

A “needs led” approach to supporting children, young people with social and communication challenges

“Thinking big, starting small, testing smartly!”

“Needs Led” Projects Newsletter 1



The Background

Historically the autism diagnosis pathway has been a challenge with demand continually rising and overwhelming commissioned capacity. Across BNSSG, we have over 2000 young people waiting for an assessment appointment and this number has risen from 750 in April 2020.

Young people regularly wait many months for an assessment which leads to enormous frustration for families, many of whom see diagnosis as an essential requirement to get their child’s needs met. A number of autism diagnosis waiting list initiatives have been tried and whilst successful in the short term none brought real long term sustainable change. A systemic change is required if we are to really address this challenging issue including understanding the perceived benefits of diagnosis and compare with the actual tangible benefits whilst at the same time shifting some of the significant resource spent on diagnosis pathway across to meeting needs.

There are a number of projects happening supporting this work:

1. The CCG is funding a £0.5m Waiting List Initiative; essential if system change is to be successful.
2. A keyworker team is being developed for young people with a diagnosis of LD and/or autism to support at crisis points.
3. A user experience project has developed a number of digital solutions to support families.
4. Local parent carer organisations have been commissioned to provide peer to peer support and workshops for families waiting on the assessment pathway.

The challenge for us is to address the current backlog whilst at the same time carrying out systemic change. We have recently seen the publication of a new National Autism Strategy with related funding opportunities and this initiative is as a result of that. Following two introductory stakeholder workshops, 5 priority areas were identified: Communication, Recommended Resources, Community, Professional Support & Direct Help and Training.

Applications for a grant, which addressed one or more of these priority areas, were invited to test a new or expanded idea or concept over a 12-month period to provide early help and support and then assessed by an independent local panel including a young person and parent carer representatives. The successful projects will need to work closely with the current support and services locally and deliver a service for children and young people aimed at early support and intervention for those with social & communication needs.

Breaking News!

Eleven exciting new or expanded projects have been successful in being selected to test over the next 15 months.....and here they are!

The Projects

Bristol Autism Support: Provision of Targeted Six-Week Autism Support Blocks

Project description:

This project involves the delivery and facilitation of 18 six-week training and support courses. These courses will address specific areas of autism, e.g., supporting non-speaking children, sensory differences managing distress behaviours, support for parents awaiting assessment and those who have recently received a diagnosis of autism for their child. Each session of the six-week course lasts 90 minutes and includes a presentation and time for discussion. Connection between participants outside of the sessions is encouraged in order to build friendship and community bonds. In order to reach the greatest number of people, we will deliver the majority of these sessions online. We expect to deliver six of the support/training blocks in person, Covid allowing. We will deliver the in-person sessions in a range of accessible venues in the BNSSG area.

Target Group:

Parents/carers awaiting autism assessment for their child (including through the Autism Hub), parents/carers who have recently had a diagnosis, parent/carers who have children with a specific issue or who are a specific age.

Expected Outcomes:

Our training is tailored to provide specific tools, strategies and ideas that parents/carers can use straight away to support their children's social and communication needs. We have delivered highly specialised autism-specific training to parents/carers for the past five years.

Our training helps parents/carers to:

- Understand their child's sensory differences.
- Understand their child's need for adapted communication at home and school.
- Manage their own emotions in order to be more calm, grounded and present for their child.
- Create visual communication supports for their children to help manage transitions, improve executive functioning.
- Support siblings around the autistic child.
- Communicate effectively with education and health professionals in order to gain further support for their child.
- Communicate with friends and family about their child's needs and differences.
- Teach their child to self-advocate.
- Reduce anxiety for their child.
- Manage distress behaviours.

Our extensive experience of supporting parents and carers of autistic children tells us that raising an autistic child relies heavily on the parent/carer learning a vast amount of information about every aspect the condition in order to support their child.

Information in these sessions is provided not only directly through our training presentations but also peer-to-peer among the participants in each group.

Our training has a ripple effect: what a parent/carer learns through our training is taken home and shared with other family members, and they also use that advice to help their child. Therefore, although we are directly supporting one person, the impact may be felt by several.

We know from our feedback surveys that participants find our training invaluable.

