



resources for
autism
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Impact Report 2018/19



Welcome

Welcome to our Impact report for 2018/19. Our focus for growth and development this year was led, as always, by feedback from the previous two years regarding areas of neglect within autism services. These continue to be adult services, women and girls and teenagers with mental health difficulties in addition to their autism but with the big addition of children with autism on long term school exclusions or with no school place allocated.

It was indicated at the end of last financial year that a positive and innovative response to school exclusions was becoming essential. To that end we worked with Newham Council to provide a school reintegration project based on the premise that no child should ever be excluded from accessing education, however great their behaviour support needs. This has been a fantastic success, although only benefiting 6 children for most of the year with an additional 2 joining us right at the end. As expected with the right staff who had the right training, the right support and above all the determination that no child should fail, all the children engaged and have been found alternative schooling.

We recognise the necessity of this service and to that end are seeking funding to employ an SEN teacher to support the team and to expand the project to support more children both in Newham and in other areas.

Funding difficulties are always with us and changes in funding criteria and language has made it even more difficult for regional organisations like ours, providing practical support to attract funders but we continue to push funders to recognise that 'helping' is not the opposite of empowering and help needs to be available for everyone who needs it, when they need it.

Please do contact me if you have any queries or suggestions and enjoy reading the report.

Liza Dresner, Director



Our Purpose

To provide practical services for children and adults with autism and for those who love and care for them.



In this part of the page throughout the Impact Report, you will find statistics from evaluations in 2018/19. The feedback is extremely valuable to us and helps us stay on the right track, providing practical, effective services.

Arts Therapy

We offer one to one or group art and music therapy sessions in purpose built, safe and welcoming spaces with experienced therapists who specialise in working with autism.

From Hugh, one of our music therapists:

K is a 6 year old boy who was referred to music therapy in order to develop his communication, resilience and flexibility. He found it hard to express himself verbally, play with other children and often seemed isolated. He was very shy in our first session and was adamant that his mother should be in the room. He stayed very close to her and was dependent on her for any musical or verbal responses.

This shyness continued into our second and third session, but K started to initiate brief pieces of play on his own. He rarely communicated verbally, but started to use pointing and gestures to indicate the instruments he would like to try. In our final assessment session, K was willing to spend the majority of the time in the music therapy room without his mother present. He started to take pleasure from some of the games and activities we played and his personality and sense of humour began to shine through.

Fast forward to the end of our work together and K was expressing himself verbally with much more confidence and could put together much clearer and more detailed sentences. He could express his wishes and emotional responses, whilst also asking me questions about different instruments and activities that we were doing.

K had an extremely positive and valuable experience of music therapy and is now much more engaged in his school work and in extra-curricular activities. His parents and school teacher have expressed that he is much more relaxed, open and expressive.



"Since starting art therapy K has become more confident, independent, a little chattier, and more flexible and has developed new play skills"

Our great disappointment is that we remain only able to offer arts based therapies in our North West London base. We have requests for this service from Greater London and the West Midlands but it remains hard to replicate in venues that are not our own.



Our teenage songwriting group has flourished over the past year, with the group organising external meetups and crafting songs together every week. It was so successful that the group has stayed in touch after the official finishing date and have monthly get togethers!

Our Impact

From a parent:

"It's amazing that over such a short space of time Hugh (music therapist) has become an important part of R's life."

"I was very emotional when I saw the video clips of how R interacted with Hugh, much more than I could have imagined, and the first time ever I have seen him interacting that well with other people, including me."

100% felt they had benefited from their service with us

95% reported an improvement in mood

Home Support

Our Reach Out service places volunteers or support workers with families disadvantaged by autism, in their homes and communities.

We were approached by a social care inclusion team to support what they described as the most vulnerable family known to them. Two boys aged 8 and 5 from the same family, both with a diagnosis of autism, and one of the boys with a life limiting health condition and many phobias resulting from his treatment. Both boys were not attending school.

The behaviour of both boys could be challenging, which made it very hard for the family to access any other support for their children. They were trapped in the house and the parents were suffering from extreme stress, hence the social care concerns and the referral. After a home visit and thorough assessment of the family needs RfA arranged regular visits from S, an experienced family support worker with a great deal of knowledge and autism and behavioural support. Her focus was on helping the mother, who was at home with the boys much of the time, to develop strategies for communication and behaviour support. The family had never had someone come to the home and support them before.



From a parent, on home support:

"Sam, D's one to one support worker has done an amazing job. Without her support, he wouldn't have gotten to the level of development he has gotten to now. I will honestly say that my son and the whole family have benefited immensely from RFA."

"Apart from D being so attached to Sam, he has developed so much independently. His speech has improved tremendously."

