

A YEAR IN REVIEW 2022



**Autism Bedfordshire** 

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### BEDFORDSHIRE



# HELPLINE SUPPORT



Our telephone helpline is open 9am –5pm, Monday to Friday for information, advice, and guidance on all aspects of Autistic Spectrum Conditions and associated problems. We provide advice and support to autistic individuals, parents, carers, partners, and professionals.



01234 350704

Key topics: social opportunities, mental health/health and diagnosis



helpline calls taken in 2022



Hours of support in 2022

"Until I spoke to Autism Bedfordshire I felt like no body cared, then I spoke to Rachael and she helped me understand what support I needed and helped me to understand how I could help my son"



## EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

### EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

Our employment support service is designed for autistic adults who are looking to find paid work, volunteering or enter into education or training. The personalised program is designed to fit around the individual's strengths, needs, and aspirations. We aim to ensure every person who enters employment support is not only closer to the job market but leaves more confident and independent. Alongside being able to offer 121 support, the team will often deliver webinars and skills courses to support those who are taking their first steps into the world of work, helping them to understand what it means to be 'work ready'.

This year, our Employment Service team supported 13 autistic people into sustainable paid employment and 3 into volunteering and training, 2 of which were successfully accepted onto university courses.

- supported into paid employment
- 3 supported volunteering
- 2 supported into higher education

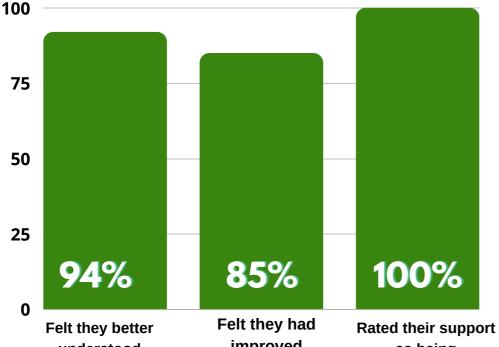








# WE ASKED OUR MEMBERS TO FEEDBACK ON OUR EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT



Felt they better understood what their employment options improved their employability skills

Rated their support as being above average

"This service made a difference in my life"

"Accessing this service has helped me to get employment and helped improve my day to day "Sonya has made a massive difference. She has given me so many extra tools to help me navigate the muggle world of work"



# TRANSITIONS SUPPORT

# TRANSITIONS SUPPORT

At the start of 2021 the Adult Services department launched 'My Future', a new and exciting transition support service that was designed to help young autistic adults (18–25) and their families to navigate the confusing world of adulthood.

The service was split into 3 keys areas which had been identified to us through feedback from our parents/carers and autistic individuals.

It was made up of:

- Parent Support Workshops
- 121 Support for Autistic adults
- A summer program to support young autistic adults about to transition into college or university.

Over the past 12 months this provision has grown in response to the demand; we have hosted a transitions conference, held 9 parent support sessions, and delivered 5 extra programs to support young people whilst still providing 1:1 support in the community.



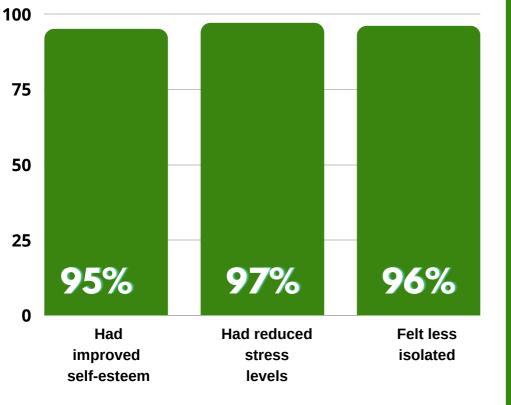








# WE ASKED OUR MEMBERS TO FEEDBACK ON OUR MY FUTURES PROGRAMMES



"I am happy I got to make a new friend"

"This course
helped me feel
more confident
about how to
build positive
relationships with
people"

"The best thing about the course is learning about things I haven't learnt before"

#### Case Study

Y came to Autism Bedfordshire at 22 years of age; he was in his last year of college and was due to finish his education after having it extended for 2 years because of Covid 19. He lives at home with his mum and has a few interests and hobbies such as reading, drawing, and watching TV.

