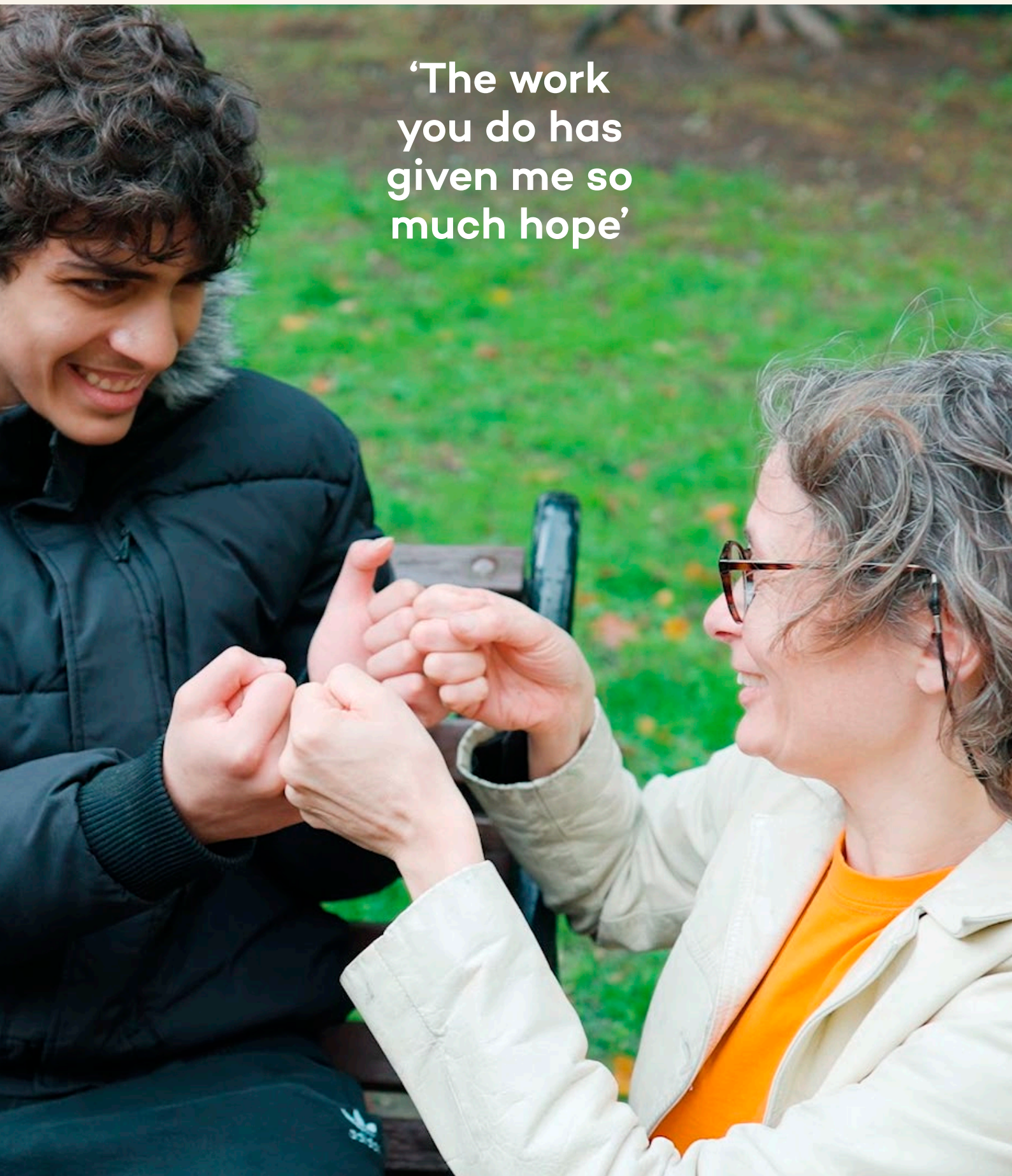


SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT 2022/23

‘The work
you do has
given me so
much hope’





WELCOME

not a single one of them needs to be 'fixed': from a place of understanding and mutual respect we work to enable them to reach their full potential. As well as offering practical support on the ground, we work to change systems and attitudes to enable all autistic people to be themselves without needing to 'mask' their autism. This year, through our training and consultancy programme, we have supported numerous organisations and companies to become even more inclusive and aware of autism and neurodiversity.

Just as we have highly close, personal connections with the individuals and families we support, we feel fortunate to have similarly meaningful relationships with our supporters. Thanks to you, we have been able to support **184 new young people** and **77 new adults** this year. The breadth and depth of our work is phenomenal for a charity of our size. We are grateful for everything that your funding helps us to achieve.

