

## Autism & Mental Health Q2 year 2 Interim Update:

- **Influencing**

- A highlight of the last quarter has been our publication of the Good Practice Guide, which is designed to help mental health professionals adapt talking therapies for autistic adults and children. The Guide sets out how, often simple, adjustments and adaptations to talking therapies (which are used widely by the NHS to treat common mental health conditions) can make such a huge difference to autistic people and the kinds of care they receive. It also provides practical support and checklists to support professionals to positively modify their practice.

Now published, the Guide has already been shared with NICE, Royal College of Psychiatrists/British Society of Psychologists, BACP/UKCP and was mentioned as part of the Government's Autism Strategy on how their approach will be informed.

We have also received some brilliant feedback following the Guide.

**Please see Appendix A to read some of this feedback.**

Going forward, we will continue to disseminate the Guide widely, including organising a roundtable meeting with NHS England and other key organisations to discuss it.

In addition, wider influencing work is taking place:

- We are in the process of producing a toolkit to be used by autistic people themselves. We are co-developing this with teams across our organisation, including those in our branch network and our Autism Inpatient Mental Health Service.
- We are working with Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) to develop a Positive Practice Guide and 2-pager to be used by IAPT practitioners.
- To mark World Mental Health Day on 10 October we shared a Stories from the Spectrum interview with Abdullah Shahjan, an autistic practitioner whom we had worked with on the guide <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/stories/stories-from-the-spectrum-abdullah-shahjan/>. Abdullah spoke about why it is important to make adaptations and adjustments for autistic clients with reference to the guide and how being autistic influences his practice.

- **Online community**

- We are pleased to report that the Online Community is continuing to provide life-changing peer support to users. Between April and September:
  - There has been a total of 141 discussions on the Mental Health and Wellbeing board - which can be found [here](#). Recent topics of conversation have included: how to make friends safely, parents and carers looking for mental health support for their autistic child, and how autistic people can support their own wellbeing;
  - 1,179 posts needed moderation. This was done by our eight volunteer moderators, who currently support the Online Community to ensure it is a safe and welcoming space, and who respond to conversation threads that require signposting to other services and organisations. This means that the Online Community is moderated seven days a week;
  - Moderators have spent 304 hours moderating the Community.
- We are also pleased to say that in September we hosted our Online Community Volunteer Forum. This time, the main focus was on safeguarding including reviewing our safeguarding policy to ensure all volunteers are knowledgeable and comfortable with using it, and looking at case studies.

At the Forum, we also discussed some newly updated resources, how to prevent spam from becoming an issue in the Online Community, and also to read over the positive feedback the moderators, and our support had recently received. **Please see Appendix B to read some of the most recent feedback we have received.**

- **Helpline Training**

- We are making good progress with delivering autism training to other teams, and particularly helpline teams, based at other charities.

Delivered by Trainers in our Training, Conferences and Consultancy team, teams will receive our three-hour standard 'Understanding Autism' training. However, our Trainers will also speak to each charity in advance to understand if there is anything additional they would like

us to include in their training, which may be particularly beneficial for the kinds of work they do – for example a specific focus on children.

We are currently planning sessions with Mind and Young Minds, and will be approaching charities such as Mencap, Shout, NSPCC and Childline as potential other organisations to receive the training.

- **Digital Guidance work**

- Over the last quarter, our digital guidance work has progressed well.

Our Autism Knowledge and Expertise team, who create and maintain pages of evidence-based, up-to-date information on a range of mental health illnesses, for primarily internal use, are currently working with our Digital Guidance team to transition these to be available publicly from our website.

Topics of information will include:

- Addiction
- Anxiety
- Depression
- OCD
- Eating disorders
- PTSD
- Suicide
- Self-harm
- Bi-polar disorder
- Autistic fatigue
- Catatonia

By growing the information and guidance we provide on our website, we will enable the people we reach to better navigate to and access the specific information they need.

- In addition, we have produced a Digital Guidance plan in partnership with Mind, including:
  - Developing clearer user journeys across the National Autistic Society and Mind websites;
  - Developing new content for both charities to use.