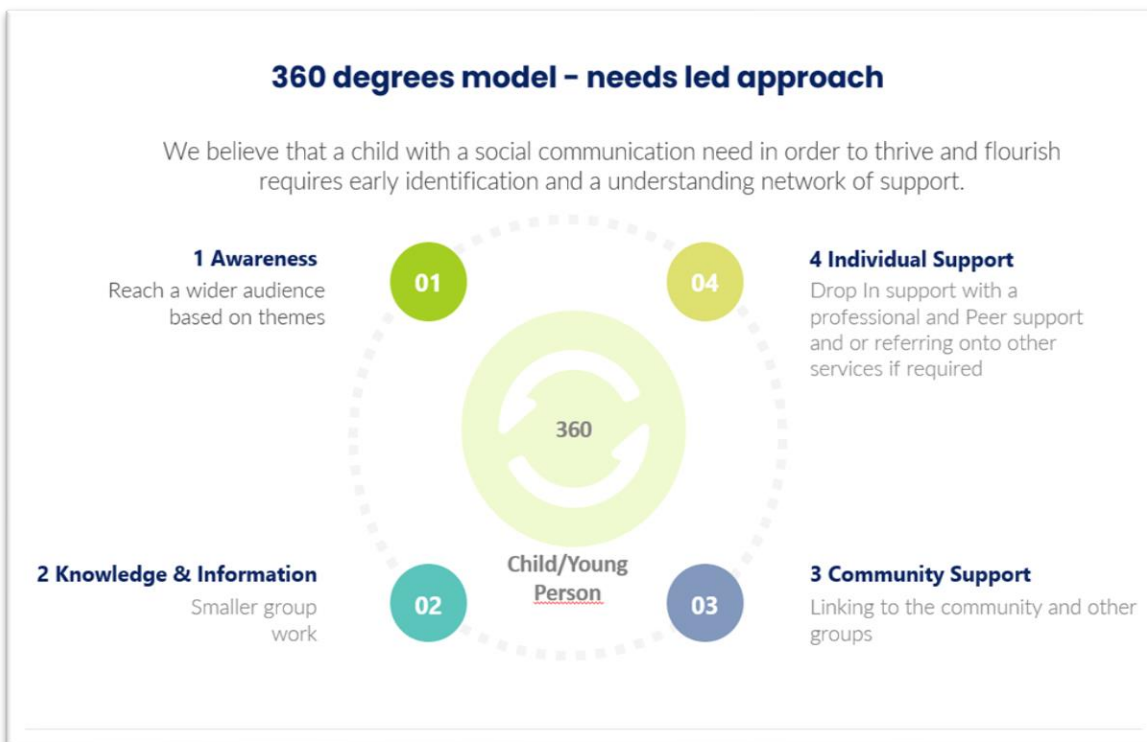
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South Glos Parent Carers: The 360 degrees project – connecting home and education to understand the whole child

Project description:

What is important to families and those who work with children is that a child’s need is identified and understood as early as possible and that the necessary support around the child is addressed for the child to experience inclusion and openness to learning. We need to remove the barriers that can often block a child’s progress.



- 1) **Awareness:** by running information sessions based on certain needs/themes for the wider community, this will help us reach a wider audience (This can be as wide as possible and across the whole of the CCG if we work online). Due to covid some of this will be best online. Face-to-face; this will be tested within the clusters. Example of themes, sensory differences, toileting needs these suggestions will be based on what the families tell us they need. This will be enough for some families.
- 2) **Knowledge and Information:** the Peer Supporter can look to organise/run some more targeted group work based on discussions with the school cluster lead/SENCO. This will be

based on the themes that families within that cluster have identified as needing more information. We want to co-produce this with those families involved. This could be support sessions within schools, online discussions or group sessions.

We aim to run some informal groups, meet-ups within school, within the community and online. We could look to hold some of the workshops we are currently running for the ASC assessment waiting list.

- 3) **Community Support:** we can sign post families to the amazing groups that already exist, also to the community support work that South Glos Parent Carers already offer. This makes the families aware of what is out there that they can access in the community and can link to throughout the different stages of their journey. Working this way will also enable our support team to collect the views of families and feed this into our other work that the forum does around engagement/participation work.
- 4) We will find some families may require more **individual support work**. We will look to co-ordinate some drop-in sessions with professionals from Integra that would benefit the families and the school setting. Our peer support worker may also be able to help with some peer-to-peer support connected to SGPC or can link with the Early help team or SEND and You. Our Peer Supporters are not there to replace any statutory roles and responsibilities but to work with them.

Target group:

The support network around a child - Parent Carers, Education Staff and any other community support staff that wish to learn more about a child they are supporting.

Parent Carers may already know their child is Autistic, or they may suspect they are autistic, or they may not even be aware as there are many girls and boys who mask and slip through the net. We want to target a wide audience to see what data we collect about the families we support.

