

Introduction

The National ASD Development Team Annual Report 2018/19 provides Welsh Government (WG), as the Team's principal funder and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and Public Health Wales (PHW), as the Team's host organisations with a summary of the team's work but most importantly, reflects the considerable amount of activity undertaken in the past year, with key partners and stakeholders, including autistic adults, parents and carers of autistic children and young people and adults and professionals.

We joined the team in interim roles at the beginning of the financial year and were struck by the quality of the resources and by www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk in particular, but also by the commitment of the ASD Leads across Wales to improve the lives of autistic people and their families and carers through the provision of information, resources and training.

The Integrated Autism Services (IAS) were at a critical stage of implementation and development when we started as joint National Leads and we were encouraged by the high quality professional staff in health and social care being recruited to the IAS teams.

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We are both committed to engagement and participation and 2018/19 marked a subtle yet significant shift in emphasis to the Team's work, which we believe has resulted in even better resources, more ownership of the work undertaken and ultimately a better end result.

We have been committed to involving autistic adults in the production of resources, together with parents/carers and professionals, with a view to the "autistic voice" being heard and the experience of parents/carers being captured and acknowledged.

We have progressed key pieces of work that we had inherited from the Team's previous work plan with a refreshed emphasis on co-production. We are particularly proud of the "Parent-Carer Film" (Chapter 6) which includes several first-hand experiences and "stories" of people living in Wales.

Some of the autistic young people on the film found the experience of the filming an affirming and confidence building experience of itself. Many of the parents, family members and carers who were involved gave us feedback that they welcomed the opportunity to be heard and to share their experiences for the benefit of parents and carers of newly diagnosed children and adults.

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The Emergency Services training (Chapter 8) work has been progressed with professional advisors and staff working in the field to make it more robust and suitable for delivery which we will continue to pilot next year.

The refreshed Housing and Homelessness Guidance (Chapter 9) has been taken forward with a cross section of housing professionals, autistic advisors, parent/carer advisors and health and social services professionals. It takes considerably more time to work in this way but the feedback to date on the draft document is that it is more robust and more relevant than previous editions.

Working with Further Education colleges and Work Based Learning providers, together with autistic students, young people and professionals has provided worthwhile and valuable insight into the challenges faced at this significant transition in the lives of autistic young people and adults (Chapter 5).

We have encouraged the whole Team in the past year to re-engage and re-establish positive working relationships with key partners and stakeholders in the public, private and third sectors.

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Working more closely with National Autistic Society Cymru (NAS Cymru) around priority areas in the 2018/19 work plan including the housing guidance and the National Autism Conference has been a positive experience which we look to build on next year, as well as engagement at a local level with local NAS Cymru groups.

Further Third Sector engagement included support of the Autism Directory "Autism Shows" and linking in with the Autism Directory, as a "platinum member" of the Directory to ensure complementary links between their resources and those of ASDinfoWales. We also worked closely with key stakeholders such as the Autistic Women's Empowerment Project and Autistic UK in supporting key events which they led.

The WLGA and PHW reaffirmed their commitment to collaborative working and joint management of the National ASD Development Team through a Memorandum of Understanding, which is available to view on the ASDinfoWales website at www.asdinfowales.co.uk/national-autism-team. The Team also facilitated regular productive network meetings of the National ASD Leads and the IAS Leads through the year. The Adults Diagnostic and IAS Community of Practise (CoP) was given a new lease of life with an agreed work plan and several valuable CoP sessions to provide insight into good practice and learning from one another and other professionals across the UK (Chapter 1).

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We have also made efforts to engage with the Regional Partnership Boards which oversee Health and Social Care integrated working, and have a critical oversight role of the IAS's in their region.

Joint presentations with the relevant IAS lead provided the RPBs with a national strategic update, together with a progress report on the IAS activity. It was also an opportunity to consider the role of Regional Autism Champions being identified on the RPB (Chapter 1).

