



PRESS RELEASE

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AUTISM-FRIENDLY SHOPPING LAUNCHED AT SHOPPING CITY RUNCORN

Shopping City Runcorn has become one of the first shopping centres in the country to make life easier for autistic children and adults by introducing a special weekly 'Autism Shopping Hour'.

The centre has fitted out a special 'Chill Room' which provides a calm escape, with dim lights, bubble machines and bean bags, where parents or carers can take children and adults who are experiencing difficulties.

All the centre's customer service and security staff have been through a special autism training programme and every Wednesday there will now be a dedicated shopping hour from 4pm-5pm, when mall lights will be dimmed, music switched off and hand driers shut down.

All the centre's 60 stores are being encouraged to take part by giving shoppers a calm experience, whether they're enjoying a cup of coffee, buying goods or having a haircut.

Karl Clawley, Centre Manager of Shopping City Runcorn explained:

"The act of shopping often means enduring a sensory overload, with loud music, bright lights and other people going about their business without much thought for those around them. This noisy environment can affect the many thousands of people who suffer from various forms of autism.

"We want to help everyone enjoy their visit here so we've worked hard behind the scenes for several months to train our staff, as well as introducing our Autism Chill Room.

"Feedback has been incredible. We hope our gesture is embraced with understanding by everyone and people, who care for autism sufferers, can now shop in a more relaxed calming environment every Wednesday.

"We are particularly grateful to Halton Autism Foundation for their help, advice and support."

The initiative has provoked a massive Facebook murmuration of approval on the centre's social media pages, with more than 45,000 views, nearly 600 shares and hundreds of positive comments.

One shopper posted on the Shopping City Facebook page: "I love this idea. A lot of people don't realise how much noise, lights and busy places can really unsettle a child with SEN needs."

"Brilliant", "really excellent", "great idea", "cool" were among a host of positive Facebook remarks.

The Autism Chill Room is available every day until 6pm and may be accessed with a standard radar key, available from shopping centre staff.

For more information, check out the Shopping City Runcorn website:
www.shopping-city.co.uk.

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