

Homeless Link

Autism & Homelessness

Launch of updated Toolkit

Wednesday 17th April 2024



Aims

- ▶ To launch the new Autism & Homelessness Toolkit
- ▶ To give some background to the development of the toolkit
- ▶ To explore how to better support autistic people experiencing homelessness

Research Evidence

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What is autism?

- ▶ Atypical social understanding and interaction
- ▶ Perceived inflexibility
- ▶ Sensory differences
- ▶ Lifelong condition

Homelessness research

(Churchard et al., 2019)

1.1% OF
GENERAL
POPULATION
ARE AUTISTIC

The diagram consists of three main elements: a rounded rectangular box on the left containing the text '1.1% OF GENERAL POPULATION ARE AUTISTIC', a small white circle in the center, and a large white oval on the right containing the text 'PUBLISHED PAPER: 12% OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS SHOWED STRONG SIGNS OF AUTISM'. A black arrow points from the rounded box to the small circle, and the small circle is positioned between the box and the large oval, suggesting a flow of information or a causal link.

**PUBLISHED PAPER:
12% OF PEOPLE
EXPERIENCING
HOMELESSNESS
SHOWED STRONG
SIGNS OF AUTISM**

Social differences

- ▶ Two areas:
 - ▶ Social understanding
 - ▶ Social interaction

Examples

- ▶ *This client does not initiate social interaction and displays a rigid smile when greeted. They give tangential responses and speak in stilted sentences.*
- ▶ *This client does not make eye contact, has a blank facial expression, and has to be told when interactions are finished as they would not pick up on this otherwise.*

Restricted and repetitive behaviours & interests

Inflexibility & repetition

Items in this client's room are organised in rows. Their day follows a precise routine of when they sleep and watch TV. They always take the same route to the shop and have rules about where shopping can be placed in their flat.

Fixated interests

This client makes lists of obscure musicians and has a large collection of broken electronics.

Sensory differences

When fire alarm went off unexpectedly seemed like they would scream, always has curtains closed, burnt hand badly but seemed under-reactive to pain (waited 1 week to seek treatment).

Autism & trauma

Risk from others plus core aspects of autism (Rumball, 2019)

Increased risk of developing PTSD, and trauma less likely to be recognised? (Haruvi-Lamdan et al., 2018)

Trauma and autism combine to make it more difficult for the individual to make use of support offered?

It is important to recognise the strengths and skills autistic people may have. Some possess detailed knowledge about things they are interested in, or have particular skills in subjects such as maths, IT or art. They may have a good eye for detail, an excellent memory, and be able to concentrate well on a specific activity. Autistic people are often direct, truthful and reliable.

Remember strengths!


Updating the Autism and Homelessness Toolkit

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With thanks to: Autistica, City of Westminster,
Homeless Link, National Autistic Society,
Resources for Autism, St Mungo's and all the
contributors to the toolkit

?
Why study this?
(AI)

High Levels of Mental Health Conditions
78% of individuals in the homelessness sector have a mental health condition (HCP, 2018)

Low Levels of Social Support
78% of individuals in the homelessness sector do not have a close family or friendship network

Low Employment Rates
31.7% of individuals in the homelessness sector are employed

Homelessness Experiences
78% of individuals in the homelessness sector have experienced homelessness



Co-Production

Learning to learn
This programme is designed to help individuals learn from their own and others' experiences.

A series of co-production workshops were used to understand the needs of autistic individuals in homelessness services

Work to update and expand the current Autism and Homelessness Toolkit

What we did...



Autism and Homelessness



Updating the Autism and Homelessness Toolkit

The Autism and Homelessness Toolkit

The toolkit was developed to help individuals with autism and homelessness services understand each other's needs and work together to improve services.

Updating the Autism and Homelessness Toolkit

What was added...

What we found

Co-occurring Conditions

Coaching

Supporting Case Studies

Understanding the autism spectrum

Being an autistic person

Shutdowns, meltdowns, and sensory overload

References

- 1. The Autism Research Centre, 2018
- 2. The Autism Research Centre, 2018
- 3. The Autism Research Centre, 2018
- 4. The Autism Research Centre, 2018
- 5. The Autism Research Centre, 2018
- 6. The Autism Research Centre, 2018
- 7. The Autism Research Centre, 2018
- 8. The Autism Research Centre, 2018
- 9. The Autism Research Centre, 2018
- 10. The Autism Research Centre, 2018

Autism and Multiple Disadvantage - Bringing About Systems Change

VICTORIA ASEERVATHAM

ROUGH SLEEPING ACCOMMODATION COORDINATOR & CHANGING
FUTURES PROJECT MANAGER, WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL

Applying an 'autism lens' across homelessness services in Westminster

- ▶ Started with rough sleeping teams – bitesize training
- ▶ Added a screening question/prompt on assessments
- ▶ Created a regular 'advice clinic' format for workers to meet with the WCC Autism Assessment Psychologist to discuss strategies
- ▶ Identified which accommodation options work well across pathways
- ▶ Awareness and communication training for Housing Options workers
- ▶ Prevention – autism awareness detailed in the floating support specification

Autism and multiple disadvantage forum – MEAM work strand

- ▶ The MEAM perspective:
 - thinking beyond an organisational lens
 - making the system visible

Helped create permission and space for this work

- ▶ Came up with a remit: targeting – people with autism but not co occurring learning disabilities, who are facing lots of difficulties at the same time e.g. mental health, substance misuse, homelessness, criminal justice interactions etc. The aim of the group is to improve join up among services to better support people, putting people with autism at the heart of this work

Collaborations have included: floating support, libraries, criminal justice, prevent programme, leaving care team, autism diagnostic service, westminster employment service, CMHTs, hospitals, Housing Options, Trailblazers, outreach, supported housing, counselling, adult education etc

Quick Wins

Created opportunities to get together

Pulled together and circulated good directories of services

Put out lots of free bitesize training opportunities

Greatest Hits

Putting autism awareness in the floating support specification

Autism aware tenancy sustainment clinic

Westminster Employment Service Autism friendly statement (with social value link up)

Autism Champions programme

Research collaborations

Work in progress

Transition from young persons services to adult services

Care Act Assessments

Mental health services and autism

Strategic link up is improving....

Top Tips on creating systems flex and change on autism and multiple disadvantage

- ▶ Get started and spread awareness – don't be overwhelmed -great guide to culture change: John Kotter 'Our Iceberg is Melting'
- ▶ Have autistic people at the heart of your work and make the autistic voice heard
- ▶ Really pay attention to all forms of communication – think about your words, your info leaflets, forms , etc
- ▶ Infuse your work with a strengths based and trauma informed approach



A Home for Everyone

Our manifesto to end homelessness

Cat Tottie

Policy Manager, Homeless Link



Homeless Link

“At the moment everyone gets shoved into the same service because it’s all that is available. NRPF, older men, young people, care leavers – they all have different needs, we need a more sophisticated, diverse offer.”

A homelessness system that works for all

The next Government must

- Guarantee a diverse network of services, accessible to everyone in need and adaptable to individual circumstances.
- Embed trauma-informed care at the centre of homelessness strategy.

Evaluation of Toolkit

- ▶ A doctoral student at the University of Oxford will be evaluating how the toolkit is used
- ▶ This will help with further developing support for autistic people experiencing homelessness and resources for services
- ▶ If you are happy to be contacted about this please give your email address on this link:
<https://forms.office.com/e/fhQLdKs68i>