From a support worker:

A decided to cook lunch for his mum and dad today: the same fajita wraps we made in our session with him. He did it all on his own and family were so pleased!

From being a young man who was demotivated and struggling to engage in anything apart from computer games, he took initiative and did something he has never done before. Regardless of whether it was a one-off or not, this is amazing news!



Our Impact

- We see reductions in outbursts of challenging behaviour and improved access to universal services such as public transport, enabling links to the community.
- Parents and siblings receive valuable respite, leading to a reduction in stress and risk of mental health problems.
- The waiting list for our free Reach Out service is extremely long and we must do more to provide for those families who are waiting for support.

96% felt the service significantly benefitted the wider family

95% reported an improvement in interaction

Children and Young People

We run a variety of groups both in term time and the holidays for isolated children and young people with autism. Specialist autism trained staff provide a safe environment along with fun filled activities



A was 14-years-old with a diagnosis of autism, increasing strength and an energetic temperament. He was a consistent challenge at the start of the year, relentlessly removing his clothing, crying and biting his keyworkers. A is a non-verbal and his parents speak very limited English. Schools repeatedly said that they were unable to meet A's needs, and so our Saturday club was his only chance to socialise outside the house, and for his exhausted mother, who was with him all day, to have respite. Having undertaken a home visit we could see why his mother was exhausted trying to care for him on her own. He was never able to sit with others during an activity such as arts and crafts and was liable to attempt to eat the materials.

A had a habit of touching himself inappropriately and the team had to create his own safe space, for when he would remove his clothes or exhibit challenging behaviour. We decided to allocate A three keyworkers, as this would help to keep him and others safe during his time at club. Other services had rejected him, but in line with our policy of full acceptance, we were determined to make the group accessible to A.

Some of A's goals over the year included:

- Sitting with the group for one activity per session
- Increased sharing
- Going towards the private area when he needed alone time



Fast forward to the end of the year and A now only requires 2:1 support, with an extra worker on standby. With challenging behaviour and inappropriate touching reduced greatly, he now sits at the tables intermittently with the others, still needing his own time, though showing a vast improvement in social skills. His keyworkers were delighted by his developments and willingness to interact. He has snacks with the other members and feeds crisps to his keyworkers, his attempts to share are a vivid improvement on earlier in the year. A still shows signs of frustration from an inability to convey his feelings and thoughts, resulting in crying and self-harm, however the length of time he is sad has greatly reduced, with the ability to move on swiftly when his keyworkers encourage him to go on the trampoline or participate in another activity.

A loves tactile and visual sensation, ecstatic when staff members blow bubbles for him or give him a tactile feedback. Our staff continue to show their expertise every week with A, able to facilitate his growth and magnify the enjoyment he gets from our club.

Our Impact

- We provide autism safe environments with one to one and two to one support so young people can enjoy themselves whilst building social and life skills.
- Young people gain independence, form relationships and grow in confidence .
- Families benefit from the respite, using the time to rest or play with other children, lowering the risk of family breakdown.

100% of children felt they had a fun time and enjoyed the service

97% of children showed improved play skills, including sharing

Volunteering

Wherever possible, we use volunteers for our groups and Reach Out service. Volunteers are given autism specific training to provide people on the spectrum a level of care unavailable elsewhere.

D is a 7 year old boy living in Southwark. He was diagnosed with autism at 5, but his parents struggled to understand and respond to his condition, and there was also violence between the parents at home. After D's father was removed from the home by the police, his mum experienced very low mood, which was made worse by having a new baby. Often she could not get D to school, which raised significant concerns about his wellbeing.



We were able to send an experienced volunteer Heather, who visited twice a week and took D out, engaging him in physical activities in the park or swimming, which enabled his mum to rest at home with the baby. Following training and advice from our behavior support manager, Heather was also able to share positive strategies for giving D attention at home, and exploring and identifying activities that interested and engaged him. D's mum also benefited from attending a parent group which helped her to understand more about autism and to start to develop a peer support network of other local parents.

Following discussion and supervision with Heather, our family support worker was able to speak with the SENCO of D's school, and D has returned to school and is attending regularly and making better progress.

Recruiting reliable volunteers is a huge challenge with so much competition for their time. Our volunteers come from all backgrounds and walks of life from psychology students to retired secretaries. From parents with 'lived experience' to those wanting to start a career in the care sector.

We trained 134 new volunteers over the past year.

Approximately 120 volunteers are placed supporting families.

Volunteers from companies such as Grunberg Accountants, John Lewis and Alstomgroup helped in other ways. Keeping our base clean and bright, sorting puzzles and creating communication symbols and timetables.