Since being at college on a supported internship he has had a few short-term work experiences supported by the college staff; these placements have been predominantly customer service based, such as reception duties. Y has high levels of anxiety; he also presents with echolalia. This is a behaviour where the individual will repeat what is said to them over and over to enable them to process the information that has been received. Understandably, this has proven to be a significant barrier to his communication skills and has negatively impacted his confidence and ultimately limited his employment opportunities.

Y had expressed in his application form and during the initial assessment that his main goals were to make friends and increase his work experience. However, he was unsure how to overcome his barriers as he didn't have a lot of confidence and struggled with low self-esteem. Y did have a few friends at college but once his course ended in June, his opportunity to socialise ceased. Also, no specific guidance was given regarding what his plans might look like once he finished studying. Despite a desire to increase his social circle, access the community, and ultimately find employment Y did not know how to improve his situation, which was disappointing as he was very keen to utilise the specific skills that he developed whilst at college.

For the reasons above, Y seemed an ideal candidate for My Future's 3-week Summer Program. This was being held in Dunstable, so access was not an issue. Despite an understandable level of anxiety due to the thought of taking part in something new and unknown Y thoroughly enjoyed the course and was able to demonstrate and reinforce the skills that he developed at college. Y fully engaged in all activities and over the duration of the course, he was able to practice and improve his communication skills with people who were essentially strangers to him.

At the end of the program, Y felt confident enough to engage in social opportunities with other Autism Bedfordshire members and now regularly attends the Dunstable and Luton Social groups. He also stated that he would like support to find paid work and was therefore referred to the My Futures Transitions Pre-employment course that ran in October. This course covered: CV writing, job searching, applying for work, and interview techniques. Y worked well on the course and continued to grow in confidence. He now feels that he is ready to apply for paid work opportunities and has been transferred to the employment team at Autism Bedfordshire where he continues his journey to find the right job for him



### SUPPORT GROUPS

#### SUPPORT GROUPS

During 2022, we increased the number of support group sessions as a result of the needs shared with us by our members and launched a Wellbeing Support Group.

We are currently running an online Female Voice group, which provides a safe space to share experiences, and explore relevant topics and resources. This is a bi-monthly group and two face to face meet ups. We have explored a variety of topics this year within the female voice group.

#### Here are some of the topics covered:

- Female Health and Healthcare Services
- Breast Self-Checks
- Understanding Meltdowns
- One woman's experience of late diagnosis

We are also running a parent support group, which provides a space for autistic parents to share mutual experiences of parenting whilst providing support and resources.

We have also continued the Carers support group which is aimed at those who are autistic and caring for others. Each month we have explored a variety of support and services that are available whilst providing an opportunity to share experiences and concerns.



members attended
Female Voice
Sessions



total number of support group sessions run this year



hours of support received at support groups



#### Some of the topics we have covered:

- Understanding Anxiety
- Body Image
- Self-Esteem
- Dealing With Stress
- Understanding Emotions
- Mindfulness
- Challenging Negative Thoughts
- Positive Thinking
- Motivation
- Self-Love



total attendance of the wellbeing group in 2022



### BENEFITS SUPPORT

#### **BENEFITS SUPPORT**

In September 2021 Adult Services launched a brand new Benefits department. Since launching the benefits department, it has gone from strength to strength, and in the last 12 months has supported 46 autistic adults across Bedfordshire to collectively receive £131000.00 in Benefits.

The benefits team are able to offer information, advice and guidance with PIP and universal credit.

