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**autism**  
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# Impact Report 2017/18

# Welcome

Welcome to our Impact report for 2017/18. Our focus for growth and development this year grew out of feedback from the previous two years regarding areas of neglect within autism services. These were adult services, women and girls and teenagers with mental health difficulties in addition to their autism.

We have seen growth in our ability to serve all these groups and our women and girl's groups and adult groups have both grown considerably, although we recognize that we are still scratching the tip of the iceberg in terms of the need in our community.

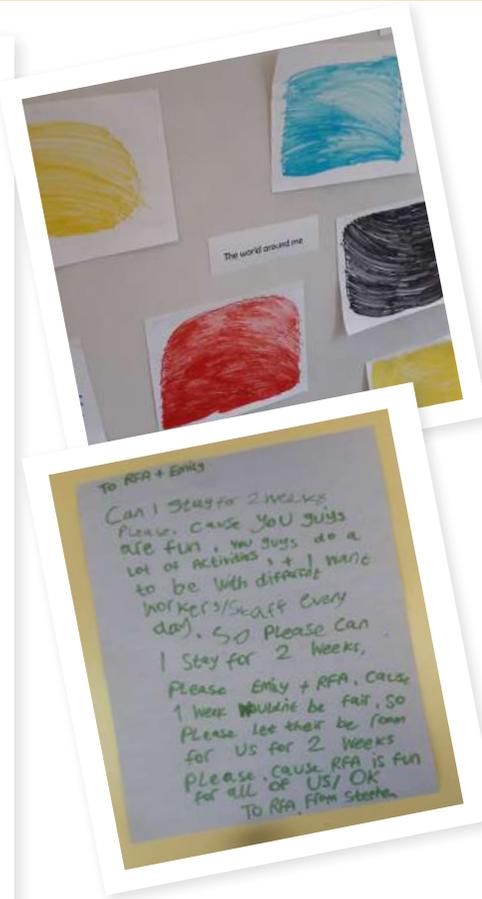
Sadly, we have seen an increase in school exclusions this year and been asked to support a number of children at home who should be in school. Whilst we try to respond positively to this it is extremely hard to find schools able and willing to take our children with space available for them. This is something that will be at the forefront of our focus during 2018/19.

Funding difficulties are always with us and I have become very aware of the dilemma of being a service agency, so having a low profile and spending all our income on direct practical services, against spending time and money on profile raising in the hope that it will create capacity to do more in the future.

As we grow we have worked hard to keep the organisation accessible and responsive. We have piloted a project in five London Boroughs, thanks to the Merchant Taylors Trust, responding by phone immediately a referral is received and offering a home visit within the following couple of days. This has made significant difference with many families finding some immediate support at the point of a school exclusion or a change in behaviour or a police intervention can make a lasting difference and make the wait for a subsequent service less stressful.

The three areas above will be our focus over the 2018/19 period.

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 2017/18. The feedback is extremely valuable to us and helps us stay on the right track, providing practical, effective services.



K is a 9 years old, non-verbal boy who started club tearing, scrunching, taking paper from others, filling his pockets with any type of paper and spitting food. Parents shared that this was an issue at home as they were struggling and needed help with strategies to support him because he was destroying siblings homework and letters. He struggled with engaging in group/independent activities, no social interaction with peers, could not share toys or take turns and was isolating himself to a certain area of the room.

K's key worker observed and monitored his behaviours and triggers, looked at his interests to adapt the activities, his sensory needs, interaction with others and how to encourage independence skills in the initial weeks.

We:

- Introduced routine by using visual timetables.
- Encouraged eating at the table with his peers - adults modelling sitting at the table and eating with him.
- Introduced a plate/cup and offered his snack and new foods in increments.
- Promoted social interaction, sitting next to peers, sitting as a group.
- Utilised food by introducing cooking activities, encouraging him to smell, taste, feel and chop ingredients. When cooking he is curious of the process e.g. mixing, rolling, shaping, baking and then eating. (taking ownership)
- Sensory activities - messy play, foot/hand massages, sensory pressure, pom poms, light up ball to squeeze, sensory room, sensory walk outside picking leaves, branches, walking on gravel, bark, and grass. Barefoot walk, gluing and stick, hand painting, sprinkling glitter on his hand to change texture, tactile, hand on hand-coordination and using different tools e.g. paint brush

NOW:

- He joins in 'hello/goodbye time' by choosing which peer to sing to, listens to stories and makes choices of songs to sing.
- Participates in group activities.
- Emerging independence - puts his own shoes and socks on and when he wants his zip fastened he uses makaton signs for please and thank you.
- He follows simple instructions.
- Parents have shared that K is happy coming to club always waiting with coat on for parents to drop him off.
- He is a happy young person and uses facial expression to express himself



## 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% felt they had enjoyed the service provided

99% reported an improvement in play skills

# 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.

J, 16, was referred to music therapy primarily for her diagnosis of autism, but had also spent time in a psychiatric unit immediately prior to starting sessions following a psychotic episode. Her parents had separated but it had been a painful split, and it was felt that J's voice was in danger of not being heard when decisions about the family were made.

Initially, J was nervous about playing the instruments on offer, but gradually found an affinity with the piano and spent a lot of time in music therapy there. We would sit side by side and would either take turns and respond to each other's musical motifs, or I would provide an accompaniment for Jessica to improvise singing over. She would improvise lyrics and melodies, saying, "I'm just singing whatever comes into my head." Her lyrics were rich in emotion and implied meaning, suggesting that she found the song form a safer way to express herself than straightforward talking; having the musical buffer meant that she was able to articulate her emotions but didn't become overwhelmed by them.