Finally, I express my gratitude and respect to RfA's staff and volunteers. Your energy, commitment and positivity make RfA's impact extraordinary. Thank you.

Dolyanna Mordochai
CEO

Welcome to Resources for Autism's 2023 Impact Report. In these pages we're proud to give a voice to our community: autistic people often can be denied the space to express themselves freely. Sharing stories of courage and experiences of change here is a privilege. We are proud to share with you the stories of resilience, hope and transformation that truly embody RfA's mission.

In this report, which is based on our online annual survey and surveys on specific services, we demonstrate our impact: **99%** told us that they have benefitted from our services, and comments such as '*I could not go out, now I can*' are far from unique. Thank you to everyone who provided us with their feedback and testimonials this year. We will continue to listen and respond to you, the community that we are privileged to serve.

There are over **700,000** autistic people in the UK. It's our belief that

OUR IMPACT



64,332
UNIQUE USERS OF OUR
ONLINE RESOURCES



6,683
HOURS DONATED BY
VOLUNTEERS



820
CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE SUPPORTED




757
FAMILIES ACCESSED
OUR FIRST RESPONSE
SERVICE



548
PARENTS AND CARERS
ATTENDED DROP-IN AND
TRAINING SESSIONS



495
PROFESSIONALS
RECEIVED AUTISM
TRAINING



334
ADULTS SUPPORTED



184
NEW PEOPLE WE
SUPPORT UNDER 18



77
NEW PEOPLE WE
SUPPORT OVER 18



43
ORGANISATIONS
TRAINED IN
NEURODIVERSITY AND
AUTISM AWARENESS



38
LOCAL AUTHORITY
PARTNERSHIPS

OUR VISION

Our vision is a society where autistic people can live happy and fulfilling lives.

OUR MISSION

To provide bespoke support for autistic individuals and those who love and care for them, and create services in wider society that are aware and inclusive of neurodivergence.



WHO WE SUPPORT

65% self-define as not 'White British'

25% live in single-parent households

15% live in multi-generational households

Although this is not data that we request from our service-users, we know that most individuals and families we help do not have the resources to access autism support privately. For them, we are a lifeline.

'Thanks to you I am taking part in two great groups and I managed to get through the stressful Personal Independence Payment application process successfully. Thank you!'

'This support feels like I am not alone with my disability, you provide not only help but hope too. This is lifesaving, and I am eternally grateful.'



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

We offer safe spaces where young autistic people can be themselves, accept and celebrate their autism, play and have fun. Our services include music therapy, play therapy, termtime clubs, holiday schemes, mentoring, befriending and school integration.

'I have always found Resources for Autism to be a professional and reliable organisation; and this is reflected in requests that I get from parents for support for their children. The team are well trained and will lead and can be relied upon to deliver services when required to some very vulnerable children and young people.'

- Local Authority Commissioner

'I will always value and be grateful for RfA and their professionalism, giving my children and family so many fond memories and cherished experiences.'





Across the year, we...

- supported **782** children and young people, of whom **184** were new
- offered **882** termtime sessions which were accessed by **229** unique children
- provided **1,298** holiday placements for **350** unique children

Our Therapies team achieved many successes: we...

- launched a new school partnership, supporting **30** autistic children through 1:1 and group work
- developed a new play therapy service which supported **24** children and **10** parents
- supported the placement of **2** students in Music Therapy and Dance Movement Therapy

Parents told us...

- 92%** My child's wellbeing improved after joining a holiday scheme
- 88%** Our family has benefitted from the respite offered by RfA

Parents or older children told us...

- 98%** My child has/I have benefitted from the service
- 90%** My child has/I have an improved capacity to try new things
- 90%** My child has/I have improved mood
- 85%** My child has/I have improved ability to interact with others
- 80%** My child has/I have improved ability to form relationships and friendships
- 76%** My child has/I have improved self-confidence
- 75%** My child has/I have improved communication

‘Your trustworthy staff always provide a safe haven for our children and we hope this continues into adulthood as they grow and develop further. My sons always come home so fulfilled :)’

‘The work you do has given me so much hope, D is just so settled at club.’

‘The mentoring scheme has really been the fulcrum of a wider sense of independence and support that means everything feels better for P. His severe mental health issues are much more under control as he can now vocalise his anxiety and depression and feel heard.’

‘As a parent I feel comfortable leaving my son and I know that he is safe and well looked after.’