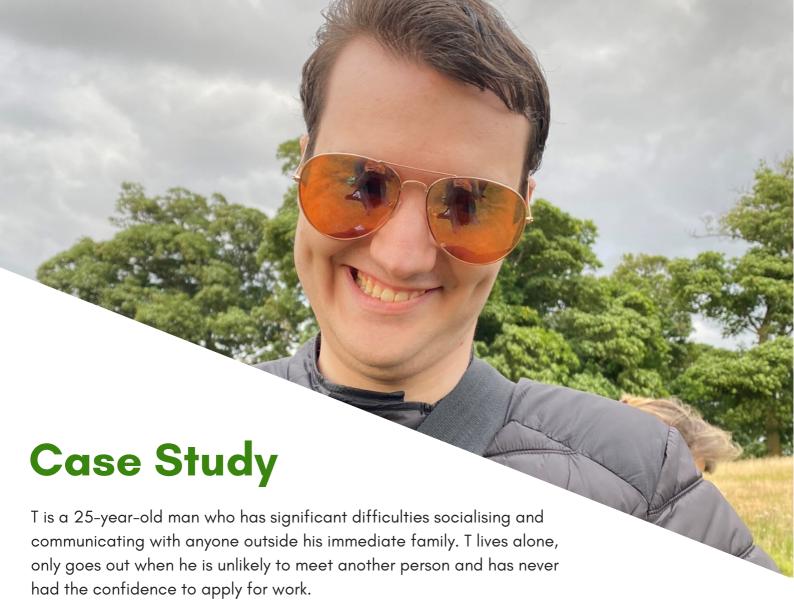












T was sent a Personal Independence Payment (PiP) review letter. Because of his inability to ask for support he completed and returned the form stating that nothing had changed in his condition since his original PiP award. After months of waiting his PiP was withdrawn stating that he showed no difficulties in any of the 10 activities of daily living or the 2 mobility activities.

With this further hit to confidence, his mother contacted Autism Bedfordshire for help and together with T and his mother a Mandatory Reconsideration letter was compiled. T waited a further 12 weeks and this too failed to convince the DWP of his entitlement to a PiP. The next step was a PiP Tribunal. This was requested and the court accepted the request, and a date was fixed. It was then necessary for the Benefits Advisor to meet T as he would need to share all the paperwork and build up a level of trust as he did not have any family members available to support him at the hearing.

Meetings were arranged at a place and time to suit T. Over the weeks leading up to the Hearing the Benefits Advisor was able to prepare T by helping him to articulate the difficulties he experiences as he would be expected to speak for himself at the Hearing. On the day of the Hearing the Benefits Advisor was able to sit with him for further reassurance.

The outcome of the Personal Independence Tribunal Hearing was a reinstatement of PiP Benefit. This was backdated to the date of the original reassessment.



# HEAR ME, SEE ME



#### HEAR ME, SEE ME

During the summer of 2021, we initiated the *Hear Me*, *See Me* campaign, an initiative in partnership with the NHS exploring inequalities autistic adults face when accessing healthcare services. 2022 has been bigger and better then 2021 and we have helped even more people have their voices heard!



empowering educational workshops for autistic adults and parents of autistic adults since launching



voices heard across across the East of England - autistic adults and parents of autistic adults



webpage created containing resources to support and empower autistic adults

https://www.autismbedfordshire.net/supportfor-adults/hear-me-see-me/



#### HEAR ME, SEE ME

Following the initial success, we wanted to keep the momentum of the Hear Me, See Me campaign going by feeding back our findings to healthcare professionals.

Since launching we have held 6 professionals workshops which have been attended by over 1000 healthcare professionals. In 2023 we have planned a further 4 workshops focusing on: Pre and Post Diagnosis Support, and also Transitions,



healthcare professionals attended the workshop



Views have taken of the workshops on YouTube



of those who attended would recommend this workshop to a colleague



# SKILLS DEVELOPMENT COURSES AND WORKSHOPS BLMK

# SKILLS COURSES AND WORKSHOPS

Adult Services has continued to deliver a range of skills development courses and workshops, both online and in person. Having the flexibility to offer both virtual and face to face courses enables us to remain accessible, and flexible to our members' needs. Our skills courses usually run for six weeks, which provides attendees opportunities to develop relationships and tools. Our workshops remain one-off sessions online, which allows members to focus on a specific skill and to 'drop in' from anywhere in Bedfordshire. This year, we were able to provide a number of online yoga sessions and online dance sessions, which enabled our members to try something new. We also launched a brand new relationships course for autistic adults and their partners with the aim to build better relationships and an opportunity to learn and understand each other more.

