

The Development of an Adult Autism Assessment Team in Grampian

PATHWAY

Lizzy Archibald Clinical Lead / Specialist Occupational Therapist, **Katja Neumann** Principal Clinical Psychologist, **Emma-Louise MacPherson** Lead Speech and Language Therapist, **Sue Grassick** Advanced Nurse Practitioner, **Nicole Schneider-Drummond** Specialist Occupational Therapist and **Julia Fry** Project Support.

Description

An adult autism assessment service was not available in NHS Grampian. It was identified through the national Autism Strategy that Health and Social Care Partnerships required to develop assessment services. The output of a working group considering this requirement, was the development of a clinical team that would provide autism assessment for adults residing in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire HSCP areas.

Methodology

Dr Marion Rutherford facilitated a workshop with a working group where a potential model for the team was discussed. This team started working together in January 2021. The team developed a pathway from scratch. The team adopted learning from other HSCP areas and used resources created by the National Autism Implementation Team (NAIT) as a guideline for the pathway. From the start, the team were keen to develop the pathway with oversight from a local autistic led third-sector organisation. This involved regular meetings with them to review the pathway and documentation. A team like this was not available in Grampian before the current team was established. This is an assessment only service but intervention sits across the pathway in terms of effective conversations.

Aims / Objectives

The need is recognised but not available in all areas of Scotland. The team in Grampian is resourced for four hours per week. The team is a fantastic blend of multidisciplinary colleagues who use current best practice guidance to fulfil the role of the team in our local community.

'I am very grateful to this service. It has led to a big breakthrough in my life. Without this service I would still be in a difficult place in my life. This service and the people involved are vital and I am so grateful for all of them.'

Key Objectives:

- Establish a sustainable adult autism assessment model.
- Apply best practice from other Health Boards and learning from those with lived experience and third-sector.
- Embed service within local communities.
- Stimulate multidisciplinary diagnostic discussions as key to process and diagnostic decision making – this is the heart of the team.
- Make a difference to those accessing the service.

Results / Outcomes

- A sustainable assessment pathway has been developed however more resource is required to ensure waiting list is manageable.
- Best practice is central to the team's assessment process and this has been discussed with colleagues at NAIT.
- Successful embedding of service in communities through social media awareness raising, including during Autism Acceptance month, and CPD sessions to interested others including mental health teams.
- Team expanded to Moray HSCP area in May 2022.
- Robust database developed for team including data on diagnostic rate.

Feedback

We conducted a survey of those who have been assessed by the team so far. We had a **50%** response rate and the results were very positive:

100% of respondents felt listened to; that it was easy to speak to the assessment team and that their views and worries were taken seriously.

89% of respondents felt that their appointments were at a convenient time.

100% of respondents would recommend the service to a friend if they needed it.

100% of respondents felt the help they received was good.

We received feedback about what else might have helped and most respondents felt that more post diagnostic support would be helpful.

Post diagnostic support is available through local third sector organisations, however, should resource allow, there is much that the current clinical team could offer in terms of this post diagnostic support and intervention using established clinical training and skills. This might also include consultation and advice to other services.

References

Scottish Strategy for Autism 2011 www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-strategy-autism/pages/1/
National Autism Implementation Team www.thirdspace.scot/naif/

NHS Grampian - caring • listening • improving