‘The staff were so dedicated and thoughtful. H was very reluctant to join in, but the staff went above and beyond to engage her’

‘I have only attended in holiday time but RfA has definitely provided a much-needed neuro-affirmative and non-discriminatory environment for me and an opportunity to find some social confidence’

‘It is the only opportunity for us to have time apart in the holidays to do things independently of each other and this benefits both of us and our relationship.’



From our base at Orange House, our Alternative Provision for children living in the London Borough of Newham, we supported **12** children who had been permanently excluded from their special education settings, of whom most have either been transitioned successfully into school or who are mid-transition in the 2022-23 academic year.

‘Both my boys had had no access to any autism-specific club and were highly distressed and anxious. When they joined RfA, they had a sense of belonging, felt understood and accessed activities in a trusted environment with a team who are highly trained. My children now come home fulfilled and with a sense of “being understood” as their needs are complex. I am so happy and grateful RfA are here.’



M, AGED 16

M is an autistic, semi-verbal female with OCD and anxiety who joined our Newham Saturday Club. Though at first struggling to join in with activities, through the personalised visuals, routines and emotion boards that her support worker put in place, we could support her needs and ensure that she felt comfortable and understood.

Her family is experiencing some significant challenges, and we were able to provide support for M's sibling, and include M's mum in our parent support group in Newham.

Because our staff took the time to get to understand M and put in place a personalised structure, we have seen a decrease in her OCD and her anxiety levels. M's parents have told us, 'We are very grateful for your help and support and how you strive to do your best for both of our children'.



L, AGED 7

L attends our afternoon group in Birmingham. Change and transitions can make him feel really anxious, which can lead to dysregulated behaviours. His mum had recently moved with L to a new location after a breakdown in her marriage.

Our team worked together to ensure that our approach was matched to his needs and level of regulation at each session. We checked in with L's mum before and after each session, giving her space to share her feelings and the emotional support she needed. L could arrive early at sessions to ease the transition, and he benefitted from the consistent routine and low demands that we could offer. We helped L to share his emotions and process the session through visual materials and a feelings chart, and we provided resources for his mum to help him at home. We carried out an observation and support visit at L's new home, helping with their move, and observing his home routine so we could incorporate it into our club sessions.

Now, L loves to come to the club. He wakes up at 5am on Saturday mornings, ready and waiting to leave. And his mum feels safe to leave L without any worries.

Sidd Sampla, West Midlands Service Manager

SPOTLIGHT ON PLAY THERAPY

After a successful pilot programme in 2021-2022, we were delighted to officially launch our West Midlands Play Therapy service, with generous support from West Midlands-based charity Landau.

Our autism-specific model of Play Therapy offers unconditional acceptance and empathy; its creativity and flexibility allow children to experience themselves through the world of play, such as music, art, story-telling and puppetry.

ACROSS THE YEAR WE OFFERED

- individual and group play therapy to **24 people**
- play coaching sessions to **10 parents and carers**



B, AGED 7

B was referred for play therapy to better understand and regulate some painful emotions which were leading to aggressive and unsafe behaviour. He was very unsettled at school and struggling to process the recent death of his father.

During 17 sessions over six months, he engaged in a variety of activities. He explored themes such as pride, anger, resentment and frustration. This encouraged him to problem-solve and make more conscious, independent decisions. This was a place where he could explore his own boundaries, both physically and emotionally.

Throughout, we liaised sensitively with B's mother and school to offer recommendations and advice around emotional regulation and opportunities for play. Developments were particularly noted in his capacity to regulate aggressive behaviours, build peer relationships and safely express his grief.

Jo Hines, Play Therapist, West Midlands

In her evaluation at the end of therapy, his mother commented:

'My concerns before starting therapy were his violent behaviours and giving him space for grieving. Both worries have been addressed and I've seen huge improvements. I am now more understanding of his journey.'

ADULT SERVICES

When autistic children transition into adulthood, most of their support disappears. We are committed to ensuring that the autistic adult community is not left behind.

ACROSS THE YEAR, WE...

- hosted **489** group sessions
- supported **334** adults
- received **166** new referrals
- welcomed **77** new service-users
- delivered **46** advocacy sessions

Our ten adult groups spanning London and the West Midlands welcome those with all levels of need, focusing on fun and connection, and on building independence and preparing for adulthood. This year we have focused on stretching service-users to advocate for themselves and get their voices heard.

We encouraged our adults to create their own timetables and planned activities and to have more ownership over their groups through creative co-production tools.



Our more **independent groups** have chosen to try new outings and activities such as canal trips along the river, mini-golf and theatre trips. Our **semi-independent groups** built their skills in areas such as cooking and planning trips. Our **complex needs groups** experimented with cooking and sensory play and created beautiful, inspiring artworks. The groups all connected with each other creatively, through art, dance and laughter.

