

Disability Sheffield

# A.A.T.A.C (Autism Awareness Training and Carers)

**Disability Sheffield is a user led organisation, run and coordinated by disabled people. We promote independent living for disabled people in Sheffield. By independent living we mean that disabled people have the same freedom and rights to exercise choice and control over their own lives as any other person.**

Recently we have moved into the area of employment support. With funding from the Workforce Development Innovation Fund, we were able to develop a training programme for people with autism, that would see them develop a training course about autism to deliver to health and social care professionals.

## What we wanted to achieve

Disabled people historically have always had things 'done to them' by professionals who have acquired their knowledge through text books rather than by truly understanding the personal experiences of people with autism.

Learning by listening to other peoples unique capabilities and experiences and by entering into their world, provides an invaluable opportunity for professionals to gain a much deeper understanding of autism.

The aims of the training were;

- to involve people with autism to deliver training
- for health and care workers to benefit from this insight to better understand autism.

We wanted to enable people with autism to tell their story but also for them to have some training on how to become a professional trainer.

We also wanted to be able to build a portfolio of training that we could use for other groups.

## What we did

We met once a week for six weeks for a full day and then delivered four free training sessions to health and social care staff in Sheffield.

We advertised for participants and held an open session for anyone interested in joining to find out more. The pre meeting also gives us a chance to get an idea of skill level and how we need to adapt the course.

## Session one: setting expectations and assessing skills

Session one looked at expectations of the programme including expectations of:

- the course for people with Autism,
- each other
- the facilitator
- the outcome of the end training to health and social care staff.

This enabled us to draw up a good group contract. We talked about giving thought to the areas that people would like to be included in the training such as social communication and imagination.

### **Session two: Different ways and experiences of learning**

Session two looked at our individual experiences of learning and whether they had been good or bad. We also looked at the different barriers to learning.

The facilitator had some pre made cards with different skills on. All participants were asked to choose cards with words on that described skills that they might have or use. Some of the cards were blank and we were asked to fill in other skills we have and rank them in order of what we felt were good at and what areas we felt we needed to develop.

The group created a presentation using a variety of different methods and covering topics such as barriers to learning, good and bad experiences of education and training and the skills needed to be an effective trainer.

### **Session three: Aims of objectives of the training**

Session three looked at 'Aims and Objectives.' We came up with the overall aim of the training we wanted to deliver to health and social care workers:

'The aim of this training is to give an introduction to autism, relevant theory and a personal insight from lived experience.'

The session also looked at different ways of presenting information i.e. the use of games and role plays.

We played a few games ourselves to see how effective they were.

We firstly played human bingo. People thought it was a good exercise in communication and

the complexities of the process of having to ask questions.

We also played the Lego game to also illustrate issues of communication difficulties. There were only three rules with this game:

- you can't talk
- you can't make noises and
- you can't draw.

Participants worked in pairs where person was given a picture of a Lego structure and the other person had to build the structure without seeing the picture.

- Pair one completed the tasks really fast (two ASD people) and they commented that they had quickly worked out a system and just followed that system for both tasks.
- Pair two (both neurotypical) found the task hard. They struggled to work out a system and stick to it.
- Pair three (two ASD people) also found this task a challenging and frustrating.

The task gave us an insight into the world of people who are nonverbal and also their carers/ supporters. The game helped the group to think about how ASD people sometimes struggle to ask for help or more information, and don't always have the confidence to ask for things to be written down. We discussed the issue of the task being completed in a comfortable environment and how hard it would be to communicate non verbally to people who don't know you, i.e. receptionists.

### **Session four: Icebreakers and energisers**

In session four each group member was asked to design their own icebreaker or energiser and get the whole group to do this.

### **Session five: Developing the session**

Session five was spent developing our session plan by using our learning objectives. We decided that we needed a mixture of games, power point presentation and speaking. .

### **Session six: The practice run**

During this session, we tried a practice run to see if our session would work in the allocated time and tweak the presentations where needed.

Given that we were only running four training sessions for professionals, it seemed sensible to have two participants on each session and a backup. The free training was advertised throughout third sector agencies, Local Authority and health service.

## What we achieved

We managed to bring together a small of people on the autistic spectrum alongside a carer, and together we have worked in a collaborative way to design and deliver a professional training course.

This project has had challenges but we all have gained a lot more insight into each other's issues and people have commented that they are more tolerant of their peers as they have had to learn to tolerate from each other some of the things they find difficult to tolerate from what they term 'neurotypicals'.

We have given some members of the group a chance to explore training as realistic job opportunity. All members of the group want to continue this training with us and roll it out into other areas such as commerce and education. One participant was keen to set herself up in business delivering training.

We have delivered four free training sessions to 36 health and social care staff, including mental health workers and IAPT workers.

All the participants of this course are now wanting to turn their learning into a qualification in training.

## What we learnt

There are a few points that we have learnt from the project.

- Personal experiences are better explanation of autism than from professionals.
- What seems to work well for people is to create an environment where their ideas are allowed to flourish and that they can quickly see how their ideas and creativity have been used to fully design something like this course.
- That six is probably the maximum number of people on the autistic spectrum that could manage for each project.
- One day a week training the trainer is a good amount of time to learn.
- It worked really well having an external supervisor for the facilitator to bounce ideas off.

One of the participants who has been involved with our project for a long time agreed to act as a consultant. This worked really well as we could talk to her about best ways to deal with situations that arose. It's been really useful also having some support with this from students who have assisted in the background with the putting together of the power point presentation as it has at times felt overwhelming.



This has been a great project. It was well planned and its been a great experience

Grace Parry  
A.A.T.A.C participant

## For more information please contact

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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](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Autism)

### Autism qualifications

Two new autism qualifications were launched in September 2014. These are a Level 3 Award and a Level 3 Certificate in Supporting Individuals on the Autistic Spectrum.

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Autism](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Autism)

### Workforce Development Fund

Funding 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](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/wdf)

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