

Autism Voice UK End of Year Report



Enhancing Happiness in The Autistic
Family

December 2018 - December 2019

Looking back at 2019

Support for Wellbeing

Our Emotional Support for Wellbeing has continued helping autistic people and families live a better and happy life. While we continue holding monthly group sessions, participants were also welcomed to partake in weekly sessions, which include one-to-one support by appointment. We meet every Thursday at our address and work to support clients on a range of issues, from applying for EHCP, other essential benefits, attending annual review meetings, working with school authorities to ensure better support for our clients at school, signposting clients to other relevant services, escorting clients to GP appointments and home visitations to support



the entire family. All of which aim to help our clients live a happy and fulfilling life. We ran this service throughout the year. In February we started monthly support group in Southwark. This also has been very helpful in enhancing the support for autistic people and families in the borough. Within the reporting period, we held 6 meetings in Southwark and 12 meetings in Lambeth and was attended by 149 people. Thanks to Jill Franklin Trust, London Catalyst and the London Community Foundation for providing grants that supported this service. *"I love this meeting. It is a great place to meet other parents, to talk, gain knowledge and information about other services"* ~ Halimatu Turay

Arts and Social Club

Our arts and social club for autistic children between the ages of 3-15 which started in March this year runs every Saturday between 2pm-4pm. The club provides a safe space for the children to interact, boost self-esteem and help enhance a happy life for them. This club aims to support the children explore their talents in the arts and to help boost awareness about autism and autistic children among their non autistic peers. The club helps neurotypical children to understand difference. AVUK is aware of the practical and emotional benefits art lessons bring to children and since it starts, the club has supported 54 children. Thanks to Magdalene hospital trust for a £2000 grant received, we will continue with the club in 2020.



Workshop, Trainings and Conference

Let's Talk About Autism

Between January and March, we held three workshops title 'Let's About Autism'. The theme for this series was Happiness with three subthemes; How to raise a Happy



child with Autism and how to stay happy as a parent, Food and Staying Healthy with Autism and Fixation. The series provided happiness tips and techniques for supporting an autistic child for the whole family. It also provides tips on sensory sensitivity relating to eating sounds and food texture and in March speaker Holly Maby shared her experience of autism and fixation, discussed gender differences of fixation, how to encourage

fixation in young people and handling more intense fixation in young people. This series was attended by 40 people. Feedbacks from participants showed the series was timely and necessary. 90% believed more information and awareness about autism and speaking openly about the condition at community level will enhance happiness for the whole autistic family. *"Affordable activities for autistic children will be necessary, a place where neurotypical and autistic children can attend,"* ~ Anonymous

Autism in BAME Community Symposium

Marking this year's World Autism Awareness Day, we held our second autism in BAME community symposium in partnership with the critical disability/autism research group at London Southbank University (LSBU) and the Participatory Autism Research Collectives (PARC). The theme was 'Providing Comprehensive Care for Autistic People and their

Families'. It involves presentation from Professor BhismaDEV Chakrabarti from University of Reading, Professor Eddie Chaplin and Professor Nicola Martin from LSBU, Dr Damian Milton and Dr Susy Ridout from PARC and Hannah Hayward and Bethany Oakley from Kings College London. The confab provided a



platform for the autistic community in BAME, families, autism experts, students, service providers to meet, discuss and identify comprehensive care approaches that are multiculturally sensitive to the needs of the autistic community. Outcomes from the discussion includes the recommendation for more inclusion of autistic people and their families in BAME communities in the making of decisions that are relevant to their needs. The symposium was attended by 45 people. Participants included autistic adults in BAME, parents/carers, students, health and social care workers, autistic professionals, lecturers, teachers, researchers and other service providers in the UK. *"Every topic was useful. I enjoyed my time at the conference. Excellent presentation from all the speakers"* ~ Mom of autistic teenager

Capacity Building Training

In May we partnered with Certitude to organise a capacity building training for members and beneficiaries. The training was on the topic 'Learning Disability and Autism Awareness'. The training was part of the Treat Me Right project by Certitude. Modules included: In depth Learning disability and Autism Awareness, Effective Health Advocacy, Mental Capacity Act and DoLS in Healthcare, and Health Action Plans and Passport. The training was delivered by Israel Bernal Romero.