Collaborative working with Cardiff University's School of Psychology and the Wales Autism Research Centre (WARC) (Chapter 7) was further embedded by taking forward the SIGNS work and "The Birthday Party" film (www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk/autismchildsigns). We were delighted to support WARC in their work to engage with European partners in Latvia, Lithuania, Italy and Spain as evidenced on ASDinfoWales (www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk/european-versions).

At the time of writing the Annual Report we were also delighted to have won Cardiff University's 21st Innovation and Impact Award for health and partnership working with WARC. Winning the "People's Choice Award" was an absolute pleasure and a reflection of the importance of the work we are doing with our partners for the benefit of autistic people and their parents and carers, as well as professionals, for whom the film was originally intended.

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The National ASD Development Team has worked closely over the past year with the IAS that are established, and those working towards establishment and implementation. We were pleased that the Minister for Health and Social Care was able to confirm that all 7 IAS' were up and running by 1st April 2019.

It has been a challenging process to establish 7 new integrated teams of health and social care staff in each Regional Partnership Board/ Health Board footprint with all the practical considerations of recruitment, logistics and accommodation but they are now established.

We are pleased to be able to reference case studies as part of this report which provide clear and valuable evidence of the impact the IAS' are beginning of have across Wales for autistic adults, parents/carers of autistic people, as well as professionals. There remains a considerable amount of work to do but this year has been a genuine milestone.

Engagement and participation was made even more tangible with the production of a Strategy which went out for consultation with the community and will be taken further forward in 2019/20 (Chapter 1).

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The Team worked closely with professionals working in the field (local authorities, health) and autistic adults to provide robust and factual evidence to the Sports, Health and Social Care Committee's scrutiny of the proposed private member's Autism Bill. Subsequent to the Bill not being taken forward, the Team contributed to the progression of the Code of Practise for Autism Services and supported the WG led consultation exercises December 2018 – March 2019. We will continue to support the development of this important work in 2019/20.

We also engaged with as many ASD leads at a local level as we practically could in 2018/19. We met with colleagues in North Wales, Mid Wales and South Wales and encouraged those working "on the ground" to submit case studies to the Team to evidence the impact of the work being delivered at a local level.

Training was delivered (Chapter 4) across a variety of settings and our emphasis on evaluating the impact of the training is evidenced in the Annual Report. We continue to adapt the training and ensure it includes the voice of autistic people as well as professionals, as much as we are able.

We were particularly encouraged by the WLGA and Data Cymru reaching Autism Aware status as organisations in 2018/19 (Chapter 11) having made a commitment to do so at a strategic level. The feedback we had from the training was really positive.

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The National Autism Wales Conference 2019 – Promoting Autistic Wellbeing (Chapter 10) was a further illustration of co production, with the establishment of a Task and Finish Group that worked alongside us to produce an event for autistic adults which was described as “ground breaking” and one delegate noted, “[I learnt that there is a] wide range of experts and specialist services available to tap into for practical advice and guidance in day to day living.”

Genuine co production requires patience, resilience and commitment in facilitation but it is also hugely rewarding and the outcomes are so much better. We were delighted to have secured £14k in sponsorship in order to run the Conference free of charge for autistic people and their carers/ friends.

World Autism Awareness Week (Chapter 11) was something of a celebration for the National ASD Development Team, as it provided the conclusion and culmination of several key pieces of work which are referenced in the Annual Report.

We are pleased to share this report with you and we hope you will find it a useful and informative account of the work being undertaken by the Team, in partnership with our stakeholders.

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There remains a considerable amount to be done and the National Autism Team Work Plan 2019/20 will sit alongside this Annual Report as a commitment to make that further progress. 2018/19 has been a year of rewards and also of robust challenges.

Given the funding for the team has been confirmed by WG for a further three years, we look forward to working with you to continue to improve the lives of autistic people in Wales. To view a summary of the Annual Report against the Work Plan 2018/19 see Appendix ONE.

Sara Harvey

National Strategic Lead Autism

Wendy Thomas

National Professional Lead Autism