"It helped me to network with others, gain knowledge and insight and feel more confident"

"Since completing the course, I have felt more confident and for the first time in 2 years I've not felt like I needed someone to help me cope with my dayto-day life. I thought I knew a lot about autism, which I did, but I now understand my own autism better. I felt the fact that other people on the course validated my experiences and feelings made me more comfortable with my diagnosis and with myself and who I am"

"Accessing has allowed me to learn new things and meet new people"

#### Skills and Workshops: Some of the topics delivered

- Understanding My Autism
- Resilience in the Community
- Confidence in Social Situations
- Online Safety
- Grounding Techniques
- Budgeting
- Challenging Negative Thoughts
- Strategies for Social Exhaustion
- Building Better Relationships
- How to be Kind to Yourself
- Cooking and Healthy Eating
- Preparing for the Festive Period

#### A member's story...

"The course, Understanding my Autism, is perfect on this matter because it is bespoke for my neurodiverse brain and given under professional supervision. The information is explained and discussed. During these discussions, we have shared experiences with others in a similar situation that resonates and helps identify how the theory applies to reality. It is important to understand my autism because this is the only way I can take measures to address my well-being. By getting aware of what are the challenges that are my own unique combination in this huge spectrum, I can work on accepting some issues and choose the ones that I will make adjustments as well as educate people close to me on what I need help with and how they can be of help as well as what are the aspects I will need more compassionate understanding.

From what I had already learned, I can say understanding the aspects of flexibility, sensory processing, communication and social interactions that apply to my autism were the most helpful aspects, because I could identify my challenges, and this worked well for my logical thinking and need for structure in ways I believe is making possible for me to plan for strategies that can make my life more comfortable and even eliminate some of the discomforts. This definitely brought good change into my life. Some of my family members said it was the first time they heard me talking I had hope. They also have been pointing to me that I appear already a bit better. My self-esteem and mental and physical health were severely impacted by not addressing some issues my autism caused me over the years."

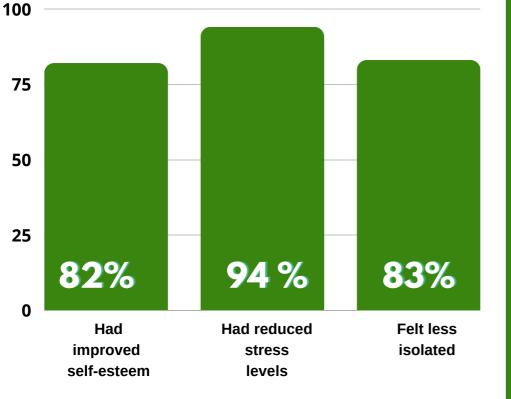








# WE ASKED OUR MEMBERS TO FEEDBACK ON OUR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS AND COURSE



"It has made me happier as I feel I know a lot more about autism and now proud of having autism"

"This service has helped me understand my rights and my anxiety"

"This service has allowed me to develop important life skills as an adult"

"The best thing about accessing this service is meeting new people and it was good to be part of a class and learn.

Can't wait for more classes"



### SOCIAL GROUPS



#### Daytime social groups

Our Social Groups are designed to provide social opportunities to autistic adults who are looking to develop friendships within a supported and structured setting. Within the groups, individuals learn social skills and gain greater self-esteem by developing an independent social life away from their family unit. Group members are encouraged and enabled to decide, plan and organise social activities with the support of our experienced staff team.

Daytime social groups that run in person are:

- Bi-weekly social group Bedford
- Bi-weekly social group Luton
- Monthly social group Biggleswade
- Monthly social group Marston Moretaine

Where additional funding can be secured we aim to offer a variety of autismfriendly sport and leisure opportunities around the county. These can include:

- Tennis
- Dance
- Yoga



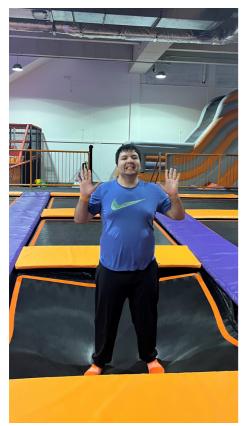
Our evening social groups typically take advantage of the local community facilities and members will be either visiting restaurants, the cinema or other local leisure activities. Sessions are generally supported by two members of staff and take place across Bedfordshire:

Adult Evening social groups in person are run in:

- Ampthill
- Bedford 18-25
- Bedford 25+
- Biggleswade
- Luton
- Leighton Buzzard
- Dunstable



evening social groups run across Bedfordshire in 2022



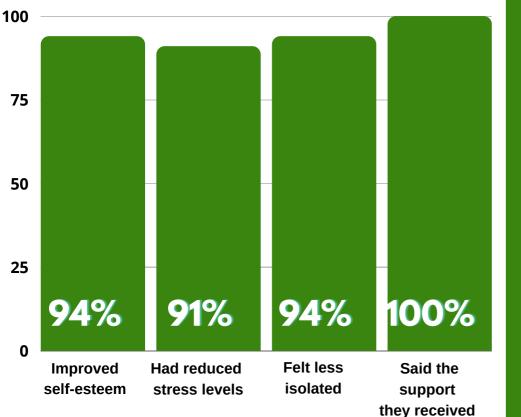


was above average





# WE ASKED OUR MEMBERS TO FEEDBACK ON OUR FACE TO FACE SERVICES



"To have something to do, if I didn't have my social group I would have nothing"

"All the staff are brilliant. and the service is great, I feel like our voices get heard and that's important."

"I have met other LGBTQ+ autistic people. Also attending the walking group gives me a reason to get up have a wash and meet others, I look forward to it each time. I feel like I group of people that understand me." Our summer and winter socials are designed to provide an opportunity for some of our members to visit places they haven't been to before, that may be a little further than their hometown. It is also a chance to try out new activities within a safe and structured setting.

#### Trips we have organised this year:

#### Summer

London Day Out

Wrest Park

Pride

Big Night Out

MK Sci-Fi trip

The Big Picnic

St Albans Trip

Stand-up paddleboarding

Female Voice Afternoon Tea

#### Winter

Sledging trip

Pantomime-Theatre

Bedford Christmas Tree Festival











# POST DIAGNOSTIC SUPPORT BLMK

February 2022 saw us pilot a brand new department within Adult Services. Our Post Diagnostic Support department was launched to provide support one to one in Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes. This support was available to individuals who have had a recent diagnosis and are wanting to understand their diagnosis further, or are wanting to discuss specific difficulties and looking for support and strategies.

In 2023 a full report will be written and made available about the findings of this pilot.







"I can't thank you enough for the support you have given me, it really is appreciated so much. I'm ok at the moment because you helped me so much in the sessions we have had. I'm getting to grips with my autism and see it as a gift rather than a hindrance."



I got a tremendous level of understanding of my autism and learned why I am the way I am. It helped me accept my diagnosis and open up to my wife which I had never done before and accept help and also to just be more comfortable in my own skin. I learned things I had experienced but had no name for like energy levels and stimming and other coping strategies for meltdowns etc and my wife also gained a lot from my sessions and finds it easier to help me and understand me even when I do not myself!

Lisa was excellent throughout, very patient (I interrupt a lot and go off on tangents!) and very professional and understanding. She kept me informed as to when my sessions were and sent reminders, all of which made this whole experience easier for me as I have trouble dealing with broken routines/appointments. She informed me of all sorts of support and offered what she thought might be applicable to me which made me feel like finally someone was listening to me and had an idea where I was coming from which has been quite rare for me so that was amazing! I cannot recommend Autism Bedfordshire enough to anyone on the spectrum who needs help or support, they certainly would not regret it!"



# SUPPORT IN MILTON KEYNES



Our telephone helpline is open 9 am-5 pm, Monday to Friday for information, advice, and guidance on all aspects of Autistic Spectrum Conditions and associated problems. We provide advice and support to autistic individuals, parents, carers, partners, and professionals.



01234 350704

Key topics: Social Opportunities, Learning and Development Opportunities



helpline calls taken in 2022



Hours of support in 2022

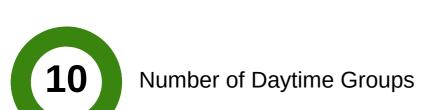
<sup>&</sup>quot;Finally someone is listening to me, being autistic and living in Milton Keynes is like a life sentence, no one cared about me or what i neeeded until now"

### MILTON KEYNES

Daytime Social

Groups

Our Social Groups are designed to provide social opportunities to autistic adults who are looking to develop friendships within a supported and structured setting. Within the groups, individuals learn social skills and gain greater self-esteem by developing an independent social life away from their family unit. Group members are encouraged and enabled to decide, plan and organise social activities with the support of our experienced staff team.