Participants gained insight and better understanding about learning disability and autism. *"The training gave me a clear insight about learning disability and autism. The language used was simple and comprehensible for everyone."* ~ Fatima

Autism and Employment

As part of the employment support project sponsored by Supporters of people's post code lottery, we held series of autism and the workplace training in the year. This include; Autism and the workplace, Money management and Metrobank Money zone training. These training discussed autism and the autistic person, communications skills at work, managing sensory experiences at work, anxiety management, organisation skills for a successful life at the workplace for the autistic person, Money goal (short/long), Budgeting tools, Income maximization and expenses minimization technique, Financial term and



illegal money lenders awareness, Generic money mindfulness model in accomplishing money goals. A total of 42 participants attended these training courses. Participants believed the content was wide and relevant and explaining the issues around anxiety was very useful, the length of the courses were about right, volunteers were friendly and very helpful, and the courses were very organised and better than expected. *"The content vast and varied. Very useful. The trainer was very knowledgeable and the ability to relate was spot on"* ~ Anonymous. As part of our job support, Autism Voice also organised Understanding Autism training for front office staff of the Peckham Job centre plus. A total of 12 staff participated in the training. The training informed them about basic knowledge about autism, sensory sensitivity relating to autism and different ways of supporting autistic clients. In September we attended the Peckham Job Centre Plus jobs fair and in October we partake in the Streatham Job Centre Plus Job fair where we met and supported some of their clients into employment, further skills/academic development and wellbeing support.



One to one Job Support for Autistic Adults

Our weekly job support for autistic people continues to help autistic people in working age gain vital skills and knowledge for successful job application, interview techniques, writing curriculum vitae and tips about staying in job. We offer one to one job support service at local job centres to autistic clients and people with related disabilities. The advice we offer also includes opportunity for skills training and/or academic development. The service also involves supporting employers to create an autism friendly working environment. We do assessment of workplace and make crucial recommendations to employers about making the workplace autism friendly. Employers in Lambeth and Southwark can contact us for this service. Since it started in June, we have directly supported a total of 57 autistic people, job coaches and employers. *“Autism Voice provides me with the support I have never been given before. Here they treat me as a family. They understand me, accept me and support me”*, ~ Michael. This service will continue in 2020 and we look forward to expanding this service to include more clients and better the service we offer.



Community Engagement



Our regular community outreach activities to faith groups, community groups in Lambeth and Southwark to educate communities about autism related stigma and discrimination in particularly the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community and how to break down barriers associated with them. Our outreach also extends beyond information and awareness, it includes wellbeing support and job support to adults on the spectrum. In April we attended the Lambeth Focus on Autism event and reached to many parents, autistic people and other service providers. In May, we extended our community outreach to the community of the Family Life Christian Centre in Southwark.

Mentorship

Our mentorship for autistic people provides confidential one to one support to autistic adults and their families on a range of practical and emotional issues with an aim of helping them identify and strategize plans to help in their personal development. Our mentors help them enhance their social and communication skills, help them access community facilities, assist them at GP appointment, help them in making telephone calls to vital services, supporting them to pursue their hobbies and interests, be someone they can speak to. Volunteers will also be working with others working with the autistic person including social workers to provide vital



information and support regarding the client. Our mentors are currently supporting 7 autistic people and their families.

Case Study and Testimonies

How Autism Voice changes a life- Aicha's story

When Aicha Sadiku walked the corridor of the office of Autism Voice in Clapham in July this year, she did not envisage that in a couple of months her life will be changed for good. In a month since she started receiving job support from Autism Voice, Aicha gained traineeship and a fixed term employment with Lambeth council. She also successfully applied for her Personal Independent Payment (PIP) for people with disability.