Expected Outcomes:

- 1) Earlier identification leading to recognising the needs as opposed to treating the behaviour separately at home and at school.
- 2) Earlier identification of those who tend to mask, the joined-up approach will help better identify this and they would then have needs met sooner.
- 3) More of a support network because families know what is available to them.
- 4) Help is accessed at the earlier stage hope to reduce the high level of crisis situations later on in their journey.
- 5) Greater understanding of what social communication is and any emerging needs related to this.
- 6) Able to target those who ending up needing help sooner to relevant services especially if families are experiencing crisis situations.
- 7) Linking with other services so more joined up.
- 8) By working with both the school and the family communication will be improved, both will be on the same team.
- 9) To coordinate and buy in speakers on various themes from various groups.
- 10) Improved professional development for schools.

11) Developing a more trusting and working relationship and providing a greater understanding between home and school.

We need to remove the phrases "you will only get help if you have an EHCP or if you have a diagnosis" and show there are other alternatives.

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Bridging The Gap Together!: Minecraft, Craft & Chat

Project description:

Craft

A relaxed and friendly space for parents to talk with other parents who have children on the spectrum without pressure, where they can bring their children/young people to try new crafts, a place to reduce family stress and possibly introduce new crafts they can try together as a family to help with social skills.

"We had a brilliant time, thank you so much for all your hard work today"

Chat

A safe place they can ask for confidential help and advice. We can offer advice on a range of topics gained from professional education and lived experience, where we do not have the knowledge, we can offer suggestions to signpost for help.

Minecraft

Our Minecraft gaming group offers young people 16 plus with autism and learning disabilities the opportunity to learn and develop their social skills. The sessions are moderated by our team of young people with autism who are keen to work together to help their peers to develop personal friendships that can be transferred to online Minecraft sessions and outside into the real world.

Photography Group

These sessions will initially be held across North Somerset, outdoors, to encourage young people with autism and learning disabilities to get out in the fresh air to have a better awareness of the world around them, nature and mindfulness. It will teach them to look for the unexpected and see things from a different angle and encourage them to build friendships by sharing their photographs with others.

Our long-term aim is to connect with the Bristol and the South Gloucestershire Parent Carers to help improve self-esteem and self-worth of young people with Autism and learning disabilities in their areas.

Target Group:

Young people 13 - 25 and their parents, carers and young people across the BNSSG area. Our aim to provide a holistic approach to wellbeing for the whole family

Expected Outcomes:

Minecraft

Our Minecraft gaming group offers young people 16 plus with autism and learning disabilities the opportunity to learn and develop their social skills, through working together and talking while they were playing the game. The sessions are moderated by our team of young people with autism who are keen to work together to help their peers to develop personal friendships that can be transferred to online Minecraft sessions outside BTGT!

Support chat and craft for parent carers

A relaxed and friendly space for parents/carers and all other family members to spend quality time together, giving them the opportunity to relax and unwind or talk with other parents without pressure, whilst being able to pursue a new or develop an existing hobby. We also offer a safe space for parents/carers to have one to one confidential support and advice should they need it. These sessions have already had a positive impact on family life.

Photography group

These sessions will be held outdoors to encourage young people with autism and learning disabilities to have a better awareness of nature and mindfulness, on weekday evenings for two hours across North Somerset and surrounding areas monthly and if there is demand we could add more dates as required. Teaching them to look for the unexpected and see things from a different angle and encouraging them to build friendships by sharing their photographs with others. Once all the sessions are completed, they will be given an opportunity to have one their photographs included in a BTGT! calendar.

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Neuroteachers Ltd: The Autism and Social Communication Knowledge (ASK) Project

Project description:

The ASK project was designed following consultation with a group of autistic young adults. It will involve schools, nurseries and those working in other early years settings who will be able to choose 8 hours of support from the following menu;

- Training in Making Sense of Autism (2 hours, beginners level), Good Autism Practice (6 hours, intermediate level), Extending Good Autism Practice (6 hours- higher level), Leading Good Autism Practice (3 hours - for managers).
- Coaching and mentoring in Progression Framework (an assessment tool for learners), Competency framework (to help individuals reach standards of autism support) Standards for settings (to help create autism friendly environments).

For further information click the link

<https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/early-years-professional-development-programme>

