

Because life happens!

Collaborating to support training in Autism across the lifespan

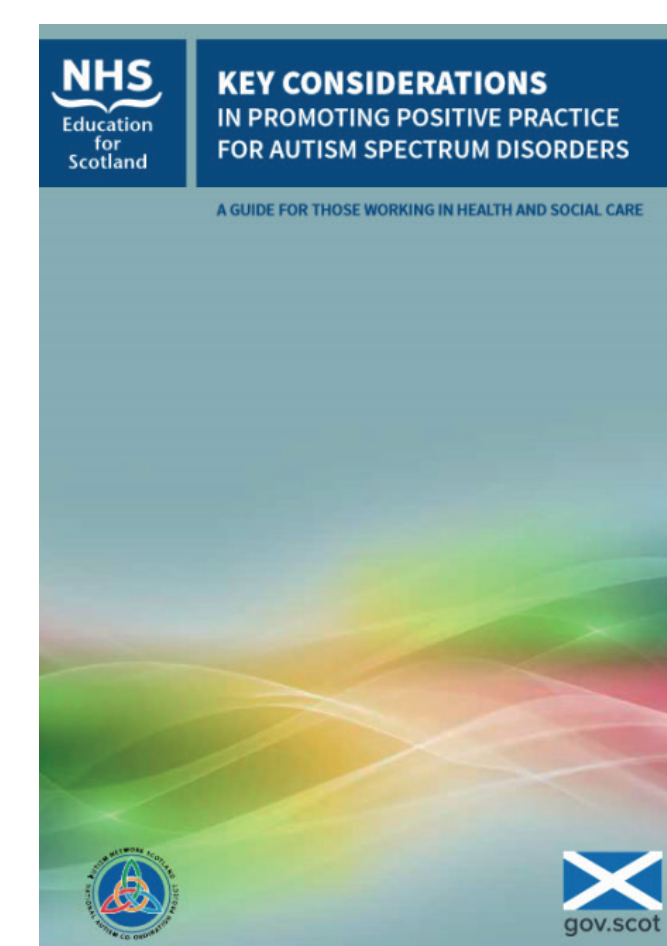
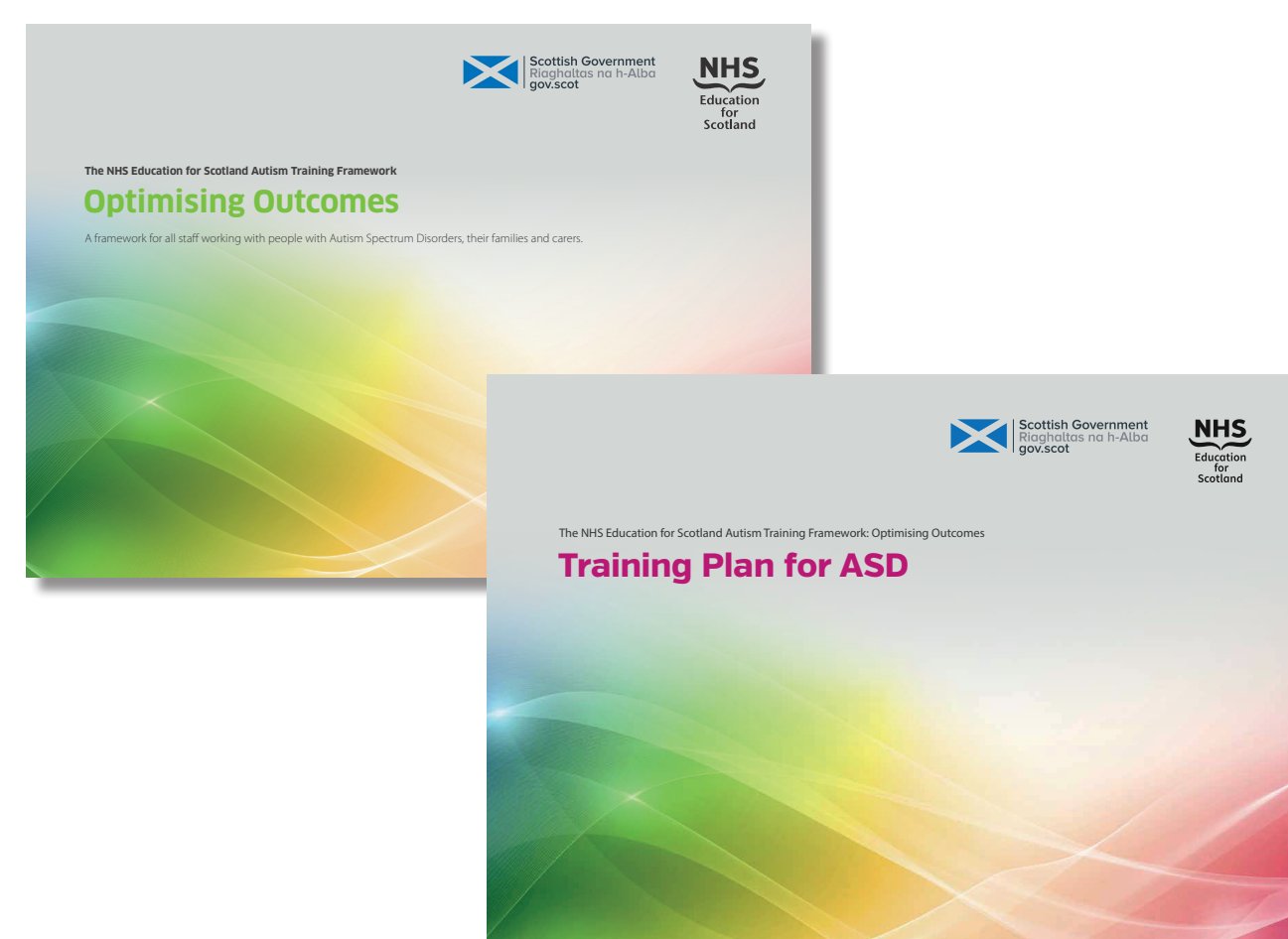
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Background

