



HIT entertainment



For Immediate Release

THOMAS & FRIENDS™ RAISES ONE MILLION POUNDS FOR THE NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY

26 June 2009, London - The National Autistic Society (NAS) revealed today the success behind one of the charity's most successful corporate partnerships. HIT Entertainment, producers and rights owners for the world's number one preschool property Thomas & Friends™ has helped raise over one million pounds for the charity since 2001.

Thomas & Friends has long held a special meaning for children with autism and their families. Research conducted by the NAS and HIT in 2007 found that 98.8% of parents of children with autism surveyed, reported that their children either liked Thomas & Friends or liked it very much. Whilst over 60% reported that Thomas was the first fictional character their children liked or associated with.

Victoria Bushell, Brand Manager Thomas & Friends HIT Entertainment, said: "Thomas & Friends holds a very special place in the hearts of young children and their families. We are delighted to be working with the NAS who continue amazing work in reaching out and supporting families of children with autism."

HIT Entertainment first collaborated with the NAS in 2001 after the company generously granted the image rights of Thomas & Friends to the charity. Since then the NAS has worked closely with HIT Entertainment on a number of different fundraising initiatives, including branded merchandise, cause-related marketing activities and community fundraising events.

On 5-8 June the NAS launched the first ever national 'Train Walk' – a series of Thomas & Friends themed sponsored walks which took place across the country, for supporters, parents, children and families, helping to raise funds and awareness for children with autism. It is estimated that over 4,500 people will have taken part in over 150 walks raising thousands more for the NAS.

AS HIT and NAS achieve the one million pound mark, the NAS has also announced a further three-year renewal of the partnership.

NAS Chief Executive, Mark Lever said: "The National Autistic Society's association with HIT Entertainment and the Thomas & Friends brand is a very special one and it remains one of our most successful partnerships. We are delighted that the support of Thomas & Friends continues to help us make a difference to the over half a million people affected by autism in the UK today."

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- For further information on autism and the NAS please call Suzi Browne in the NAS Press Office on 0207 903 3539 or email suzi.browne@nas.org.uk
- For further information on Thomas & Friends, please contact Nicole Price at HIT Entertainment on 020 7554 3613 or email nprice@hitentertainment.com

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

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 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 almost 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

About HIT Entertainment

HIT Entertainment, owned by private equity investment group Apax Partners, 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 and Japan. HIT also acts as a worldwide representative for The Jim Henson Company's library of classic family brands and 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 SproutSM, and international preschool channel JimJam, (outside of the US, UK and China). For more information, visit www.hitentertainment.com.