Our much-needed **advocacy and crisis support services** continued to provide guidance on the often-complicated pathway to access benefits and housing services.

'The support provided by you was incredibly thoughtful, empathetic and at the same time professional and detailed. I was scared to ask for help and your work helped me change my life for the better.'

Our **virtual groups**, for those unable to access in-person groups, include our Adult Women's Group. Its ten core members share advice, stories and compassion, exploring wellbeing, personal safety and autism acceptance. Some members now meet independently online to continue to connect with each other.

'I wanted to say thank you for leading this group. I still have social anxiety about it but it's getting better, and I actually find myself having a lot in common with the ladies.'

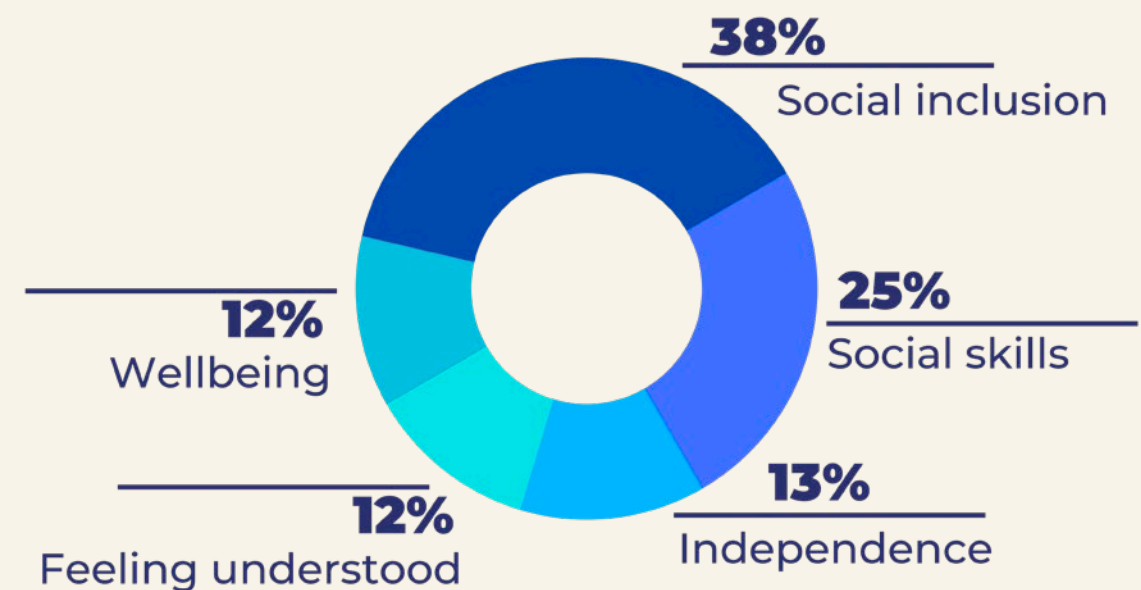
72% of our adult service-users have experienced mental health difficulties, with anxiety and depression being the most common. This year, with generous funding from the Bloomfield Foundation, we provided counselling support to **23** adults which was very well received.

Adults told us...

100% I have benefitted from the service

85% I have seen improvements in my mood

The most significant benefit of our support has been...



‘The help I received from Resources for Autism is not something I can measure. I would have been mad if I did not receive their help.’

“I managed to get a job and to understand people much better.’

‘Thanks to your help, I have been awarded Personal Independence Payment and UC50. I am actively taking part in two groups, receiving counselling sessions that are incredibly helpful.’

‘The staff were so dedicated and thoughtful. H was very reluctant to join in, but the staff went above and beyond to engage her’

“I am more independent and have made lots of nice friends :-)’

‘Since working with you, my mental health is better, I feel encouraged and even though I might not have tons of energy to advocate for myself, I feel like we have already accomplished so much in these few months.’

‘I have made more friends’

‘I love coming to the group on a Wednesday. It feels like we are all developing a really lovely connection together.’



