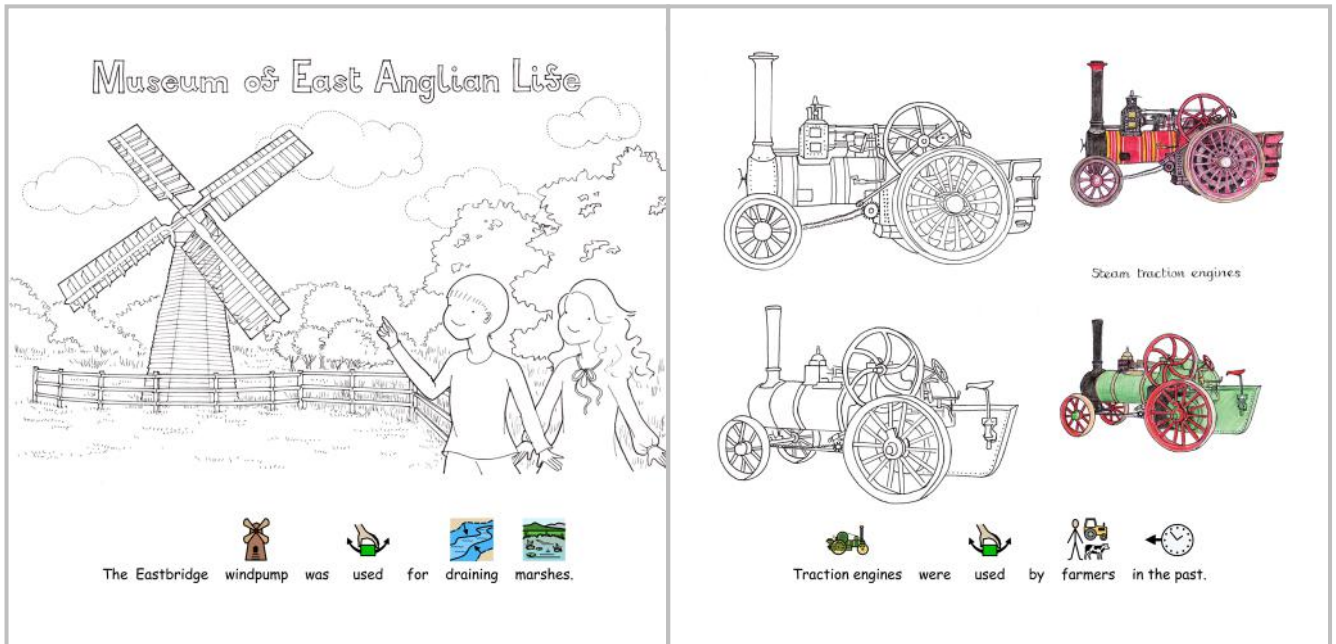
Excerpts from our illustrated story book for children in Essex

### Colouring book for children in Suffolk

The Nineveh Charitable Trust funding allocated to the production of 'Alex and Rosie's Suffolk Heritage Colouring Book' for children with autism in Suffolk was supplemented by additional funding from the Suffolk Community Foundation (Bunbury Family Fund and Private Fund – JA) and Suffolk County Council Inclusion Services. The initial award of funding by the Nineveh Charitable Trust was extremely important to our subsequent fund-raising success.

As mentioned earlier, the main beneficiaries of our books are children with autism of early years, pre- and primary school age. Our motivation for producing colouring books is to help parents, carers and teachers to overcome some of the barriers to engaging autistic children with the countryside and to increase opportunities for many autistic children to engage with natural places in the countryside.

Art therapy can improve communication with children who are visually oriented, and who find the use of words or language difficult. Art has also been reported to be calming and to aid self-expression, to help the development of a child’s motor skills and help children to relate to their environment. From the colouring activities in our books, children will learn about activities they might undertake and wildlife they might experience in the countryside. In Suffolk for example, Alex and Rosie visit a windpump and see steam traction engines at the Museum of East Anglian Life; visit a working Tide Mill at Woodbridge; and visit the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway. The colouring book also helps children and their carers to prepare for visits to the places featured, as autistic children often lack imagination, and respond well to visual images. One thousand five hundred copies will be distributed (free of charge) by Autism and Nature, with the support of the Activities Unlimited, in spring 2022.



*Excerpts from Alex and Rosie’s Suffolk Heritage Colouring Book’*

**Nineveh Charitable Trust support**

We are extremely grateful to the Nineveh Charitable Trust for their generous support of our work. The flexibility afforded to us by the Trust and the funding provided by the Trust has been more important than ever to the continued success of our organisation during times that have been difficult and challenging, and remain so. It has enabled us to make the best use of the funding to undertake five major projects. We believe that the demonstrated commitment of Nineveh Charitable Trust funding to each project, at the outset, helped us to raise further funding to support each of these projects.