**Shirelle Stewart, Director, National Autistic Society, Northern Ireland**

**Shirelle Stewart** has worked in the field of External Affairs for over twenty years previously holding posts with War on Want Northern Ireland and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Shirelle is currently the Director of the National Autistic Society Northern Ireland (NASNI). She has worked at the NASNI for nearly eight years assuming the role of Director in the last year and half. Shirelle is responsible for the strategic direction and development of the NAS in Northern Ireland. Since joining the NAS Shirelle has written three reports and ran three campaigns highlighting issues affecting children and adults with autism in Northern Ireland. The first report entitled, “I exist” examined the issues affecting adults with autism in Northern Ireland, this was followed by “You Need to Know” which highlighted the mental health issues and services for children with autism. The third report and campaign was entitled “A \* for Autism: Make every school a good school” which was in response to proposed reforms of SEN legislation in Northern Ireland. Shirelle was a member of RASDN (Regional Autistic Spectrum Disorder Network) the Autism Strategy Project Board and currently sits on a number of Health Trust Autism Forums. Shirelle is the mother of two boys, the youngest of whom has autism and a severe learning disability requiring high levels of support. On a voluntary basis Shirelle set up the National Autistic Society Newtownards branch, which is a parent support branch running activities for children and young people with autism. Since moving back to Belfast Shirelle runs the National Autistic Society Juniors club which is a youth club for young people with autism, severe learning disability and behaviour that can challenge. All the young people who attend require 1-1 support and are some of the most isolated in society. This club gives them the chance to develop friendships and have fun in a safe and supportive environment.