

Recipient of the
Workforce Development
Innovation Fund 2015/16



learn
from others

Association for Real Change (ARC) and Speak-up for Autism

Autism awareness training

This project looked to develop a programme of training on autism awareness from a person centred perspective, and to pilot delivery of this training to groups of 20-30 social care and teaching staff.

Health and social care staff can now access autism awareness training from teachers who are on the autism spectrum. The Association for Real Change (ARC) worked with Speak up for Autism Group to make the Level 3 Award in Education and Training accessible for people with autism. When reasonable adjustments were made to the qualification delivery, six people achieved the award and have already delivered training on understanding autism to more than 60 health and social care professionals.

ARC is a national membership group representing service providers in the learning disability sector. Our purpose is to improve the quality of life for people who have a learning disability. We provide a range of services including information, networking opportunities, learning disability training, qualifications, publications, and Disclosure checks. ARC is based in Chesterfield, Derbyshire and covers the whole of England.

Speak up for Autism Group are seven adults on the autism spectrum. They are a self-selected advocacy group within the organisation Speak

up Self Advocacy based in Rotherham. The group was involved in a research study that helped them to develop digital skills. They used an online e-portfolio to reflect on their experiences and learning, and to identify their plans and aspirations for the future. As part of this project, the group members started to teach other people and professionals, with and without autism, about the e-portfolio as a vehicle to assist in their personal development. As a result, the seven group members discovered they enjoyed teaching and decided they would like to teach people to understand autism. Their aim was to take a professional approach and achieve the Level 3 Award in Education and Training.

What we wanted to achieve

The first objective was to develop a programme of training on autism awareness from a person-centred perspective, and to pilot delivery of this training to groups of 20-30 social care and teaching staff. The training would be evaluated, and the data used to improve the programme where necessary. It could then be offered to more staff in the health and social care sectors, and other related sectors.

The group was supported in this work by a researcher from Sheffield Hallam University (also an employee of an advocacy group). The researcher had already worked with Speak Up for Autism Group for two years, and had a deep understanding about how people on the autism spectrum learn and develop. The programme was to be designed with the guidance of a City & Guilds assessor, or qualified teacher to ensure it would be effective.

The second objective was to enable all seven members of the group to register for, and work towards, the Level 3 Award in Education and Training. They were to be supported in this by ARC's qualification centre. Reasonable adjustments were to be made to the teacher training course by the assessor/ trainer, with support from the researcher, to create more accessible learning and development for individuals on the autism spectrum. Portfolio development, observations and other assessments would be conducted by an assessor in line with City & Guilds and regulatory standards.

The group would achieve the teaching qualification, to which they all aspired, enabling them to offer training on a formal, professional basis and to be paid for their work. Our aim was for at least two members of the group to successfully complete the qualification before the end of the project, with the others completing shortly after. It was envisioned the learning from this project would be shared, and the group were keen to become role models and assist others on the autism spectrum to become trainers.

What we did

We all discussed and agreed the following learning outcomes for the autism awareness programme, each was chosen from the national occupational standards in understanding autism:

1. I can describe types of difficulties that individuals with an autistic spectrum condition may have with language and other ways of communicating with others.
2. I can explain why it is important to recognise that each individual on the autistic spectrum has their own individual abilities, needs, strengths, preferences and interests.

3. I can outline the use of visual communication systems for individuals who have an autistic spectrum condition.

We produced lesson plans, course materials and hand-outs. The session was presented first to a group of staff from Sheffield Hallam University. We used their feedback, and the reflections from the group, to improve the session in terms of timings, and the specific role of each trainer. The session was then delivered to staff at the National Autistic Society (NAS) school.

Each of the seven people from Speak up for Autism Group was registered for the Level 3 Award in Education and Training and an induction day was held.

The Teacher Training course was designed and delivered by the assessor/ trainer and researcher. Reasonable adjustments to course materials, hand-outs and assessment activities were made and these were further adapted as a result of feedback received from group members. The two main changes were:

- An additional date was added to the Teacher Training course.
- The proposal to assess with assignments was rejected when it became evident that the group preferred to use discussion and written questions.

Assessment was ongoing throughout the course, culminating in individual micro-teaching lessons where the sessions were recorded and reviewed. During these sessions, learners demonstrated competence in delivery with constructive feedback generally only given about the actual session plan. The level of delivery easily met the standards within the award.

What we achieved

Five of the original group plus an additional, self-funding learner achieved the whole award before the end of the project and a learner who re-joined, achieved one of the three units.

The portfolios were fully assessed and internally quality-assured within the timeframe, and the group now has five members with a fully accredited qualification in education and training. The group delivered the autism awareness

programme on two occasions during the project to staff at a nearby school run by The National Autistic Society (NAS) and spoke at a Sheffield Hallam University event. This training was well received and positive feedback was given following both sessions. The target of delivering this training to 20-30 health, social care and teaching staff was well exceeded.



The information on autism and group member's effort to raise autism awareness has helped me to understand autism spectrum disorders more and I believe it will help me in my professional life.

Training course attendee



The Speak up for Autism Group was asked to deliver more Autism Awareness training to the school after they completed the pilot sessions. The group now has the ambition to develop and deliver further awareness training, particularly around communication and the autism spectrum.

The group also aims to support others to achieve the Level 3 qualification in Education and Training and to act as mentors for other people with autism.

What we learnt

The most successful parts of the project were:

- Working in partnership resulted in mutual benefits to ARC and to Speak up for Autism Group.
- Co-delivery of the autism training, which provided a 'safety net' for the Speak up for Autism Group during the pilot stage.
- Co-delivery of the teacher training course meant that the course could continue during times when one to one support was needed for individual learners.
- Managing expectations about the number of learners who would complete the qualification within the timeframe of the project, resulted in our target being well exceeded. However, every group will be different and this might not always be the case.

The most challenging parts of the project were:

- Working with a group of individuals who are on the autistic spectrum was both rewarding and challenging. The group proved to be quick and efficient learners who exceeded our expectations, but who were easily distracted by external factors in their lives.

What we would recommend to others considering a similar approach:

- Working in partnership can be both beneficial and constraining. The benefits are in pooling resources and sharing knowledge and expertise, but in terms of geography and other roles, time together is constrained. As a result of this we focussed too much during the planning stage on being clear about and agreeing the outcomes, and not enough on how we were going to achieve these in terms of individual capacity.

This project addressed the 2015/16 priority on:

Projects that model approaches to developing a workforce with the skills necessary to provide improved person-centred care and support through multi-disciplinary working.

For more information please visit:

www.arcuk.org.uk
www.speakup.org.uk

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Skills for Care recommends

Skills for Care has helped to develop a range of resources that directly help employers and those caring for people with autism.

Autism skills and knowledge list

This enables individual workers, or services and teams, to work out whether they have the knowledge and skills needed to provide a good service to people who have autism.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/autism

Autism qualifications

We promote two autism qualifications. These are a Level 3 Award and a Level 3 Certificate in Supporting Individuals on the Autistic Spectrum.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/autism

Workforce Development Fund

Money is available for employers to claim back costs for the learning and development of their staff, including Autism units and qualifications.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/wdf

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