

CHAPTER 7

The Birthday
Party film
and SIGNS
work



The Birthday Party Film

Background and Description

The first edition of The Birthday Party film launched in June 2017¹ as a partnership project between the **Welsh Local Government Association, Cardiff University, Aston University** and clinical psychology partners.

Its aim is to improve front-line professionals' understanding and awareness of autism in children and is available to view on the ASDinfoWales website:

www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk/autismchildsigns.



Following a call for the film to be translated and rolled out in European countries, Professor Sue Leekam and Dr Catherine Jones, then Co-Directors of the Wales Autism Research Centre (WARC) at Cardiff University, applied for and were awarded funding by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in order to respond to these international interests. The National ASD Development Team was an external partner on the application.



¹ www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk/news/wlga-press-release-film-collaboration-aiming-to-increase-awareness-of-autism-signs-in-children

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Professor Sue Leekam and Dr Sarah Carrington, School of Psychology, had originally identified and published a set of essential signposting items from an assessment known as the Diagnostic Interview for Social and Communication Disorders (DISCO).

Further research conducted by the Cardiff team led to the creation of SIGNS – a way for frontline professionals to identify and understand autistic behaviours in children.



The 18-minute training film, which is based on SIGNS, is an example of international best practice and is now available in Latvian, Italian, Lithuanian and Spanish thanks to the work being taken forward by WARC, Auspicious and the National ASD Development Team.

*On 27th September 2018² there was a joint re-launch of the film between WARC and WLGA in its six different languages – Welsh, English, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Spanish – an example of **Wales' pioneering collaboration with four European countries.***

² www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk/news/recognising-signs-of-autism-welsh-autism-awareness-film-rolled-out-across-europe

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Co-Production

Throughout the project, a novel approach was used to achieve the aims of the collaboration – Cardiff University and The National ASD Development Team worked very closely with the autism community (parents; autistic people) at various stages of the film's development.

The autistic community in turn gave important feedback, as well as being active in sharing and disseminating the film. The success of the European collaborations was underpinned by research-charity partnerships in each country, where an academic team was paired with an autism charity.

Through these pairings, each country worked closely with an advisory group from the autism community to give feedback on the initial translations of the film script. The result of this has been an important university-practitioner platform of communication, facilitated by members of the autism community.



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How did the European countries get involved?

WARC played an integral role in administrating the project and its translation processes, as well as having the contacts with the different countries.

Latvia

Liga Berzina visited WARC in 2014. Her charity, the Autism Association of Latvia, had just been set up and resources were few.

She joined a parent conference that WARC held and was immediately interested in the resources and research activities that WARC were creating for families.



Welsh



English



Italian



Latvian



Lithuanian



Spanish

Once Liga saw the ASDinfoWales site she wanted to make similar resources in Latvia.

In February 2017, Liga brought a delegation of teachers for a visit to Wales, to whom Sue Leekam and Jo Manikiza (the National Lead for the National ASD Development Team at the time) presented the work that was being developed for The Birthday Party film.

Liga and her team were so impressed that they asked if a translation was possible.

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Arrangements were made to translate the film into Latvian without funding (a student did the voice-over), and a few months later the film was presented to 400 people at a professional's conference in Latvia.

The evaluation was very positive, and it has since been adopted into teacher training in Latvia.

Lithuania

While Sue Leekam was at the Latvia conference, two parents disclosed their Lithuania-based charity to her which desperately required the film to be translated into Lithuanian, again because they had hardly any resources of their own and attitudes in schools and clinics needed changing.



As a result of this, Sue Leekam and Catherine Jones wrote a funding application to the ESRC. Jo Manikiza was their partner through Auspicious Wales, and Tracy Hinton was their partner at the WLGA.

The film is now used widely in Lithuania by charity partners Valdona Judickaite and Kristina Radžvilaitė, Lithuanian Autism Association, and the academic partner there, Dr Renata Geležinienė, Siauliai University has incorporated it into the training for speech and language therapists and teachers.

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Spain

While Sue and Catherine were planning the funding application, Sue was invited to give a seminar to a university in Madrid. After talking about the film, the academic colleagues told her of the interest from the national charity Autism Spain for the film in Spanish.

The film was therefore extended into Spanish with partners Dr Carmen Nieto and Dr Ruth Campos from the Autonoma University of Madrid, and Ruth Vidriales, Autism Spain.



Dr Claudi Ferre

The Spanish version of The Birthday Party film has been used at Autonoma University for the training of medical students and psychology students. The national charity Autism Spain (Autismo España) report that, after its release, it was in the top five most viewed items on their blog. With thanks to WARC at Cardiff University for sharing the photographs.



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Italy

Another colleague in Italy, Dr Marcella Caputi, Vita-Salute San Raffaele University, Milan, Italy, with charity partner Silvia Montanari, Associazione Autismo Pavia Onlus also asked for translation, so that the film could be available in Italian.

Since then, Dr Caputi has won an award from Italian charitable foundation to travel to Cardiff in July and October 2019 to continue the partnership work, and she will present the work at the Autism Europe Conference in September 2019.



Dr Daniela Brazzo

S = Social Interaction and verbal communication

I = Imagination

G = Gestures or non-verbal communication

N = Narrow range of interests, routines and repetitive behaviours

S = Sensory responses

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Outcome

Since its re-launch in September 2018, the project has received several positive feedbacks, which Cardiff University have provided below.

Feedback from Practitioners

"As a teacher with experience of [autism] I found this resource remarkable as it opened my eyes to the wider and more varied ways that children with [autism] experience life...

The resource will certainly help me to a better practitioner." - **Primary School Teacher**

"This is a very clever teaching tool... it would suit all of our clinical team, including reception staff who observe patients in the waiting area. Really helpful!" - **GP**

"The film is very informative and will be a useful tool to incorporate into training new and mainstream school staff. The film highlights an important discussion point regarding the subtleties of ASD in girls and how best to support them appropriately." - **Head of ASD Specialist Resource Base**

"An amazing resource which debunks stereotypes and explores the many ways autism may show up with both sensitivity and respect for difference." - **Learning and Development Consultant**

Feedback from Parents

(NB. both parents with children seeking diagnosis at time feedback provided)

"I think this video is great not only for professionals but as a parent of a child who is yet to be diagnosed it will be great to show my family/friends to give them an insight into what autism means for children." - **Parent**

"Love this film!! So very powerful, showing the different signs. I wish we could educate staff and children about invisible disability right from a young age, with clips like this!" - **Parent**

Cardiff University and the WLGA jointly submitted an application to Cardiff University's "Innovation and Impact Awards 2019" in 2018, for their work on the SIGNS and Birthday Party film. At the time of producing the Annual Report, the project had won the "Innovation in Healthcare" award and the "People's Choice" award.