In the end, J was able to write whole songs, coming back to them each week and working on them. She decided not to record her songs in the end, although that was an option for her, as being able to externalise the thoughts and feelings she had kept in her mind for so long was a powerful enough device for her at that time.



'Elvira is outstanding and her approach towards tailoring the session to V's needs really helped his self confidence.'

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 music therapists have offered one to one and groups this year with a new venture into a song writing group for youngsters who have not been able to access other services. This has proved very popular and has helped us meet our target of offering more to teenagers with autism and mental health issues.

## Our Impact

- Art and music therapy enables new forms of expression, leading to improved communication and interaction with others.
- The bond formed with an arts therapist develops social skills that give rise to friendships and relationships elsewhere.
- We have yet to implement arts therapy in the West Midlands and this remains a priority for us going forward.

100% felt they had benefited from their service with us

100% 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.

A is a lone parent who had terminal cancer and wanted to make arrangements for her 16 year old son with autism, J, who had no contact with his father.

Being able to place a skilled support worker at such a critical time supported J in developing independent living skills and helped him to understand his mothers' condition and then her death.

J is now living with a family member and being supported by a volunteer and both J and his new family are coping well.



From a support worker:

For the first hour, R was very challenging and it was extremely difficult to manage his behaviour and he was extremely anxious. He kept ripping his pads and stripping naked. He was defecating in his hands and smearing and smelling his hands. Every time we got closer to R he would kick, hit or bite.. Trying to engage with R seemed to over stimulate him more; even when we gave him space he tried to attack us.

It took us an hour of very low arousal engagement to bring R to a calmer state. Throughout the visit we had to be very calm, with soft voices, offering lots of deep pressure, massages and bubbles (the only thing he seemed to enjoy) to keep him settled. Eventually, we managed to engage him in very short music activities and reading but we had to be very careful not to overstimulate him. We offered a tiny amount of water throughout the session to meet R's sensory needs.

## 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.

100% felt the service met the individual's needs

100% reported an improvement in interaction

# 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.

## Maria's Story

I visited every week to spend time with H, giving his family time to relax, teaching him to use the toilet and trying new activities. We visited the park; H loved to play with leaves so we took them home and made art. He liked playing with light and pop-up history books. I sent logs of my time to the coordinator who gave me feedback, new ideas and encouragement.

By the end of my time with H, there were noticeable changes – he was calmer, could go to the bathroom, was able to say some words and play with others. Mum was happier too, she was using some of the strategies Resources for Autism gave us, such as having a routine; H liked the structure. Saying goodbye was sad, you become attached to the families you work with but it's important to move on. There's a long waiting list of other families looking for help. I've seen H and his family out in the community and think of him sometimes. I learnt a lot about autism through H, he was my best teacher."

Since volunteering with H, Maria has gone on to work with six more families, all with their own unique situation and challenges. We are incredibly grateful for the time she and all our other volunteers have given to help families disadvantaged by autism.



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 350 volunteers over the past year.

Approximately 120 volunteers are placed supporting families.

Volunteers from companies such as Grunberg Accountants and Alstom Transport help in other ways. Keeping our base clean and bright, sorting puzzles and creating communication symbols and time tables.



## 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.

**100%** said the training made a huge difference to their understanding

**97%** reported an increase in self-confidence

This year has seen a number of new developments including two new adult groups in the West Midlands and 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 Impact

Our Autism Community Volunteering Service continues to grow and demand is high. 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. We are placing three to four volunteers per month into all kinds of exciting opportunities such as conservation, assisting in libraries and museums and caring for cats in an animal rescue centre. Autistic Volunteers work in our office and help with our training.

- 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.



"I guess I enjoy the different workshops for me every fortnight. I find them to be of great benefit through my struggles. Outings are what I enjoy as well because it means I am socializing with the right type of people when I used to socialize with the wrong people looking back on my past. It means that I belong somewhere. I don't think I would have liked to be doing anything different."

Initially M would only come to a group with a Resources for Autism support worker. Although Au Struck is an independent group we allowed M to come with his support worker as this was the only social activity he was attending and we felt we could build his confidence to come independently. The support worker waited in a

side room initially and M would stay with the group. M brought his phone with him, listened to music and didn't engage with anyone in the group. After 6 months M is now attending on his own, although his support worker travels with him as he is not comfortable on public transport on his own. M now engages with the group and has even learnt to play pool with another group member, and they have a weekly game. We have not seen him on his phone for four months, which is an achievement. His goal for his year is to be travel trained so that he can come to the group without his support worker.

99% reported an improvement in independence

100% reported an improvement in communication

Running our pilot 'Triage' service has been extremely important in extending our work with families. We are committed to responding within two weeks of a referral to families within 5 London boroughs. We believed that families ask for help when things are at their worst so a quick response and an offer of an immediate family visit might reduce family stress and make waiting for other services easier. This has proved to be absolutely true with families presenting at the point of near collapse, often having contacted many organisations looking for support and not receiving any contact back. Extremely poor housing, children excluded from school, domestic violence, police involvement due to autistic behaviour, threat of eviction, withdrawal of benefits, parental ill health and concern for siblings have all been features of triage visits.

Our Sunday Family Drop-in has served approximately 5 families a week with 20 children at any one time. As it is a 'just turn up' service, it has been helpful for families who find it difficult to plan. For larger families it is often very difficult to find place to go that are not expensive and where autistic children are accepted and welcomed.

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.

It is difficult to argue sustainability with small numbers of families despite the impact of the service on those families.



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.

**100%** felt the service benefited parents, carers, and the wider family

**100%** felt the service had reduced isolation and provided useful links





## 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](http://www.justgiving.com/rfa) or call us on 020 8458 3259 to speak to one of our team.

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