SPOTLIGHT ON ADULT DATING BOOT CAMP

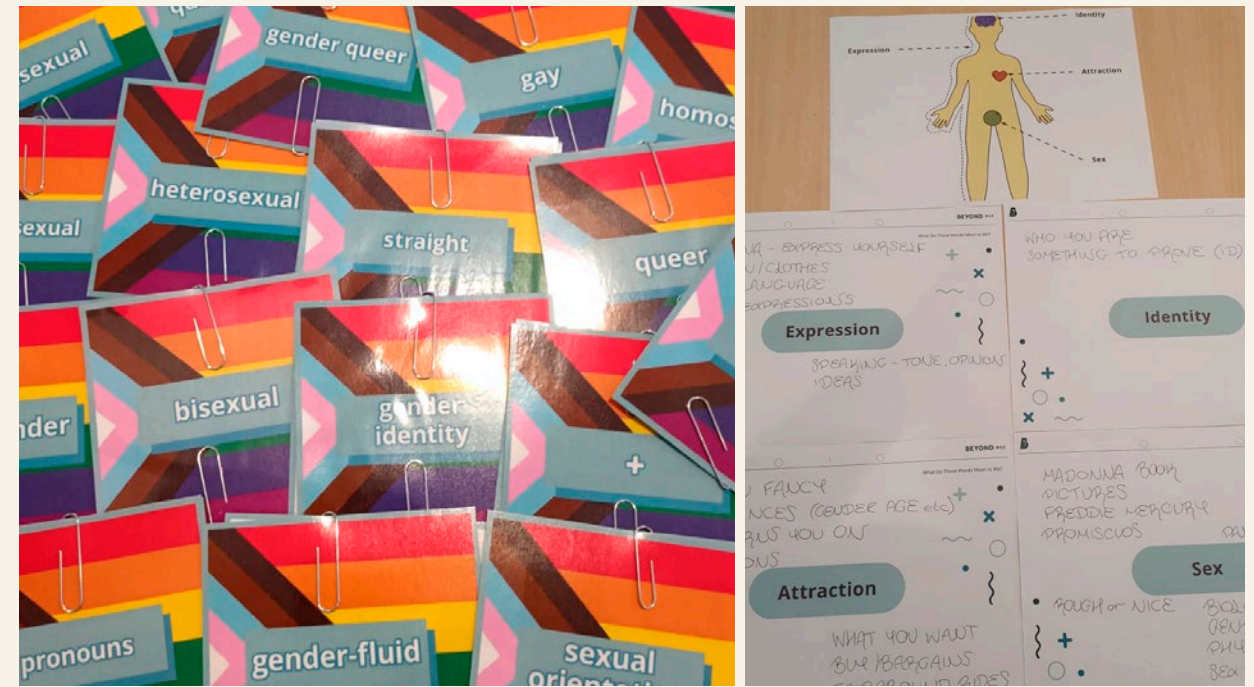
Autistic people sometimes tell our support workers that they seek sexual or romantic contact, but that the lack of appropriate education which is sensitive to autistic people can act as a barrier to forming healthy sexual relationships. Though sexual development in autistic people is not typically delayed, we often stop conversations around sexuality due to fears, prejudice about sex as an act, sex as an identity and sex as a choice.

In response to this feedback, out of numerous applicant charities, we were delighted to receive a generous grant from the London Borough of Barnet's Community Innovation Fund, to deliver a project for autistic adults around sex and relationships.

THIS PROJECT INVOLVED

- **32** weekly two-hour workshops
- **14** adults aged 20-64

The group participated in practical, art and drama activities and explorative sessions in an open, supportive environment. Topics included consent, red flags and the law. One session involved a trip to a café, where participants could identify their desired qualities in a partner and red flags to avoid; they practised approaching a potential partner and learned to accept rejection as well as positive responses.



Autistic guest speakers joined us to share their stories, providing opportunities for peer-to-peer support and advice. For some sessions, we worked alongside a psychoeducator and a drama therapist.

Reported outcomes included

- Increased confidence and understanding of dating
- Increased knowledge of consent, boundaries, contraception, diversity and healthy relationships
- Increased understanding of how to approach someone
- Increased understanding of grooming and other forms of abuse
- Increased knowledge of myths versus facts around sex

In our final session participants were able to demonstrate that they understood about areas such as condoms, LGBTQ and the law. They also really enjoyed being part of a speed-dating event.

FAMILIES

Working with families is core to our work. We offer peer-led coffee mornings, crisis support, behaviour support, training, specialist workshops, signposting and a siblings groups. Our Family Support team staff and volunteers are all experts by experience.

OUR IMPACT THIS YEAR WAS SIGNIFICANT:

- **757** families accessed our signposting service
- **548** parent/carers attended drop-in and training sessions
- **481** families were referred for further support from RfA
- **331** parent/carers attended our 32 workshops
- **217** parent/carers attended our monthly peer-led coffee mornings and drop-ins

Our workshops covered areas such as sleep, diet and nutrition, self-care and wellbeing, behaviours of concern and screentime.

PARENTS AND CARERS REPORTED....