Target Group:	
<p>The project will cover North Somerset. The delegates will be early years (EY) practitioners including early years teachers and teaching assistants, nursery nurses, keyworkers and child minders. We will also aim to attract health care professionals such as health visitors and paediatric nurses. Parents/ carers of children with a diagnosis of autism or who are on the diagnostic pathway, or who have identified traits of social communication difference will be encouraged to attend with practitioners to ensure co-production and parity of support across all settings.</p>	
Expected Outcomes:	
<p>By the end of this project, we will have given autistic children and their families improved self-worth and confidence for the future. Their children will be prepared for the next step in their education. The early years practitioners involved will have a better knowledge and acceptance of autism and related social communication needs. All AET training is approved by the National Autistic Society, DFE and OFSTED. These training materials have been recently updated. Delegates will receive a pack of resources and activities enabling them to support their learner's social communication, sensory integration and understanding of the world. The aim is to equip delegates with the competence to encourage culture change within their workplaces and to create an environment of autism acceptance where social communication needs are nurtured. The AET's track record is proof that this has been possible in other settings and across the whole county. Catrina Lowri, the lead trainer, has much direct experience of coaching and mentoring sessions to help EY staff to provide approaches to support children with social communication needs. Indeed, she has experience of working with autistic young people who have gone on to work in EY settings successfully. By employing local autistic young people, from North Somerset, we will be sharing lived experience and insight into the importance of creating autism friendly environments.</p> <p>Finally, we will offer free spaces to parents and carers on all training courses and coaching sessions. This will help to provide co-production between families and settings which is proven to improve outcomes for learners with social communication needs.</p>	
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Can't Sit Still: The Being Me Club	
Project description:	
<p>The Being Me Club is a fun and empowering creative drama club for girls from 11-14 years of age, with low confidence caused by social and communication challenges. Our activity will be divided into 4 phases:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Co-creation of the club through consultation and planning with target participants, their families and teachers. 	

- 2) Recruitment of participants, using one-to-one meetings with possible participants (either face to face or on zoom), social stories and access videos, helping participants and families feel comfortable to attend the clubs.
- 3) Delivery of the Being Me Club pilot - 2 groups that last for 10 weeks each.
- 4) Impact assessment, in collaboration with participants, facilitators, volunteers, families and teachers.

Target Group:

This club is for cis-female young people from 11-14 years of age, in mainstream education, with low confidence caused by social and communication challenges, who may or may not have a diagnosis of ASD.

Expected Outcomes:

Through creative approaches to drama, where the emphasis is placed as much on process as the end product, participants will develop confidence, physical and verbal communication skills and individual self-expression. A 2015 research paper exploring the use of theatre to develop social and communication behaviours for students with ASD summarises that students involved in a 10-week drama programme "had significant and positive changes in the development of social and language skills. Most particularly, these students had significant improvement in Social Responsiveness, acknowledgement of the Perspective of Others, and Participation and Cooperation." ([Reading et al, 2015](#)).

Our co-creative approach gives agency to participants, raising self-esteem, encouraging good communication and creating social cohesion. The facilitators will create and hold a space where the participants feel able to be their authentic selves. Spending time with peers who also experience social and communication challenges that lead to low confidence will allow the participants to find common ground and normalise behaviours that they may believe to be unacceptable in mainstream society. It will give them a space to relax and unwind, and a peer support group of friends beyond the life of the creative club.

The groups are for girls and led by female facilitators. This creates a safe space to develop communication skills around puberty, body image and other issues that specifically affect 11-14 year old girls. This will also support the social cohesion of the group.

In addition to the benefits for young people, the clubs will also create a network and common ground for the families supporting the participants.

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North Somerset Parent Carers Working Together CIC: Peer Support

Project description:

Peer support delivering: (in term time)

- a) Locality / community-based hub - peer support drop-in sessions (1-2 per week) creating opportunities for parent carers to meet others and help ensure a supportive community along with good signposting to further support where needed. Also facilitating opportunities for drop-in sessions with professionals.
- b) In School Parent Carer peer support session (2+ per week) Developing and encouraging SEND parent carer school communities to regularly meet whilst supporting parent carers and school staff to work together – as this model develops it will be able to facilitate training sessions in school communities (Parent Carers & Staff) on key areas that they would appreciate further support with.

Target Group:

Parent Carers and those working with children / young people with additional needs and / or disabilities. (Especially those with Social and Communication support needs)

Families with neurodiverse children are the key target group for this funding however we will have a needs led approach to ensure we are fully inclusive.

(We must ensure we do not set up services with access criteria that prevents access for those in need).

Expected Outcomes:

Parent Carers are the primary support for their child / young person. If we help parent carers have the confidence and skills to support their child more effectively whilst also having a clear knowledge of where to turn if further support is needed, we will make a significant difference to the lives of our Children/young people with additional needs and disabilities during the most important development stages of their lives. Supporting both early identification and support (intervention) all contributing to better outcomes and preparation for adulthood.

Connecting stakeholders will contribute to this and help ensure consistent messaging and approach for families, schools and other organisations providing support. This will all contribute towards improved experiences and outcomes for families.

Peer support work will significantly contribute to creating a cohesive approach for parent carers and schools with clear signposting and awareness of support available whilst also reducing the sense of isolation often experienced by parent carers.