Our Impact

- All of our staff and volunteers learn how to work with people with disabilities, developing skills they keep for life.
- Volunteers become ambassadors for autism, spreading understanding and acceptance in their families and communities.
- Volunteering allows support to be offered for free to families who struggle financially, and would otherwise not be able to receive support.

Volunteers contributed over 34,500 hours of their time over the last year, which equates to 19 full-time paid staff.

This year has seen a number of new developments including a series of workshops for adult women in both London and the West Midlands. The work with Women with Autism has been particularly exciting. With a very general focus on 'safety', groups were split by age and ability. Our group for women over 30, some with children was illuminating with women talking about the dreadful feeling of alienation at the school gates as they witnessed other mothers making friends and sharing lives. Our younger women were particularly keen to understand how to keep safe in relationships and when out in the community.



Our Autism Community Volunteering Service continues to grow and demand is high. We currently have 28 successfully placed active volunteers across London, with the desire to expand the project and increase our ACV manager role to full-time, to accommodate our waiting list; we hope to raise funds

in order to do this. We have developed excellent links with Job Centre's and have supported their staff in understanding why pre-employment opportunities to explore the world of work is so important to our service users.

Our Impact

- Adults develop practical skills such as money management to gain increased independence and less reliance on carers.
- Our services lead to the opportunity for qualifications, work placement and employment.
- A multi-sports group promotes activity and exercise outside, leading to increased health and fitness.



From a service user:

"I think the Tuesday club is an excellent adults group- I've met many young people my age which is awesome and it's so exciting when a new person joins as its someone possibly new to get to know. Also the staff are very helpful and make the place feel more of a safe and fun environment for young adults to come and relax and learn more about themselves."

From a parent:

"The Tuesday club has made a huge difference to L and also myself, as L was only diagnosed a couple of years ago it has been an introduction to other Autistic adults which would not have been possible with out it. "

"The club offers just the right balance of evenings in for social mixing along with informative talks from guest speakers and also group discussions which have proved extremely valuable as well as wonderful evenings out in a wide variety of locations, all of the things offered contributes to the wellbeing and development of L as well as the other members.

L is soon to start a 6 week job programme with one of your guest speakers who runs personalised job coaching courses, which is a great opportunity. You and all the team go out of your way to make this club as wonderful as it is and hopefully the club will continue for a very long time into the future."

95% reported an improvement in interaction

with others

92% of adults felt their overall skills had

improved

Family Services

We run a variety of groups both in term time and the holidays for isolated children and young people with autism. Specialist autism trained staff provide a safe environment along with fun filled activities

Running our siblings group in Birmingham has allowed young people with autism and their siblings to come together once a month in a safe, fun, inclusive environment. We currently have eight regular attendees as well as their siblings involved in the group, with sessions allowing for brothers and sisters to participate in activities like bowling, rock climbing, cooking and role play, as well as discuss important topics related to having autism or helping someone with autism. This is facilitated by our expert staff, whose knowledge and awareness allows them to give specific and helpful advice, or assist when someone needs it. We would love to replicate such a successful group in London down the line.

Our monthly coffee mornings in Birmingham have helped 55 parents and carers over 9 sessions, providing them with a relaxed space for a warm brew and helpful discussions with like-minded people. As it's a 'just turn up' service, it has been helpful for families who find it difficult to plan.

It is a small service that could and should be replicated everywhere but as with many of the things we do, lack of suitable, affordable premises, makes that challenging.

The fact that the coffee morning is 'run by parents for parents' allows for the morning to steer towards the pressing topics in the minds of our parents. It's also great for us to know what our parents think is working well and what could be improved upon, furthering our services and encouraging open communication.



Our siblings ask:
If I had Aspergers would I understand him and he understand me?
Why does he always want to be in charge?
Why does he always play the same game?
Why does my brother scream?
Why don't I get as much attention?

Our Impact

- Families see a reduction in loneliness and isolation by engaging with people who understand their situation.
- Groups for parents allow peer support and focus on issues as decided by parents themselves, for example, strategies where sleep is an issue for the family.
- Siblings whose brother or sister have autism, have the chance to make friends with others who share their situation, and to learn and freely ask questions about autism.

96% felt the service benefited parents, carers, and the wider family

96% felt the service had reduced isolation and provided useful links

Thank You

A big thank you to everyone who has supported Resources for Autism over the last year as well as to all our staff and volunteers. We couldn't do what we do without you.

Funders

The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust
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Below is a 'word graph' based on the number of contacts we have had and where they live, over the past year. The bigger the size the greater the numbers. To put this in context we have had contact with over 350 different people in Birmingham alone this year





Support Us

A donation to Resources for Autism goes entirely towards providing practical help for individuals and families disadvantaged by autism.

You can make a donation securely online at www.justgiving.com/rfa or call us on 020 8458 3259 to speak to one of our team.

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