- **100%** experience of support groups as at least 4 out of 5
- **95%** increased confidence in dealing with their child's behaviour
- **95%** reduced isolation



'I so appreciate you taking the time to break down all the strategies and advice. Having guidelines will help me to deal with the challenges I come up against with K.'

'I leave so many drop-in sessions thinking - Oh, I didn't know that.'

'It was great to get advice from professionals who understand autism. There is still so much lack of understanding surrounding ASD. It is comforting to have this level of support, it's not easy to come by.'

'To attend amongst peers and families who are in the same or similar situations is very comforting, as all too often it can feel very lonely.'

'The value of feeling heard and supported can't be expressed... I have felt very isolated for the past few years. We now have a greater patience and understanding. We all feel less overwhelmed by everything.'

'My brother is very loud and it upsets me as I don't like loud noises. It would make me angry and I would sometimes hit my brother. Now I can have time away from him so it makes me happy.'

L, PARENT OF AN AUTISTIC CHILD

(any identifying information has been changed to protect confidentiality)

L is the parent of an autistic boy aged 4. She is originally from Eastern Europe, living in temporary accommodation after fleeing domestic violence. She speaks only basic English and has no family in the UK.

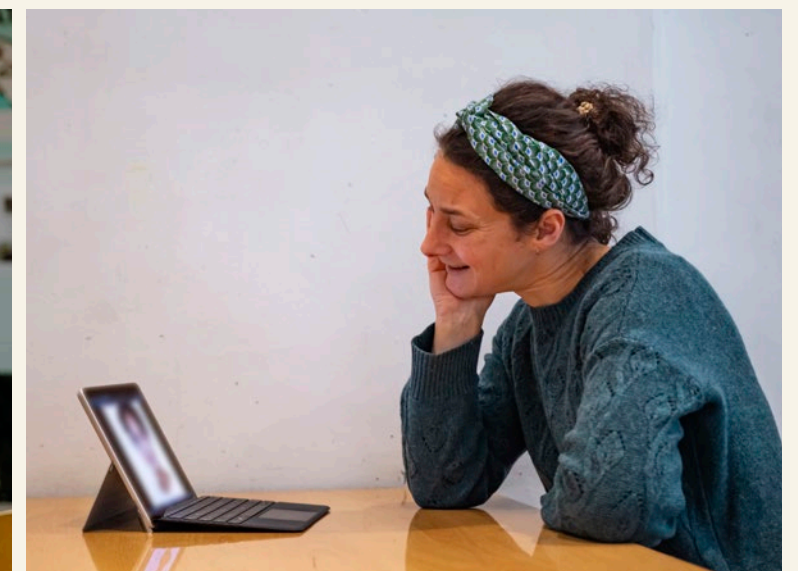
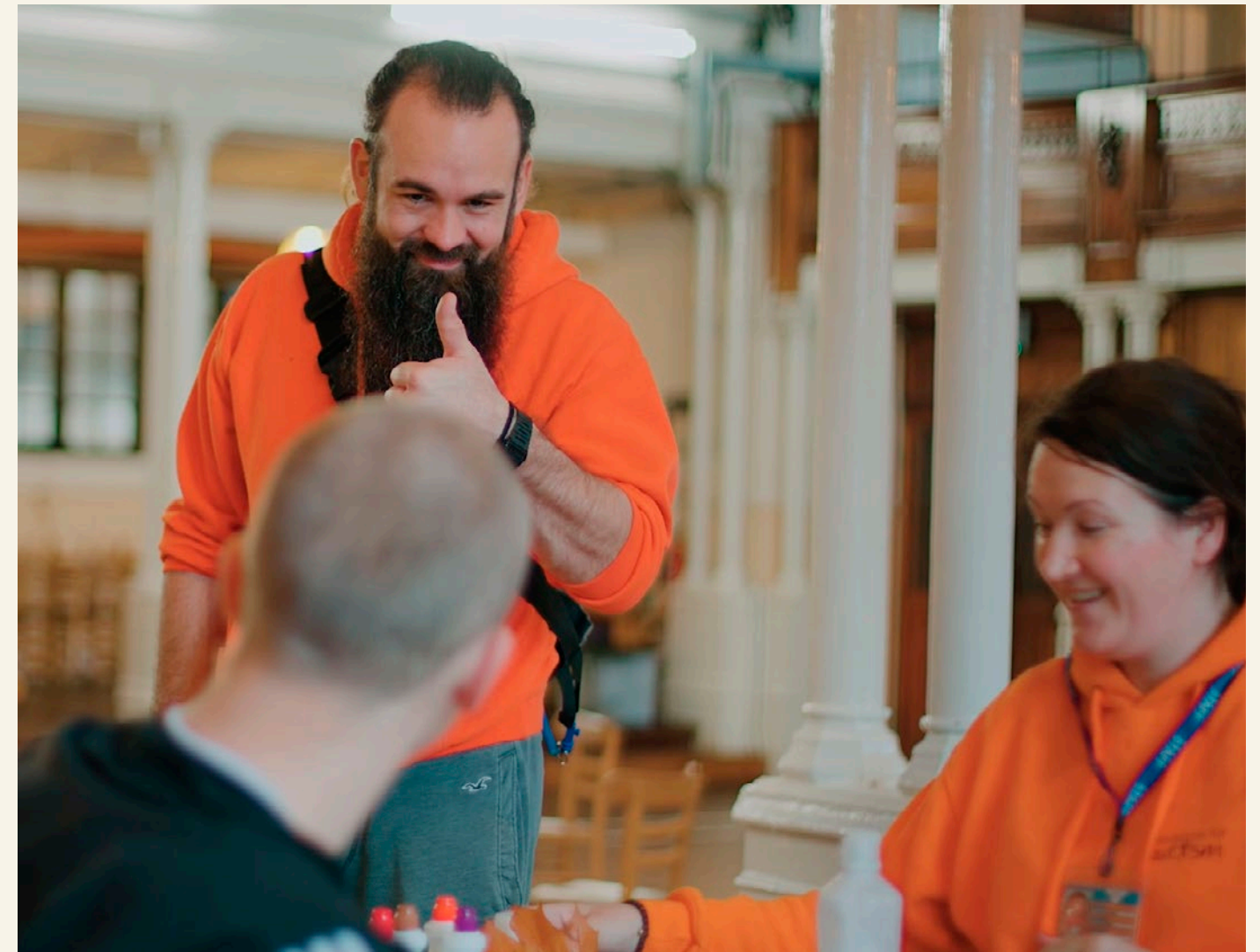
She was very tearful during our first conversation, bewildered and unsure what to do. She didn't understand autism or her son's dysregulated behaviour. Everything seemed hopeless. She felt stuck and ashamed of her situation, of her son, of her unfurnished flat.