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North Somerset Parent Carers Working Together CIC: Training Workshops

Project description:

Training / workshops on topics such as:
 Demand Avoidance, Dyspraxia, introduction to NVR, Suicide Prevention, Self-Harm awareness, Eating Disorders, Complex Medical Conditions and serious Illness, Sleep Issues/seminar practical strategies, supporting siblings of children with neurodiversity, happier healthier stress free mealtimes, ERIC – Bladder & Bowel advice, parenting tips for children with ADHD, Makaton for early years/children & young people, Autism in Girls, Young people supporting their self-esteem/build healthy relationships, managing your neurodiverse child's difficult behaviour, Dyslexia/Dyscalculia workshop etc.

Target Group:

Parent Carers and those working with children / young people with additional needs and / or disabilities (Especially those with Social and Communication support needs).

Families with neurodiverse children are the key target group for this funding however we will have a needs led approach to ensure we are fully inclusive.

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South Gloucestershire Council: Autism Education Trust (AET) Training Hub

Project description:

To provide free, accredited, Ofsted & DfE approved, online introductory autism training for all mainstream primary, secondary schools and post 16 provisions in South Gloucestershire for one year.

The course that will be provided is the Autism Education Trust (AET) introductory course, 'Making Sense of Autism'. It is part of the AET professional development programme for educational

professionals working in schools and gives a clear and thorough overview of autism and the best ways in which to support autistic pupils at school and also at home.

The AET is a not-for-profit organisation supported by the DfE. Their 360-degree support programme leads the way in autism education and offers education professionals training, practical tools and a wealth of free resources to better support autistic pupils.

To promote a whole-school approach, schools will be encouraged to include:

- Headteacher, Deputy Head and senior leadership team
- Local governing board (governors)
- Teachers including NQTs and ECTs, student teachers
- Teaching assistants – both general learning assistants and SENTAs
- Lunchtime staff
- Volunteers
- Administration staff, caretaker

‘Making Sense of Autism’ is a brand-new course (Oct 2021) with the most up to date materials and resources and the AET also have a new website. The course is fully accredited, approved by Ofsted and the DfE, and delegates receive a certificate of completion.

Target Group:

Mainstream educational professionals at Primary, Secondary and Post 16 phases.

Expected Outcomes:

It is vital that schools receive high quality training about autism as the number of autistic children and young people and those with social communication differences is rising exponentially.

Teachers do not necessarily receive specific training regarding autism and for less experienced teachers it is important that they are equipped to support all the children in their class, whatever their special educational need.

The training reinforces the need to make support for autistic pupils a whole school issue, developing a shared awareness and understanding and developing provision at school which is embedded in a school’s inclusive ethos.

As a result of the training, staff will have increased confidence and understanding and will be able to use effective strategies in their practice.

Many children will benefit from the training as good autism practice is generally good educational practice.

The training consists of:

- Virtual training modules including ‘Making Sense of Autism’.
- A good practice standards framework against which leaders can audit their practice and plan improvement.

- A competency framework for delegates to self-assess their practice.
- Tools for Teachers – videos, case studies, problem solving scenarios, strategies, presentations and activities.
- A range of practical materials and further reading options.

The AET training focuses on autism as a difference and not a deficit. It puts the child or young person at the heart of the process. It is their voice that is heard through the training.

The AET’s mission is to empower the education workforce and support them in securing a positive education that supports wellbeing for all autistic children and young people.

The AET is the go-to destination for autism education expertise brought to life by a unique network of autism education specialists, autistic people, parents of autistic children, academics and education professionals.

The training promotes communities of practice to facilitate mutual support and shared learning, which extends to parents and carers.

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NeonDaisy CIC:
1) Online resources and targeted communications activity
2) Nature Club pilot and peer-to-peer support on Facebook

Project description:

Our vision is to connect and inspire girls who are autistic/have social communication difficulties to help them bloom. We do this by:

- Helping girls to make good friends so they feel more connected and happier.
- Inspiring girls about neurodiversity to nurture self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Enlightening families and professionals about neurodiversity in girls to help build better support for them, sooner.
- Providing an easy-to-find single gateway where local families and professionals supporting autistic girls can be signposted to other resources/support.

1) Resources and communications: Raising awareness and skills to meet needs

- Vibrant online resources aimed at girls, families, teachers, health/social care professionals, to inspire and fill gaps in awareness and skills, and reframe the narrative about neurodiversity. Developed by and featuring neurodiverse young people.
- Targeted ongoing communications activity to share and embed these resources widely in the community.

Through our resources, young people and families will watch and read about people just like them and be filled with new ideas and understanding.