- **Social media campaign**

- Finally, we would like to make Axia ASD aware of a projected £8,925 cost saving this year. This is due to the Covid-19 pandemic still having an impact on budget lines such as volunteer travel and expenses, and our move to all of these activities being done virtually. To confirm, all planned activity will take place but we are making large cost savings on volunteer travel and expenses.

In order to meaningfully utilise this funding and to contribute to our overall campaign, we propose to deliver a social media campaign in the run-up to our Mental Health Conference in March 2022. This will then draw greater attention to our mental health resources and campaign.

By utilising the Conference as a hook, as part of the Campaign we could:

- Ask our group of autistic content creators to film videos;
- Deliver blog posts;
- Deliver personal stories/interviews/Q&A sessions;
- Share tips for autistic people and professionals;
- Signpost to our digital guidance and Online Community;
- Encourage people, and particularly mental health professionals, to attend the Conference;
- Share the Good Practice Guide;
- Include paid promotion on social media to reach more people.

**If you have any questions about this update, please do not hesitate to contact me:  
Gaby Richardson, Corporate Partnership Manager | [Gaby.Richardson@nas.org.uk](mailto:Gaby.Richardson@nas.org.uk) |  
07849991508**

## Appendix A – Good Practice Guide Feedback

### Contributors to the resource - (autistic people involved in the interviews)

- It's brilliant! An absolute credit to you, I love the layout, the visuals, the simple-but-not-condescending language, it's perfect. The graphics are so good. I worked on the STOMP brochure recently and really pushed for less text and more diagrams so I'm really delighted to see others are doing the same. I really got a lot from contributing to this, thank you for listening.
- Thank you very much for sharing. How exciting and what a great piece of work. Many thanks again - this is hugely timely for us personally and I'm sure it will prove invaluable to many others in the community.
- Just wanted to say how impressed I was at the guide - it is really clear and useful and I am very grateful for the opportunity for my experiences to contribute to this. Thank you again for this chance.
- Thanks for sending this - oh my goodness I just had a read through and almost burst into tears! It's just amazing to see so clearly and beautifully presented, so much that would have made our experiences so much more effective and easier to cope with. I can't thank you enough for undertaking this project, and for doing it so well. It looks fab – what a great resource. Well done!!!
- Many thanks Fliss. looks great. Really looking forward to seeing it used, and to any feedback from practitioners

### Lauren, on her involvement as a case study and the research:

- 'Thank you so much is all I can say, I am so grateful for the opportunity. thank you for helping me be able to do something so big. I am lost for words. I am so happy and humbled and excited. Thank you for making the reasonable adjustments to accommodate and making all this possible.'

### Externally

- I just had a look at the guide and it is very well put together and clear. About the right length too so not excessively over-facing for clinicians. I will recommend it to the RCpsych autism clinical group. - **Royal College of Psychiatrists Autism Champion**
- Thanks so much – this looks brilliant. I also work as a child therapist, and from that perspective think this looks really useful – I've shared it with a few other therapists. I'll share it with the helpline team too. – **YoungMinds**
- Great work!!! - **NHS England Improvement - National Autism Team**

- This looks like an incredibly practical guide and something that would be really useful to our audience - **Public Health England**

