

<p style="text-align: center;">Stars in the Sky Yorkshire Developing the involvement of people on the Autism Spectrum in Wakefield - January 2010</p>
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Background

Stars in the Sky Yorkshire aims to provide opportunities for adults with learning disabilities to develop their social networks, keep in touch with existing friends, meet new friends and have opportunities to develop relationships.

A key priority is to ensure this opportunity is open to as many people as possible irrespective of their learning disability and broader support needs. For example people with complex needs, people on the autism spectrum

Introduction

As of January 2010 the total membership of Stars in the Sky is 80 people, approximately 40 of these live in the Wakefield District, of this 40 however only a handful of people are recognised / diagnosed as being on the Autism Spectrum.

Stars in the Sky Yorkshire is keen to address this issue and therefore increase the opportunities for people on the Autism Spectrum to become members and enjoy the opportunities being a member provides.

Progress to date:

Following an indication from Jayne Gilmour – Service Manager, Strategy and Business Development, Adults of Wakefield MDC that funding could be available to address the above, a meeting was held between Gillian Quinn – Autism Advocate and Development Worker for Your Voice Advocacy Project, Karen England – Development Manager SITSY and John Proctor – Assistant Regional Director Hft, to discuss possible ways to work in partnership

This paper provides details of what it is felt the issues are and initial thoughts on how these could be addressed

The issues and how we might address them

1) Low awareness of Stars in the Sky ?

Evidence suggests many people are not aware that Stars in the Sky exists – an issue that is not unique to people on the autism spectrum, however the means by which this issue would be addressed could be different for this group of people

Suggested action:

- Develop marketing specific to this target “audience”
- Identification of and the development of links with groups and individuals in Wakefield and utilise current networks to raise awareness of Stars in the Sky and develop the take up of membership by people on the autism spectrum

2) How we make the membership process more accessible

Many people on the autism spectrum find it difficult to deal with the various stages of the membership process and this proves a barrier to them becoming members. It is important each stage is as accessible as it can be

Suggested actions

- Look in depth at the Systems / forms /stages etc within Application process and identify areas that could prove to be a barrier for people on the autism spectrum.
- Implement changes where appropriate in response to the above

3) How can we support people to develop the social skills and awareness needed to enjoy what being a member offers ?

The nature of Autism means that many people find it very difficult or impossible to access Stars in the Sky as they lack the skills required to form friendships and relationships and find it difficult to function in a social environment.

Suggested action:

- To identify the skills people on the autism spectrum need and determine how / what training would provide opportunities for the development of such skills
- To identify and train a group of people to provide support and mentoring to individuals to develop their skills and awareness in social settings and enable them to become members of Stars in the Sky.
- To explore the possibility of people on the autism spectrum playing key roles in the planning and delivery of such a programme and perhaps developing a mentoring role for others
- Using the above people to offer a Buddy system whereby people can come to an event or be involved in a 1;1 meeting supported by a trained member of staff or volunteer.

4) Can we change the support Stars in the Sky's volunteers and staff provide to make it more accessible ?

Stars in the Sky has run in a particular way since its inception in Sept 2007, however by changing / developing the support it offers would this make it more accessible to people on the Autism Spectrum ?

Suggested actions:

- Talk to people on the autism spectrum and determine what if any changes would remove any barriers currently making membership difficult
- To provide volunteers and staff with a programme of Autism Awareness and Autism Specific Training

- To develop and run a programme of events etc that is accessible to people on the autism spectrum
- To explore ways by which People and Places – Stars in the Sky's - Social Networking site can be used more to enhance access by people on the autism spectrum.

The next stage

- Meeting held with Gillian Quinn to explore / discuss the above
- Draft proposals taken for consideration and comment to Gillian's group to ensure full involvement from people on the autism spectrum
- Meeting held with Rachael Margrave – Back In Touch
- To submit the above proposal to Jayne Gilmour – Service Manager, Strategy and Business Development, Adults Wakefield MDC to access funding for such a development