Professionals - with limited time, energy and budget - will understand quickly why they should care, and take away simple, cost-effective ideas that make an immediate difference.

Content will be drip-fed gradually throughout the year (between April 2022 to March 2023) to maintain momentum and awareness on a continual basis, rather than all be completed in one go. This also allows our community to shape content as we progress through the year.

Content will include:

- Storytelling and documentary-style films to change hearts and minds. Positive narratives about neurodiversity and richer, human stories about autistic girls so families and professionals understand better why they should care and what to look for.
- Engaging tips-based videos and articles to help parents and professionals take immediate action with low-cost, practical ideas to implement and share quickly. Easy to search by topic, cutting through the information overload.
- 'The Greenhouse': Discovering and incubating joint child/parent/teacher strategies that work. From our community, gathering the best strategies where girls, parents and teachers have collaborated successfully to make life better at school. Refining into engaging, sharable content and pushing back out to parents and schools in a high-value, low-cost way.
- Signposting to existing resources and services elsewhere in the community.

Ongoing targeted communications activity planned throughout the year would ensure the resources above reach the right people, are absorbed and acted on, and drive genuine outcomes.

2) Nature Club pilot and Facebook group: Connecting girls and providing peer-to-peer support for parents/carers

A. NeonDaisy Nature Club (pilot)

An early-intervention Nature Club for 7-11 girls with the primary goal of sparking healthy friendships that last into the future.

The same girls will attend a weekly session, for 12 weeks, to build familiarity and trust. The pilot will be based in South Gloucestershire, supporting 10 girls in total. It will run between May-July.

These outdoor sessions will be provided by an established community provider, Mudpie Explorers CIC, in collaboration with NeonDaisy. Sessions will be facilitated by specialist forest school workers, giving freedom and space for the girls to explore interests, build confidence and trust - and to gradually build connections with others. The content of the sessions will be co-developed with girls at the beginning of the programme.

Sessions may also include gradual light-touch conversations about neurodiversity to start modelling a positive language the girls can use themselves, building confidence and self-esteem.

Connections will also be facilitated online by NeonDaisy between sessions and after the programme has finished. This will prepare girls beforehand, help them share common interests and encourage them to stay connected after the programme has finished. NeonDaisy will also run the promotional and administrative activity to ensure places are filled.

There will also be two additional sessions just for the girls’ parents/carers (at the beginning and end of programme). Through a cuppa and chat around the campfire, we’ll aim to help these parents connect too, empowering them to meet up again with their girls in the future after the club finishes.

The pilot will include a full assessment of the girls’ needs, individual risk-benefit assessments and wellbeing support plans for those who need it.

B. Peer-to-peer support for parents/carers:

Expanding the existing private Facebook group (currently 290 members) to provide more families with opportunities for informal meet-ups and peer-to-peer support.

Target Group:

- **Resources and communications:** Girls and gender diverse young people who are autistic/have social communication difficulties up to age 18, their parents/carers, teachers, health/social care professionals (BNSSG).
- **Nature Club pilot:** 7-11 girls who are autistic/have social communication difficulties (South Gloucestershire).
- **Facebook group:** All parents and carers supporting girls and gender diverse young people who are autistic/have social communication difficulties up to age 18 (BNSSG).

We will pay particular attention to reaching young people and families who are from minoritized ethnic communities.

Expected Outcomes:

1) Through resources and targeted communications activity:

More girls will:

- Have needs met at an earlier stage because families/professionals know more about how to identify and support them at an early age and where to go for further support.
- Feel more connected and more inspired about neurodiversity, through vibrant peer stories and a more positive narrative.

More parents/carers and professionals will:

- Have a thirst to find out more, now, because they better understand the devastating long-term impact of doing nothing.

- Be a more powerful ally to girls, because they better understand their needs and truly understand their huge potential.
- Look beyond the diagnostic pathway – because they are more confident about the small things they can do to make a big impact, and where to go for more local community support.
- Become a champion, helping to forge a more accepting world using a fluent new language about neurodiversity.

2) Through the Nature Club and Facebook group:

More girls will:

- Feel less alone and happier because they have more friendships with like-minded girls which will last into the future, offsetting the negative impact of social difficulties at school.
- Have better self-esteem because they are included and accepted by their tribe where they can drop their mask, be their authentic self and revel in their strengths.
- Feel more empowered to talk about neurodiversity and their needs at home and school through positive facilitated discussions at the club.

Parents/carers will:

- Feel better connected, supported and informed, and part of a like-minded community.

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Sirona Care & Health: SPACE Service

Project description:

The SPACE service will offer early advice and support to families where a young child (18 months - 30 months) is presenting with early signs of difficulties in the areas of social communication and interaction, who may go on to require an Autism assessment. 100 families in Bristol will receive up to six individual therapy sessions, delivered in the family home and tailored to the needs of the individual child.

