

# Lincolnshire Autism Involvement; Person centred working for people who have autism

The Lincolnshire Autism Partnership Board includes representatives from health, social care, police, employment, community and voluntary groups and people with lived experience of autism. The partnership has an active commitment to involving more people with autism, carers and family members in co-producing and implementing a new local autism strategy.

## Background

A sub group of the Partnership is developing a multi-agency training strategy and plan to improve the knowledge and skills of the social care and health workforce and raise awareness of autism across the wider community.

A key objective of the training strategy is 'growing our own' network of experts with lived experience of autism as partners in the design, delivery and evaluation of the multi-agency training.

## What we wanted to achieve

The aim of the project was to provide people with autism and family carers who want to be involved in delivering training for the Partnership, an opportunity to develop their confidence, knowledge and skills, and attain a recognised qualification. The anticipated benefits and outcomes were:

- A core group of people with experience of caring for people with autism to help design, deliver and evaluate effective multi-agency training for the Autism Partnership.
- An expanding partnership network offering increased opportunities for employment, occupation, social and/or meaningful activity and inclusion for course participants.
- Improved knowledge and understanding of neurologically typical professionals of how to adjust and improve their communication to engage as partners with people with autism.
- To use evaluation and feedback from all involved to shape the strategy and plan for "growing our own" local, sustainable autism training expertise.

## What we did

We offered 12 places on an 'Introduction to Trainer Skills' qualification course to people with lived experience and family carers of people with autism.

All delegates self-selected to attend the course on the basis that they want to provide face-to-face autism awareness training on behalf of the Lincolnshire Autism Partnership.

### **1. Selecting participants for the course**

Details about the opportunity to complete the course were circulated to all partners/stakeholders within the Lincolnshire Autism Partnership, who in turn cascaded the information out to their own contacts and circulation lists. Expressions of interest were requested from individuals and there was a stipulation that every delegate needed to either have autism themselves or care for someone on the spectrum.

All of the expressions of interest received were reviewed by a small panel, consisting of a health representative, a social care representative and the Autism Expert By Experience Worker. Where appropriate the applicants were contacted to ascertain further background information about them before a decision was made on the participants to be selected.

### **2. The content of course**

The local authority workforce team had previously commissioned this Introduction to Trainer Skill course for care sector leaders and managers, and recognised that the 'fixed' structure, processes and content, required for accrediting the learning might present barriers for participants with Autism and family carers. There was particular concern that this did not result in a sense of frustration and/or failure for any of the participants.

Emphasis was placed upon enabling the participants to have positive experiences of engaging with the course and to achieve the stated outcomes of increased confidence, knowledge and skills in training.

A significant amount of joint working on planning and co-ordination took place to arrange adjustments in an individualised way. This included participants and the trainer completing 'One page profiles' to share, and the opportunity to meet with each other before the first day of the course.

Practical concerns about specific requirements, and potential barriers to success were discussed with the course tutor and actions taken to use person-centred approaches to co-create an enabling learning environment that benefited the delegates and the trainer/assessors and minimise risks, including familiarisation with the venue and a course briefing.

### **3. Delivering the course**

The Expert By Experience Worker undertook the course herself, and employed a 'hands on' dynamic and flexible approach in communicating with each participant as required, before, during and after each training day. This level of person-centred support included practicalities, such as sorting a transportation problem, and required skills in mentoring, interpreting and translating to ease the communication with and between participants, trainers and commissioners.

All achievements towards the training course were acknowledged and recorded in individual statements and certificates of completion for one or both training days, and the certification as appropriate.

### **4. Evaluating the course**

The participants all completed an evaluation of the programme to inform the Partnerships training strategy and plan. This included how they intended to put their learning into practice, and a follow-up evaluation will be undertaken.

“Everyone involved in the project learned from it – because it required us all to be prepared to venture into each other's worlds to make it work”

Kim Hughes  
Workforce Quality and Development Commissioner  
Lincolnshire County Council

## What we achieved

- 9 people completed both days of the course and all of these attained the qualification.
- Of the 9 who completed the course, all programme evaluations reported an increase in confidence, and knowledge and skills and 100% strongly agreed that the course had met their learning objectives.
- 1 participant on the course attended for 1 day and supplied very constructive feedback, confirming a decision not to become a trainer.
- Participants stated that they would be able to use their learning to deliver improved training to professionals and other people within the community to increase awareness about autism.
- The trainer and assessor commented that the standard of presentations given by participants was very high, and has led to an improved process for certifying individual achievements.

## What we learnt

- Co-production with the Expert By Experience Worker, who has excellent leadership and communication skills, was critical to the successful planning, implementation and evaluation of the project.
- Whilst all the commissioners and trainers

involved were keen to undertake and learn from the project, we were mindful of the risk of participants disengaging and/or losing confidence in their own abilities, due to our comparative lack of understanding of how autistic spectrum conditions may impact upon the learning and the reasonable adjustments that may be required.

- We recognise that person-centred communication is crucial to enabling people with autism to participate in formal training and/or achieve qualifications.
- The training provider gained significant learning from the experience of delivering an established programme in a person-centred way, which addressed the tension between the awarding body requirements and the reasonable adjustments that were needed for some of the participants.
- The experience has given us an outline 'blueprint' for person-centred training of experts by experience and family carers, which can be improved and adapted for people with a range of other disabilities.
- The commissioners recognise that it is imperative to support and consolidate the skills and learning of the Expert By Experience Worker and the course participants in creating a sustainable network, and are helping to shape plans for mentoring and 'buddying' systems linked to other Autism Partnership and community activities.

“The standard of presentations and range of methods used was excellent...some people were quiet and reserved during the course, but when they got up to speak they were really confident”

Mark Turton  
Trainer  
Orders of St John Care Trust

## 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.

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### 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)

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### 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)

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### 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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