I visited her, showed her some visuals she could use with her son and demonstrated some strategies but she wasn't very interested. She felt it was easy for me as her son had 'respect' for me but he would never listen to her. When I asked her how she would feel if I put her in touch with an Albanian mother of a 12-year-old autistic child whom we had supported for a few years, she suddenly got interested! She got excited at the prospect of meeting someone with whom she could talk in her own language, free from judgement or lack of understanding.

They had several phone conversations and then arranged to meet. When I next spoke with L, she sounded happier and more positive about her son and their future together...

Vesna Glavas, Family Support Manager

L wrote to us to say, ***'It is so good you put me in contact with an Albanian woman with autistic child, and I can get information from her on how to act in my case, this would help me a lot, because my English is not very good, I believe that you also understood my situation. Thank you very much.'***



CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

OUR WORK WITH ORGANISATIONS

94% of autistic adults report experiencing anxiety, and 83% report experiencing depression (National Autistic Society, 2021).

Only 22% of autistic people are in employment - the lowest employment rate of any form of disability or difference (ONS, 2021), and 75% of autistic adults still live at home (compared to 16% of people with a disability). Numbers like these make us committed to driving behaviour change and helping to build a world which is understanding of autistic people and which doesn't push them to the margins of society and sentence them to a life of isolation.

'Informative, interesting, relaxed and empowering. Made me feel like I am already doing some things correctly, and plenty of ideas for a better understanding of how to support young people with autism.'

'Facilitator's experience was brilliant. She had great knowledge and was able to answer questions. Pitched at just the right level where it was an overview of info about the subject and still tailored to our organisation.'

'Clear overview of topics on autism with opportunities for questions and clarification. Insight on how to implement strategies in real-life situations. Opportunities to stay connected for further questions.'

Highlights of our work in changing behaviours and training organisations include...

- **16** youth organisations in London supported with a capacity-support programme, through a grant from the Mayor of London's New Deal for Young People
- **300+** secondary school students given autism awareness training in three school settings
- **400** professionals from sectors including education and youth organisations supported across **14** training sessions
- Featured in a BBC interview about autism and homelessness
- Supported Communicourt, the largest provider of intermediaries for HM Courts and Tribunals Service, producing a best practice guide on how to support autistic people in the criminal justice system
- Conducted autistic-led research on the intersectionality of Autism, Race and Culture, which was then presented to 100+ professionals in the London Borough of Newham, within our report entitled RfA's Report on the Challenges Facing Autistic People and their Carers from Ethnically Diverse Backgrounds

'Emily was really clear and expanded on the learning with anecdotes that really helped to clarify an example and make it resonate and stick in my mind.'