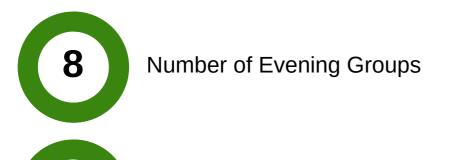


19 Number of Adult Supported

### MILTON KEYNES

Evening Social Groups

Our Social Groups are designed to provide social opportunities to autistic adults who are looking to develop friendships within a supported and structured setting. Within the groups, individuals learn social skills and gain greater self-esteem by developing an independent social life away from their family unit. Group members are encouraged and enabled to decide, plan and organise social activities with the support of our experienced staff team.



**21** Number of Adult Supported

# ADULT SERVICES NEW SERVICES IN BLMK IN 2022



### **New this Year**

- 1. A 121 Post Diagnostic Service in partnership with ELFT
- 2. A monthly face to face evening adult social group in Dunstable
- 3. Launched a brand new Skills Course supporting Autistic adults to build better relationships
- 4. Launched the Bedfordshire Autism Voice Groups in Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough
- 5. Launched a brand new Transitions
  Conference

In response to member feedback we have developed six new services this year

# ADULT SERVICES NEW SERVICES COMING IN BLMK IN 2023



- 1. Launch a brand new monthly face to face adult daytime social group in Leighton Buzzard
- 2. Launch a brand new pre-diagnosis service in partnership with ELFT
- 3. Work in Partnership with BLMK ICB to create brand new resources making diabetes services more accessible for autistic people and those with a learning disability.
- 4.Launch a brand new parent/carer/support group.
- 5. Create a series of workshops and skills courses supporting autistic people to date safely.



# HERTFORDSHIRE

# ADULT SERVICES HERTFORDSHIRE



In 2021 Autism Bedfordshire were successful in their bid to provide life changing opportunities for autistic people aged 16+ across Hertfordshire.

Know locally as Autism Hertfordshire, the service was launched under the Autism Bedfordshire umbrella in November 2021 and has gone from strength to strength. The team provide a multitude of support services including:

- Helpline Service
- Skills Development Courses and Workshops
- 121 Post Diagnostic Support
- Transitions Support
- Carers Support





In 2019, based on feedback from autistic adults and their carers and in collaboration with the Hertfordshire All-Age Autism Co-production Board, Commissioners started a review of services and support for autistic adults in Hertfordshire.

The review and design of the new service was co-produced with people with lived experience, carers and professionals and we heard the views of hundreds of people across the County. One of the key findings of the review was that we needed a service in Hertfordshire that would deliver support, advice and guidance to adults with autism and their carers. In 2021 the Integrated Health and Care Commissioning Team commissioned Autism Bedfordshire, an experienced, specialist autism charity to deliver a new community support service in the County. Known locally as Autism Hertfordshire, this new service will offer support to adults both pre-and post-diagnosis through a range of interventions including group work, skills training and development and 1:1 support, in recognition that getting the right support at the right time is crucial to achieving better outcomes in the longer term. Our vision is that Hertfordshire is recognised as an autism friendly county, in which people with autism can live fulfilling and meaningful lives within communities that are understanding and supportive. This new service forms part of that vision, designed by people with lived experience and their carers, to make a real impact to people's lives and we look forward to working with Autism Hertfordshire over the coming years to realise this vision".

Tara Mullaeny

Lead Commissioner for the Integrated Health and Care Commissioning Team



# HELPLINE SUPPORT HERTFORDSHIRE



Our telephone helpline is open 9 am-5 pm, Monday to Friday for information, advice, and guidance on all aspects of Autistic Spectrum Conditions and associated problems. We provide advice and support to autistic individuals, parents, carers, partners, and professionals.



01727 743246

#### Key topics: Mental Health, Training and Support Opportunities



helpline calls taken in 2022



Hours of support in 2022

<sup>&</sup>quot;Someone actually cares now, for so long I felt desperate and alone and wanted to die because no cared"



# POST DIAGNOSTIC SUPPORT HERTS



Those who access this service will be offered up to eight 1:1 sessions either online or in-person with a member of staff from Autism Hertfordshire.