The current lower age range for acceptance onto the autism diagnostic pathway is 28 months – this service will provide support and therapeutic intervention at a very early stage. Early identification and intervention will reduce the impact of the child’s differences and difficulties.

Early signs of possible social communication difficulties in young children include:

- Limited interaction (e.g., not responding to their name).
- Difficulties in developing play and relationships.
- Being very attached to non-functional routines.
- Reacting negatively to change.
- Using less language than their peers or none at all.

Behaviourally, children with these behaviours find the world an uncertain place and parents report eating, sleeping and sensory difficulties making it hard for families to engage in activities of daily living.

Parents can feel bewildered and as the child gets older their anxieties increase about their child's differences and often they blame themselves.

Feedback from many Parent/carers is that standard parenting courses are not an answer and exacerbate their feelings of failure.

Our delivery model focuses on working with parents in a partnership that gives them choice over accessing support for the specific areas which concern them and giving parents the ability to influence how the offer is delivered.

The service will be delivered by one whole time equivalent Early Support Practitioner (ESP) and a Somali speaking colleague, to offer bespoke packages to families. Following an initial ESP consultation, a menu of support will be offered to the family and an agreed package and timeline put into place. The package of support will provide four individual sessions per family with two additional workshops or virtual training opportunities as required.

The types of support on offer will include:

- Discussion around general developmental expectations (sleep, toileting etc).
- Strategies to manage daily routines which the child finds challenging.
- Exploring possible impact of a child's sensory differences on activities of daily living (e.g., sleep, toileting, feeding/food textures, play skills, mouthing toys, tolerating being hugged/dressed/showered/bathed etc)
- Signposting to local groups and services.
- Early communication advice.
- Parent: child interaction intervention and strategies to engage children in play and interaction
- Use of visual support (photos/symbols/signing).
- Support parents with child's behaviours they find challenging (e.g., head banging, repetitive movements, emptying drawers, watching washing machine).
- Discussion on social communication difficulties, when a child may need more assessment, what the assessment pathway is currently.
- Access to appropriate webinars / online training on the above topics or anything else found to be relevant / helpful.

Health visiting (HV) colleagues, Community Paediatricians and Children's Centres will be key in the early identification of families needing this support. A Health visiting colleague will be co-opted to the project to inform the support packages, receive enhanced training in identifying children with emerging social communication difficulties and to familiarise all HV colleagues with the new service.

Included in the proposal is 1.5 days a week of combined Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy advisory support. These clinical advisors will:

- Provide a comprehensive training package to the Early Support Practitioners.
- Devise workshops and virtual resources to support the individual therapeutic sessions.
- Provide quality assurance for the Therapies Outcomes Measure to be used with all children to measure impact.
- Provide clinical supervision for the team.
- Refer the child to a diagnostic pathway if required after intervention is completed and reviewed.

Included in the proposal is a BAME advisor, BAME outreach workers and interpreting services delivered by Autism Independence. Partnership working will ensure that services are culturally appropriate and sensitive, and delivered in a way that is accessible for BAME families in Bristol.

Target Group:

Parent/carers of children aged 18-30 months living in Bristol who are presenting with social communication and behaviour that could be indicative of an autism profile.

Expected Outcomes:

Studies indicate that interventions implemented early on are associated with significant gains in cognition, language and adaptive behaviour. Identification of a possible autism profile is the essential first step to effective support, even before a formal diagnosis. It is recognised that diagnosis is not a goal in itself, but part of the integrated process which should lead to people with autism being able to access the support they need (Crane, L., Chester, J., Goddard, L., Henry, L., & Hill, E. (2016)).

Despite the wealth of evidence on the benefits of early identification and intervention, in BNSSG there are very few health or VCSE services available to parents and carers of young children (18-30 months) with social communication difficulties.

Parents and carers have reported that they are unclear about the benefit of seeking a diagnosis, but there is little support available to them without a formal diagnosis of autism. They report that there are many contradictory sources of information around the disorder that may confuse matters, especially online, and they don't always know where to go to speak to others in the same situation.

Offering the range of individualised, need-led support will give parents strategies to manage aspects of their child's development which may be causing concern in a timely way (e.g., sleep), rather than having to wait for a full assessment. This will have a positive impact on the child's development, with secondary positive impacts on the child's and parent's well-being.