'Excellent trainer, really engaging and informed. Comprehensive slides and materials.'

VOLUNTEERS

Our volunteers are core to the services we provide. We are particularly grateful for their involvement in mentoring and befriending, play therapy, parent support, gardening and office support.

This year...

- **6,683** volunteer hours were donated
- **100+** volunteers supported our community and their families in London and the West Midlands
- **78** new volunteers joined our team

Volunteers told us that the benefits of volunteering which they most valued were...

- Greater understanding and awareness of autism
- Making a positive difference for autistic people
- Gaining new skills and experiences
- Enjoyment
- Helping others
- Meeting new people

‘Confidence is the BIG ONE. At first, I was nervous when I started on the training... but then you build up that confidence, as you want the best for the person you’re helping, that becomes your focus – working together to find solutions.’



‘I am gaining so much experience on how to plan and organise sessions, for my career in psychology, and learning so much about autism... I am really enjoying volunteering and being able to get to know and support (person-centred) the young woman.’

SPOTLIGHT ON VOLUNTEER MENTORING

This year, through a grant from Mayor Sadiq Khan's volunteering programme, Team London, our volunteers supported 76 people through mentoring.

Our Mentors supported young autistic people, helping them to build personal and life skills, confidence and self-esteem, both at their home and in the community.

**4,014 hours were donated by our
Volunteer Mentors this year.**

**Mentors told us that they were particularly proud
to make a difference to their mentees, who noted...**

- Improved social skills and independence
- Increased self-confidence
- Confidence to try new things
- Improved mood and reduced anxiety



‘He has historically been plagued with ‘bad voices’ – where he starts speaking in the voice of people who have upset him in the past. Recently, he told me that he has a new coping strategy for this – when the ‘bad voices’ try to sneak in, he starts speaking back to them in MY voice, because it makes him feel safe and happy. Apart from being one of the nicest compliments I’ve ever received, I was really proud of him for being so resourceful and for problem-solving by himself :)’

‘Before, the young person would jump from one topic to another and would often not answer my questions as they would get easily distracted by something else, but now when in our conversations it is much more collaborative. I think this is due to us building a strong relationship; it’s one of the things I am the most proud of from my volunteering so far.’

‘The young woman I am supporting struggles with anxiety and understanding emotions, she often thinks people are angry with her. Now that we are building trust she speaks more freely to me. When we first started, she would only meet up for 30 minutes as she was so anxious, and now after 3 sessions we have met for an hour! We are working on understanding emotion when out in the community and on how to cross the road other than where there are traffic lights.’



‘My mentor is someone I would be friends with and not just someone who’s helping me. We have a lot in common. I warmed up to her very quickly.’

‘Our son B has found his sessions with Nazir absolutely amazing. The benefits are many but generally: 1) To have someone nearer his age who can champion him and make him feel connected is really so helpful. 2) He is mid-GCSEs and the pressure and anxiety can get very overwhelming, his mentor understands and can support in ways we, his parents, can’t. 3) It helps him realise that his social isolation will change as he gets older. It gives him perspective. It takes the pressure off us and his sister and gives valuable time for us to step back and focus on her.’

TAKING ON BOARD FEEDBACK

Although we love receiving so much positive feedback, we take great care to listen to constructive feedback and requests that we gather during the survey process so we can make changes to our services to ensure their relevance and quality.

‘Please provide more termtime clubs and holiday schemes’

→ *We are exploring new funding opportunities which will enable us to offer more such activities and bring respite for families.*

‘It would be useful if the RfA website was up-to-date with photos and descriptions of what team members are responsible for.’

→ *Our Co-Production Group has suggested multiple changes to our webpages which we have now incorporated, including making it more focused on our support for adults.*

‘More opportunities for people we support of a similar age to meet up for group activities.’

→ *A key priority for next year is to increase the number and frequency of our young peoples’ groups, funding permitting.*

We would like to express our warmest thanks to...

- The parents, carers, adults and young people who completed our survey and feedback questions
- RfA’s extraordinary Services team, who make a difference to thousands of people each year
- The incredibly committed RfA office team members in London and the West Midlands who enable our work
- Our army of volunteers, who calmly and quietly get on with supporting our community and without whom our impact would be smaller
- Our Board of Trustees for their efforts on behalf of the people and families we support
- Our community of supporters, funders and donors, who enable us to have a growing impact year on year
- All the children and families that we have supported over the last year for showing us that our work really does make a difference

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