What are the 1:1 Sessions for?

They are for specific problems that you may need some support to resolve. For example:

- Support in managing difficult emotions
- Problem-solving support for specific difficulties, For example, coping strategies
- Assistance to complete forms, for example, DLA, Care needs assessment, etc.
- Advice relating to accessing and maintaining education or employment
- Advice about difficulties in relating to others
- Finding out what support is available from other services
- Support with referrals to other services
- Gain more understanding about autism spectrum conditions
- Advice on how to manage sensory processing difficulties



# TRANSISTIONS SUPPORT



Members have access to specialist skills development courses during school holidays and term time and also a bi-weekly social group; both activities are focused on giving the young person every opportunity to learn and develop the skills needed in the adult world.

#### Topics include:

- Confident in communication
- Travel training
- Preparing for college and university
- Cookery and Healthy eating
- Budgeting
- Friendship skills
- An Introduction to employment and volunteering



People Supported



# SKILLS DEVELOPMENT COURSES AND WORKSHOPS HERTS



Our exciting Adult Skills Development and workshops are designed to support autistic adults over the age of 18.

The courses and workshops are moulded to support autistic adults, whether they are newly diagnosed or have been diagnosed since a young age. The main aim of this service is to create an inclusive environment for all adults to feel safe to share any personal experiences away from any judgement.

We pride ourselves on having a person-centred approach with our members when developing our courses and workshops. The feedback we have from our members helps us to facilitate new courses and workshops, specifically tailored to support autistic adults in a neurotypical world.

#### Topics include:

- Confident in communication
- Masking, unmasking and shielding
- Understanding energy levels
- Being kind to yourself
- Values and beliefs
- What is autistic identity
- Understanding my sensory needs
- Understanding PDA
- Understanding my autistic identity



Hours of attendance



## SUPPORT GROUPS HERTFORDSHIRE



Carers are able to attend groups as and when it is convenient for them. They are welcome to drop in as often or as little as they like; we understand that the caring role can at times be unpredictable and demanding. There is no cost to attend our groups.

### Parent Carer workshops have included:

- Understanding and managing anxiety
- Support with speaking to professionals
- Self Care
- Carers Assessments and managing the process
- Understanding financial support that is available to you and your family
- What is a Needs Assessment and why are they important?
- De-escalation strategies in the family home



members attended
Carers support
Group



#### **Support Groups:**

- A monthly Wellbeing group
- A monthly Peer Support for Newly Diagnosed support group
- A bi-monthly Autistic Carer support group
- A monthly Female Voice group
- A monthly Carers Support 25+ group
- A monthly Transitions Carers Support group



members attended support groups in 2023

# ADULT SERVICES NEW SERVICES COMING TO HERTFORDSHIRE IN 2023



- 1. Launch a brand new monthly face to face adult daytime social group in Stevenage
- 2. Launch a brand new pre-diagnostic service
- 3. Launch a Peer Support program
- 4. Launch a brand new monthly adult evening social group in St Albans
- 5.Create a series of brand new skills development workshops to support those who have co-occurring support needs
- Run our first ever Transitions Conference in Hertfordshire



## Adult Service

#### Meet the Team



Sharna Raine ADULT SERVICE DIRECTOR



Data Officer



BLMK Service Manager



Angela Amitrano Heather Wildsmith Co Production and Engagement Lead



**Emily Cullum** Skills and Post Diagnostic Lead



Elizabeth Cook Adult Services Manger Herts



Sonya Power **Employment Support** , Offlicer



**Annette Reid** Co Production and Engagement Officer

Saeeda Younis

Marketing Support Officer



Lisa Bowes Senior Adult Skills Tutor





**Ellys Morton** Adult Skills Tutor



**Kerrie Lister** 

Amanda McGuire Adult Skills Tutor and Support Officer



**Rachel Hatton** Transitions Support Officer



**Judy Wardle** Adult Skills Tutor and Support Officer



**Wendy Jephcote** 

**Rachael Champion** Helpline and Assessment Officer



Sam Brown **Employment Support** Officer