## Appendix B – Online Community

July 2021	"Thank you for your reply, it gives me positive hope"	<a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23053/medication-for-anxiety-in-teens">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23053/medication-for-anxiety-in-teens</a>
July 2021	"Thank you for that. It did help"	<a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/22951/meltdowns-negative-thoughts">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/22951/meltdowns-negative-thoughts</a>
July 2021	"Thank you for your reply... things are already starting to get better now that I am part of a community."	<a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/22833/hello-reaching-out-for-first-time">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/22833/hello-reaching-out-for-first-time</a>
July 2021	"I'm glad to see others identify with what I'm talking about though, to know it's not just me."	<a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/22770/anxiety-and-obsessions">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/22770/anxiety-and-obsessions</a>
July 2021	"My GP should be calling me soon. I'm going to tell him everything and how I'm not coping with everyday life. I just want help. Thank you for the links." – response to links posted by Mod	<a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/22761/can-the-gp-refer-you-to-an-acute-inpatient-service">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/22761/can-the-gp-refer-you-to-an-acute-inpatient-service</a>
August 2021	"Well, if I am around, I would be willing to listen"	<a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/22770/anxiety-and-obsessions">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/22770/anxiety-and-obsessions</a>
	"That's very kind. I'll bear it in mind and maybe drop you a message some time 😊"	
August 2021	"This forum is the best place on the internet for me right now. The only place where others truly understand me."	<a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23240/staying-out-of-arguments-debates-as-an-autistic">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23240/staying-out-of-arguments-debates-as-an-autistic</a>
August 2021	"You are the first person I have come across who seems to be experiencing a very similar situation."	<a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/20553/useful-resources-webinars-etc-on-burnout-extreme-withdrawal-and-hygiene-issues-in-adults">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/20553/useful-resources-webinars-etc-on-burnout-extreme-withdrawal-and-hygiene-issues-in-adults</a>
August 2021	"Thank you. I cleaned up the bathroom and kitchen as a favour to the staff - that made me feel good."	<a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23338/feeling-like-i-have-the-weight-of-the-world-on-my-shoulders">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23338/feeling-like-i-have-the-weight-of-the-world-on-my-shoulders</a>
August 2021	"I identify"	<a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23358/shutdowns">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23358/shutdowns</a>
August 2021	"I'm grateful you said this. For years I have assumed it was depression or laziness."	<a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23377/how-to-clean-my-flat-properly">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23377/how-to-clean-my-flat-properly</a>

	<p>"I'm so grateful to this marvellous forum and the compassion, generosity and kindness of your contributions."</p> <p>"I love the way you make it possible by introducing manageable steps."</p> <p>"...this forum has given me hope"</p>	
<u>August 2021</u>	<p>"Yes I have this but you have drawn attention to it for me; thank you."</p> <p>"Oh god, I've resonated with so many things people have said, but this one especially!"</p> <p>"Hi, and welcome to the forum. It's good to hear that you are working with supportive people at least."</p>	<p><a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23049/mentally-exhausted-interacting-with-other-people">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23049/mentally-exhausted-interacting-with-other-people</a></p>
<u>August 2021</u>	<p>"Well done for writing and asking something you found difficult."</p> <p>"Good advice that there is no way one should or shouldn't be. Thank you"</p> <p>"This is such a helpful reply, thank you"</p> <p>"It is very brave of you to reveal that you are dealing with this, we should all learn from that"</p>	<p><a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23371/tearful">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23371/tearful</a></p>
<u>Sept 2021</u>	<p>"I identify with you. The kind contributors here are the beginning of your help"</p> <p>"I feel a sense of being trapped and I get hope from what you write about help within NAS."</p> <p>"The MH nurse was very supportive. I felt quite a bit better after speaking to her. My GP practice called the next day and reduced my meds back to previous levels, as the increase was likely causing the negative effects. I also got prescribed some extra meds for anxiety, which seem to be working well. Thanks for your kind words."</p>	<p><a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23421/depression-and-suicide-thoughts">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23421/depression-and-suicide-thoughts</a></p>

Sept 2021	"Here here. Couldn't have said it better myself. Thought it was only me that saw things this way"	<a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23528/changing-perception-of-others">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23528/changing-perception-of-others</a>
Sept 2021	"I was going to do a more serious post, but wasn't comfortable with the content. So I'm just going to say thank you for supporting me with my mental health crisis."	<a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23441/thank-you-for-your-support">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23441/thank-you-for-your-support</a>
Sept 2021	"For whatever it's worth, I know exactly how you feel"	<a href="https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23421/depression-and-suicide-thoughts">https://community.autism.org.uk/f/mental-health-and-wellbeing/23421/depression-and-suicide-thoughts</a>
	"Stay safe and smile, you can do this"	