The Situation

Aicha, 23, is epileptic, with learning disability and a pending diagnosis for Autism. She was signposted to Autism Voice's job support project by her local job centre. With little hope she joined the project. Aicha was suffering from stress which was leading to regular blackouts for which she needed wellbeing support. Aicha who had been unemployed for two years due to her deteriorating health had very little hope that she could secure any job soon.

"I didn't know what to think when I started coming here. I just thought oh well this setting is a place where I can come every Thursday, talk about my issues and get genuine people who'll listen to me."

At the time Aicha joined the project she was not receiving any social benefits relating to her disability. Even though she was clearly suffering from several issues regarding her condition.

Success

With the help of our job support and wellbeing support advisors, Aicha's stress level reduced immensely, leading to very fewer weekly blackouts. In addition, Aicha was supported in writing her Curriculum Vitae, jobs were applied for including the traineeship by Mencap's Lambeth Inclusive Future Employment (LIFE) project. Aicha was offered a one to one support that prepared her for the interview. She was escorted to the interview and all other prework appointments both on phone and in person by an advisor. Aicha was also supported in applying for her Personal Independent Payment which came through successfully on the first week of November.

The Future

Aicha hope to maintain the fixed term role and look for other opportunities within Lambeth Council. "I am very excited. I can't believe this is happening to me. I was at a stage wherein I was not sure what the end of this year would be like. I am totally grateful to all the team at Autism Voice for the support. Now I feel happier, I see progress happening in my life, I am hopeful about the future once again."

Aicha will continue receiving wellbeing support from Autism Voice and we intend to extend this to other members of her family.

Meeting Autism Voice – A parent's story

My name is Josanne James. I'm a mother to a son (Delano McDonald) who was diagnosed with autism at age 4. Delano's autism is accompanied by learning disabilities and dyspraxia. Against the advice of others, he has always remained in mainstream schools. With a statement of special education needs, he's had a one to one ta or Las.

I really struggled when Delano left school because I did not have an advocate and I did not know what to do. Whenever I contacted International House (Brixton/Lambeth Sen) I got conflicting information. They obviously weren't bothered. I kept calling around but nowhere or no one would help us. I found myself completely



on my own. I was feeling overwhelmed and frustrated and stressed. I struggled on my own and became increasingly anxious about my son's future. I was sleeping even less than usual having always suffered from insomnia.

A few months ago, I was advised to visit the job centre to meet some people regarding support and advice about Delano. At this time, I was desperate and would have travelled to Timbuktu if I was promised any kind of help.

Not knowing what to expect I went along.

This was where I met the wonderful people from Autism Voice. At first, I was very anxious and cautious. I had become use to talking to people who had no clue about autism or what it is like to be a mom like me. I was usually judged and left to feel even more frustrated. I trusted no one. However, I soon realised that these ladies were not like that at all. I eventually relaxed, my back was not up against a wall, sweet relief at last. I finally found a place where I was understood and wasn't judged. I laughed for the first time in a while. I talked about my son in a relaxed atmosphere.

Since I met these beautiful women, I have had some relief. They were able to give me the support, advice and information I needed to make decisions to assist Delano.

They keep in touch regularly; I go to meetings and meet other moms just like me. I am no longer alone or ashamed. I do not feel like a failure anymore nor do I feel like I'm letting my son down anymore. For me, I met people who knows exactly how I felt, and I was comfortable. I found some people who shared similar experiences and knows exactly how to navigate this journey.

The support is phenomenal, and I do not know what would happen now if I hadn't encountered Autism Voice when I did. Now my sleep is improving because I do not feel like I'm swimming in a rough dark ocean alone anymore. I still worry about my sons' future, I'm still anxious but I'm not alone and now I'm sure I've got people who knows and understands. People who won't judge or mock me or my son. People who offer support and quality services.