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Bristol City Council: COSI-Communication and Social Interaction Team

Project description:

COSI will pilot the delivery of the following service:

Educational Support/Individual Support Training

- Educating through group training; **any** provider/practitioner who works with neurodivergent C/YP across Health, Social Care and Education e.g., Police, Social Care practitioners, Education providers, out of school providers, health visitors, School nurses, Youth Offending Team, School transport etc through training (*Please note family training support is detailed below*). The aim would be to support the delegate and organisation/setting to understand and embrace neurodiversity. To increase % take up by voluntary and public sector. The training would be delivered to raise Neurodiversity Awareness, knowledge and understanding and to support with effective strategies and early identification from Early Years to Post 16 and into Employment.
- BAT propose to use our existing, high impact early identification and intervention service delivery model to expand the offer with a specific focus on social communication/interaction differences by supporting understanding of neurodiversity. In addition to raising early identification, understanding and awareness we would focus on ensuring there is a clear, consistent use of language across education, health and care. This would, of course, be co-produced directly with families, C/YP.

Mainstream Primary-post 16 educational Settings will have a designated **COSI** link (Specialist Mentor in the age phase). Post 16 would also offer transition advice into employment. The educational setting would have the following core service offer:

- **Annual Cohort Meeting including** focus on data for each setting leading to informed service planning across Health, Social Care and Education. Early identification of individuals requiring early intervention and support including pupils within vulnerable groups. This offer would be to provide 'informal' advice and strategies for a given number of C/YP including those identified as Neurodivergent but without formal Autism Diagnosis. The strategies are evidence based and modelled by appropriately trained professionals. Those pupils requiring **direct active casework** would be identified (This would be the settings referral point 1 – Term 1)
- **Active Casework (Conducted in Terms 2-3 and Terms 5-6). Specialist COSI Practitioners** would work directly with the setting and Neurodivergent C/YP and in close partnership with families. The specialist **COSI** practitioner would observe the C/YP and provide a report with strategies and advice which would be used to measure impact and outcomes at the individual level. AET progression framework would be used (this assessment tool can be utilised for those C/YP with social communication needs).
- **Advice Clinic** conducted in Term 4 would be referral point 2 and would also be an advice clinic which professionals and families can attend together.
- **Transition Support:** All settings would be given a package of advice on supporting transition for Neurodivergent pupils

- **Identity Groups:** As part of the role the **COSI** family practitioner would liaise with the **COSI** links for educational settings and would deliver training around setting up identity groups within educational settings. The aim of this would include educating and supporting individuals to embrace neurodiversity and by working as a group to develop peer/group support networks and upskilling the workforce.

Family Support

In addition to the Identity groups the **COSI** family practitioner would deliver family learning courses to develop understanding, awareness and knowledge of Neurodiversity. This would support families in clarifying the perceived benefits of diagnosis and support with embracing neurodiversity and providing strategies. The family learning courses would also develop peer/group support. We also know from our work with families there are many cultural barriers for families. The aim would be to break down these barriers and to work directly with our communities. The family learning courses (training) and support groups would be delivered, face to face and virtually in the local community as we know many of our family's dislike accessing events in places which are unfamiliar so would utilise our settings. We know joined up work is effective, and we would be able to offer liaison with our educational settings.

Raising Awareness and Understanding

The **COSI** Service providers would increase inclusion across the city through developing a clear communication strategy for families/CYP using the BCC Local Offer. This would detail support across Health, Social Care and education including how to access support from the service and signposting to other support services e.g., FLORA, community partners as part of the family offer, we would support families in signposting and accessing the BCC local offer.

Target Group:

Children, Young People, Families, Employers and any practitioner involved within any form of Education (including educating and working closely with health and social care practitioners including health visitors. G.P's), play and Community Groups.

Expected Outcomes:

There will be a service for neurodivergent C/YP which increases social participation, self-esteem/confidence through identity groups. The service would increase community Inclusion and participation, so all members of the community feel a sense of belonging. Development of participation and inclusion in after school activities, increasing social inclusion.

Families have direct access to support through our Hotline, their **COSI** link linked to their C/YP educational establishment, family learning courses and signposting worked on in partnership with the NHS teams and Voluntary and Community sector.

Increased self-confidence and self-esteem through our community training and peer groups for families, C/YP.

The Service would increase coherency and communication on myth busting (the need for ASC diagnosis) and would signpost and communicate support across our area.

The training would deliver the key messages of embracing neurodiversity and challenging perceptions, celebrating the strengths and areas of difference but with clear co-production with C/YP, raising neurodiversity understanding/knowledge and skills.

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What's next?

Week beginning 24th January:

- "Needs Led" Projects Newsletter 1 published

Up to 31st March:

- Grant documentation and funding finalised
- Project preparation

1st April:

- Projects go live!

Next Edition

- Project updates
- What "doors" does autism diagnosis open?

Useful information

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