



▶ autism ▶ asperger syndrome

annual review
2006 - 2007



Rhiannon Walters

The year covered by this report has been one for giving more control to the people who use our services.

In our residential service we have worked on person-centred plans for the people who live there. This new approach helps us to provide better services by taking our lead from the people who use them about what they need, what they hope for and what their priorities are. This sounds simple, but it is a fairly new approach which asks a lot from the person we are planning with, and takes skill and insight from the staff. We are learning from the experience and we hope to share our lessons with other organisations who provide services for adults with autism.

In our support services we have been trying to do less for the people who contact us for help about children and adult services, by supporting them to do more themselves. We have been trying

to give people the tools to address their own difficulties, and to identify some specific, solvable issues. For this, our staff need good skills and a rich understanding of both autism spectrum disorders and all the organisations and services that are relevant.

These approaches are important signs of the values of autism london. As you can see from the wonderful stories in this report, autism london has come a long way since its humble beginnings as North East London Autistic Society. We have even developed a new look – an image of the river Thames, which is synonymous with London and the developmental flow of our services.

Rhiannon

We believe that individuals should be supported to live as independently as possible in a home of their choice.

Our residential service in Leyton provides 24-hour support to 7 people with more challenging behaviours. We work hard to ensure that residents live in a happy and safe environment with their friends, respecting each person's choice to lead an independent life.



Many of the residents have supportive parents who visit their children regularly and they are invited to feed back to us in regular meetings. Ken, who is unable to communicate verbally, has shown noticeable improvements with his communication.

At a parents' meeting Ken's mother praised the service:

"I am so pleased with Ken's progress. We now communicate using makaton®, which has been so useful. He helps me a lot whilst he's at home over the weekend, both with the cooking and cleaning. I thank the staff for their support and hard work."

As most residents have complex needs and struggle with communication, the staff have worked closely with a speech and language therapist to help them communicate more effectively and improve their interaction with people. This has been very positive, with one parent commenting:

"It is so nice to see the change in Harvey. He now communicates more with me and he even volunteers to come shopping, which is a great achievement."





We believe that individuals should be supported to choose activities that could lead to volunteering, training or holding down a paid job.

Desmond Meldrum was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome in 1996 at the age of 48. Since then, he has made numerous talks to groups and organisations across the country speaking about his experiences living with Asperger syndrome. He has even found time to have several books published.

Excerpt from his autobiography 'Feeling Different':

Even from an early age, I always had this awareness that I was somehow different from other people. I did not speak until I was over three years old and then had great difficulty mixing with other people.

I also developed all kinds of strange fears, particularly of loud noises and flickering lights...I would not sleep at night unless I had a particular object in my hand and during my waking hours, clung to my mother at all times. I understood what other people were saying, but I did not know how to respond.

Joining the autism london Board of Trustees in 2001, Desmond makes a positive and valuable contribution to the way the organisation is run.

We believe that individuals should be supported to have fun and try new things in their social life so that they can choose and access the things they want to do.

With the emphasis upon independence, individuals are encouraged to make the most of their lives, irrespective of their disability. Taking part in community activities is a great way to meet friends and experience something new, whilst also improving their social interaction skills.

Fiona has an active social life, meeting friends and family regularly.

"I like it here at my home in Leyton. They take me into the community and I can do fun things that really help my communication. I like dancing and music and the staff support me with all my interests. I love my sisters – they visit me often. I also get on well with all my housemates."

Staff at the service always make time to take the residents out into the community.

"It really is an important part of our work. It's not just about supporting an individual in their home, that's only part of the story. We believe in enabling the resident to lead the kind of life they aspire to. We visit many different places within the community and actively encourage them to have fun and enjoy themselves."

Monica, Deputy Manager

autism london support services also arrange an annual day trip for its supporters. This enables families and individuals with autistic spectrum disorder to visit a public place of interest and enjoy a day out with people who understand their disability.



▶ support services



autism london provides a range of different services for people affected by autistic spectrum disorder. Our helpline receives calls from carers or individuals affected by autistic spectrum disorder, as well as from medical, education and social welfare professionals. We respond to requests for information about a wide range of issues including diagnosis, education and respite care. Some people just need a reassuring voice at the end of the telephone.

“My son now has the support he so needed at school thanks to the advocacy support I received from autism london.”

When someone is diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder, it is often a scary and daunting time. Building a supportive community where people can get together regularly can often ease one’s mind and can help each other to get through a very difficult time. Our Support Officers, Dee and Ethney organise and run the monthly support group meetings, which enable people to meet with others in a similar situation and discuss important issues such as social exclusion, education, discrimination, employment and personal safety, amongst others.

“I attended an excellent meeting on anger management. It really helped me to understand the anger and frustration I often experience and more importantly, how to deal with it.”

▶ person-centred approaches

Our staff have been working at developing and designing an autism specific person-centred planning framework for individuals in the residential service in Leyton.

Person-centred planning means that we really listen to what people want in their life. At the same time we also discover what help a person may need in order to get what they want. Plans enable people to be more in control of their lives and what is happening around them. The desire to have more friends and moving house are just some of the outcomes from

a person-centred plan. With help from others (friends, family, staff), people are supported to take action.

“The plans that we currently have with the residents have proved very fruitful as we are concentrating on the positive side of the individuals. This has helped the staff team to understand how we could help the residents achieve their dreams and aspirations.”

Richard, Registered Development Manager



Together with our partner organisation mcch, autism london will be playing a key role in an exciting new project that aims to help end the chronic exclusion experienced by adults.



This project was one of just 12 schemes that bid successfully for a share of £6 million of government funding pooled from the Departments of Health, Communities & Local Government, Work & Pensions and the Home Office. It will be supported for 3 years and aims to:

- ▶ improve individuals' ability to engage with services
- ▶ increase the support available to excluded adults with multiple needs
- ▶ help people negotiate points of transition in their lives

autism london has also received sponsorship from the Department of Health to develop PAN (Partnerships in Autism Network). This brings together autism service stakeholders nationally who are contributing to surveying and mapping the quantity and quality of existing helpline/web-based services.

Partners will meet bi-monthly to discuss, develop and improve the presence of autism helpline/web-based services within national health and social care provision with the aim of ultimately forming a national autism network.

Chair of autism london, Rhiannon Walters, said, "**autism london has lots of skills and knowledge to offer and we are delighted that the sponsoring government departments recognised the particular challenges experienced by many adults with autism. We look forward to making these projects a real success so that we can share what we learn nationally.**"

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