Thank you for everything Mariama and the rest of the team from Autism Voice.

Volunteering with Autism Voice – Sonia’s story

Since volunteering with Autism Voice almost two years ago, I have met a lot of parents/carers and spent time with the autistic community. It has helped me to understand how life is for a young person or adult living with autism and trying to manoeuvre every day. It has been very refreshing to meet some inspirational people from different parts of the community. I have been privileged to connect with lots of professionals, some good and well informed.



As well as offering wellbeing within the community, the charity also runs several workshops during the year and being a part of the organizing team has enhanced my skills in events management.

Recently the charity has set up Employment Advice and Support service for autistic adults. This has opened a whole new world for me as I meet young and older adults trying to find full time employment, while managing their condition. Some time, it can be frustrating for the individual as they try to understand what the neurotypical employer is looking for. I try my best to explain to them why they do not always have the necessary skills for a certain position. Sometimes it takes a while to get some clients to understand why they need to be opened to alternative jobs in which they can exhibit their interests. I've learnt through trainings and personal advice how to deal with this. I do find it extremely rewarding when I am able to support the individual into full time employment.

Benefits for me include:

- Meeting life-long friend
- Going to a workplace I enjoy and gaining
- It has increased my self-confidence

This role has fired me up to pursue a course in management recruitment. And above all connecting parents/ carers and autistic adults to the workplace through an organization that understands their needs and can communicate this to the outside world is really a fulfilling achievement that I will forever be proud of.

What Arts and Craft mean for my child – A parent’s testimony

Arts and Crafts has made Margaret discover the enjoyment of painting and drawing and likes the freedom to draw/paint whatever she likes. Margaret also enjoys the freedom to make bracelets and necklaces with beads etc and has become quite artistic in her designs. Well done to the staff of Arts and Crafts for opening the childrens' imaginations in a positive and helpful environment. ~ Paulette.

Coming Up in 2020

Social Support for Healthy Living

The project will involve 10 young Lambeth volunteers who will provide community support service to 10 autistic people between the ages of 12 and 25. The aim is to enhance their social and communication skills, help them access community facilities, support them at face to face or telephone appointments, supporting them to pursue their hobbies and interests, be someone they can speak to. It is an exciting opportunity for the volunteers to develop skills and knowledge about community development, social action, disability and autism.

This project is supported by the #IWillFund. The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport are each investing £20 million seed funding over four years to create the #IWillFund. The London Community Foundation is raising match funding and awarding grants on behalf of the #IWillFund.

Note

All other projects delivered in 2019 will continue in 2020.

Please contact us via telephone or email if you wish to be part of any of our project.

Strategic Priority

Autism Voice currently uses a space at the West Indian Association of Service Personnel headquarters for all our services. Having a space which we could use for all our services and for us to be able to do more is one of our key strategic priorities. Having a building which we could design to fit with our needs and the needs of the autistic community will assist us in pursuance of our vision, mission and key objectives particularly in relation to:

- Researching and documenting the scope and nature of autism in communities we operate and planning a strategic approach to addressing the challenges therein to ensure autistic people and their families live a healthy and happier lives.
- An interactive website - Improving our web presence, allowing people from around the world to interact and participate in information exchange and learning about autism particularly how it is approached, perceived and accepted by different community groups.

Autism Voice is immensely grateful in having committed staff and volunteers who continue to assist us in delivering our services. Without the contribution of their time and the tremendous effort of our unpaid staff, we cannot achieve our vision, mission and objectives.

Autism Voice also wishes to thank the following for their financial support during the reporting period:

- Big Lottery Awards for All
- Supporters of People's Postcode Lottery
- London Community Foundation

- Ernest Cook Trust
- London Catalyst
- Jill Franklin Trust
- Magdalene Hospital Trust

We are also very thankful to all of you who supported us one way or the other throughout the reporting period.

For our latest financial report, please check company house website.

Please register to support us at:

<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/autismvoice/>