This cross-sector project and the web-based resources created, address a key recommendation identified in the *Scottish Strategy for Autism* (2011) regarding transitions and change and the associated learning needs highlighted in the *NES Autism Training Framework: Optimising Outcomes* (2014). They also complement the *Principles of Good Transitions and the Autism Transitions Supplement* produced by the Scottish Transitions Forum and Autism Network Scotland (ANS).



Methods

Aims & Objectives

1. To develop learning resources and 'tools for the job' for public sector staff across Scotland
2. To create meaningful and sustainable collaboration with partner organisations, autistic individuals and the wider autism community through well-considered processes that facilitate active participation, reflection and outcomes for all participants
3. To encourage the application of a person-centred approach to supporting resilience, through awareness-raising and examples of practical strategies
4. Learning from the autism community helps to address myths and assumptions so that practitioners can be aspirational for autistic individuals and do not make assumptions about previous capacity to cope with change.

Procedures

A collaborative approach was embedded within all stages of the process. Core principles of engagement outlined in documents by Autistic People's Organisations – Kabie Brook (ARG) and Alastair Meek (Triple As) were adopted.



Outcome

- The production and launch of two online resources for health, social care and third sector organisations
- Consultation around dissemination and response to the significant interest in extending the planned use of resources to wider audiences, including the wider workforce, the general public and the development of resources more specifically suitable for the autism community
- Feedback across participants endorse the value of the planned, iterative, collaborative process and engagement

Key Outcomes & Emerging Principles of Collaboration

Thom Kirkwood, Parent and Engagement and Participation Officer, The Autism Team, University of Strathclyde, commented:

“This is a further example, following *Optimising Outcomes* (NES Autism Training Framework, November 2014) of a Positive Partnership for Beneficial Outcomes approach in the co-production of this new, much awaited resource. It has ensured inclusion and contributions from all stakeholder sectors, especially Autistic Individuals, Parents, Carers and Independent Advocacy.”

Collaboration Integral to Project Plan & Implementation:

“Thank you for your patience with me. I was fortunate enough to be of some help, and can't wait to see how things develop... Please let me know how I can help more, and I'm definitely going to stick around the resource work to try to help with development beyond the current Health and Social Care audience.”

Autistic insight: why and how?

“Autistic insight is so important in order to understand and be able to empathise with the internal autistic experience. Only when we understand why transitions or change can be difficult for an autistic person can we be in a position to provide support. I have also learned that many accommodations autistic people say will help are actually fairly easy to put in place.”

Challenging Myths and Assumptions:

“There is still a lot of misunderstanding about autism generally. Every autistic person is different, such as having different sensory profiles, preferences, strengths and areas requiring support. We are not all Rain Man, we do not lack empathy and we don't all have special skills! It is important to treat each autistic person as the individual they are.”

Language & Terminology:

“I am pleased to see that identify first (autistic person), rather than person first (person who has autism), language is being used and this is the preference of most autistic people. Language is powerful and identify first language recognises that autism is an implicit part of who someone is. It should not be anything to be ashamed of and there really is no ending of the autism and beginning of the person!

I felt that it was important that the material is worded in a way to put people in the right mindset. The language we use impacts the view people have of each other as it can stigmatise and pathologise. So rather than talk about an autistic person not being resilient or not good at coping with change, instead talk about how to support someone to understand what to expect and what is expected of them (...which is what everyone wants really).”

Affirming Value of Participation & Impact:

“There was definitely a thrill seeing something I had helped with draw genuine attention from such a broad variety of people – especially the range of professions; but also other people on the Spectrum, and it would be amazing to see how far it could be taken with further development!”

Conclusions

“Our collaboration with ANS, the intrinsic engagement with autistic individuals and the wider autism community, and their willingness and interest in contributing to the development of the content and characters used in the resources - have been invaluable to our work. The process has ensured that we represent as accurately as possible the lived experience of individuals, their families and carers alongside evidence of good practice.”

Janine Robinson, NES, November 2018

The successful project highlighted that the mutual benefits and added value of collaboration with partner agencies, service users and families can only be fully realised with investment in proper infrastructure, costs, time and enabling processes to facilitate meaningful and productive participation.

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