

# AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS** **2021**



# Best Corporate Communication

## Best Campaign in Support of Organisational Values



Adam Harris, CEO of AslAm.

### Campaign

Building the 'Bridge Back to School' for the Autism community with SuperValu and AslAm

### Description of Campaign

2020 brought many challenges for every child in the country, but for families in the autism community, the lack of structure and routine were particularly difficult. Building on their partnership with the AslAm, Fleishman Hillard worked with our client SuperValu to bring a valuable educational resource to the community.



FLEISHMANHILLARD

### Public Relations Consultant

FleishmanHillard

**SuperValu**

### Client

SuperValu

### Background to the Campaign

One in 65 people in Ireland is on the autism spectrum and 1.5% of the school going population in Ireland had a diagnosis of autism. For the last five years SuperValu has partnered with AslAm, Ireland's national autism charity to support the community and become the country's most inclusive supermarket. As SuperValu's partner agency we have been proud to work on campaigns that make a tangible difference in the lives of families that need a welcoming, safe and understanding place to shop.

SuperValu's partnership with AslAm began in 2015 when Scally's SuperValu in Clonakilty became the first food retailer in Ireland to implement changes in-store that would ensure members of the autism community could enjoy a better shopping experience. That was just a first step in what was to become an incredible initiative in the town and in 2018 Clonakilty achieved a world first and became an accredited Autism Friendly Community. The initiative was then rolled out into other communities around Ireland and 8 towns are now on the journey to becoming Autism Friendly.

But, as we all know, things were very different in 2020. Shopping became a swift, solo endeavour and new obstacles



presented themselves almost daily. To build on their ongoing relationship, SuperValu and AslAm worked with Mary Immaculate College to develop an educational resource that was an inclusive, cross sectoral, evidence-based tool to support children with autism while their school options were limited and to prepare them to return to school after the summer break.

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## Statement of Objectives

1. To promote the distribution of the educational resource 'Bridge Back to School' in SuperValu stores and online.
2. To demonstrate SuperValu's commitment to raising understanding and awareness of autism among its customers and staff.
3. To underline SuperValu's commitment to making communities around Ireland more inclusive.
4. To ensure that families within the autism community know that they are supported through the pandemic by SuperValu.
5. To highlight that everything that SuperValu does is with the local community in mind and to reinforce the locally owned, family values of each and every store.

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## Programme Planning and Strategy

Working with SuperValu and AslAm is a privilege. It is a rare opportunity to see how this initiative, that started in West Cork with one parent approaching her local supermarket manager, could grow into a national programme with real results that positively impact the lives of many Irish families. This year our campaign was always going to be different. While 2020 posed huge challenges for every household in the country, for those homes that are part of the autism community the closure of schools and supports often meant that children and their parents felt isolated.

SuperValu's commitment to local communities and their five-year long involvement in the autism community meant that they were well placed to offer support. During the COVID-19 pandemic they worked together with AslAm to find new ways to support the autism community – which included generating COVID-19 specific resources. AslAm worked in collaboration with Professor Emer Ring of Mary Immaculate College who has extensive experience in education, including working with the Department of Education and Skills, to develop the Bridge Back to School learning resource. Initially planned to help those with high support needs prepare during the summer months to return to school in September, 20,000 copies of the booklet were made available in SuperValu stores nationwide in July. It was also offered as a downloadable toolkit through the SuperValu website.

It was clear from outset that this was going to be a really helpful tool for families in the autism community. Having previously worked with SuperValu and AslAm on their partnership we understood the benefit of using traditional launch methods together with a specifically targeted approach. There is a trust that has been built over the years in this collaboration and that sensitivity and understanding were key in our approach. We worked with influencers who are already seeded in the autism community and are parents or siblings of autistic children that have a very engaged audience around autism. Our panel of influencers showcased the elements of the resource and how they could help support families during this challenging time and highlighted that they could be picked up in local SuperValu's around Ireland. Our influencer panel included **Special Ed Teacher Ireland, Autism and Me, Ellen O'Keeffe and Out in the Sticks with Six.**

The key to this campaign is the expertise that Professor Ring and AslAm bring and our communications around it had to 100% match that integrity.

As well as our targeted influencer work, we launched with a virtual media briefing that heavily focused on education and parenting media. This allowed us to brief this key media on the challenges the autism community were currently dealing with and how this resource could support them. In keeping with the SuperValu local community message we had both a national launch press release, and a regionalised press release for every county in Ireland, these were supported with a photocall outside Moriarty's SuperValu with Adam Harris and SuperValu retailer James Moriarty. Interviews with Adam Harris, CEO of AslAm and one of our influencers were secured on national and regional broadcast media.

Following the media launch a webinar for parents in the autism community was held to launch the resource and give a full run-down of what was included and how it could be used in day-to-day life to support families and prepare

children to return to education. SuperValu owned social media channels promoted the launch webinar and the resource itself with four posts across the launch period.

The success of the project in July was such that when schools closed again after Christmas plans were put in place to relaunch to coincide with children with special educational needs return to school, first part time and then full time. From the 19th of February 2021 an additional 10,000 copies of the resource were made available from SuperValu stores nationwide. A copy of the resource was also sent to every primary school in the country. This new activity had a renewed PR campaign to run alongside it which again included both national and regional press releases, influencer collaborations, media interviews with the team behind the booklet through education press and social media posts on the SuperValu channels.

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## Measurement

The launch was a huge success. All 20,000 copies of the resource were picked up within the first five days which resulted in an additional print run of 2,500 copies.

The reaction within the autism community was hugely positive with the response to influencers posts and support on social media overwhelmingly positive as well as numerous emails to AslAm asking for additional copies and for the resource to be included on Irish support services sites. The reach of the campaign was over three million which was a 60% increase on the SuperValu/Aslam 2019 campaign.

The success of the campaign meant that the positive impact of the project was felt beyond Ireland. The International Step by Step organization, based in the Netherlands, is an early child network and learning community that promotes quality, equitable and integrated services for children, families and practitioners. They shared the resource on their social channels.

The resource has also now been translated into several European languages and been used internationally through partner organisations.

Maintaining the trust of the autism community is the most important thing to us in this work. Every piece of coverage must reflect that and every influencer we work with must be credible within the community. Trust is something you work hard to achieve and we're proud to have the support and belief of the autism community in this ongoing partnership.

87 pieces of coverage were secured across online, print and broadcast, with a combined reach or opportunity to see of 3,768,741. Highlights in top tier publications include **Ireland AM**, **Irish Times**, **Irish Independent**, **Irish Times & Irish Examiner**. Coverage had a 100% positive sentiment and delivered the key campaign messages. Directly after the Ireland AM interview retailers received queries from parents looking to pick up a resource in their local SuperValu store.

SuperValu's social media posts stats had a combined reach of 480,000.

The resource has now been translated into several European languages, used in several other countries through educational partner organisations & the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) shared the resource on their channels.

PARAGON



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