

Case study



# Co-production with autistic people

Chester and Wirral Partnership  
NHS Foundation Trust

Kerry Arnison

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## About Kerry

Kerry Arnison is an OT with a drive for working with autistic people. Her busy career has included physical and mental health settings where she carried out autism assessments, children's and wheelchair services.

Recently she became the lead for a new trust wide role focusing on implementing the Autism Strategy ([DoH 2021](#)).

Kerry has always been motivated to listen to people who use her services and make improvements from the feedback.

Her innovation has also been facilitated by other people she works with who have supported her. Her practice is responsive. She's not afraid to try new things, adapt them and find ways to make them work.

## About the innovation

Co-production needs to be firmly cemented in all aspects of NHS service design and delivery (NHSE 2022).

To make this happen, Kerry has created a database of experts by experience who all want to influence service delivery. Individuals are recruited to the database via:

- existing community support networks
- word of mouth
- literature given to everyone with a new diagnosis of autism.

Kerry contacts every new recruit to explore their strengths and preferred ways of engaging. By doing this, she can ensure that individuals are offered opportunities they can take part in. For example, some people dislike telephone contact, but don't mind video calls. Some people prefer email as it allows them time to process their response.

Many of the projects that Kerry co-produces are identified by individuals on the database through discussion with them.

Projects include:

- co-producing training material
- developing tools, such as reasonable adjustment checklists and bitesize learning resources
- recording patient stories and supporting services to make adjustments.

People are also encouraged to use their talents to help others with autism. For example, Sally was supported to set up a peer support session using art to help people talk to each other and build relationships.

## Impact

People with lived experience of autism often see solutions that professionals don't. By working in co-production with autistic people, Kerry has been able to amplify these solutions.

For example, Della, a young autistic woman shared her challenging experience of accessing the COVID vaccination centres.

Kerry supported Della and others to design a reasonable adjustment checklist to improve this for other autistic people.

The checklist included giving people the option:

- to write their responses in advance to standard vaccination questions
- to take a carer with them
- to use sensory strategies to help them cope in crowded, busy places.

An autistic person who has used these resources said 'I feel understood for the first time.'

This checklist was so well received the National Autistic Society and the Royal College of Psychiatry distributed it nationally.

It was supported by a co-produced virtual tour of the vaccine centre. This included images of the building and information about what would happen there to help people prepare for their vaccination.

Building on this project, the group identified a need for a similar health care checklist and an employment checklist. The health checklist is now being used by local GP practices to support autistic people accessing and using primary care.

The employment checklist is due to be published by Health Education England (HEE) in their new Autism peer support worker guidance.

Aspects of Kerry's co-produced training is being used by the local ambulance service to ensure their services are responsive to autistic people.

Finally, and most importantly, Kerry's approach has inspired autistic people to think ambitiously and become leaders for positive change.

An autistic person who has benefitted from the training said 'Kerry's work has empowered me and given me the confidence to believe that we can set our own rules, define our limits, finding success in life and in employment.'

Feeling inspired to pilot your own innovation?

Share your ideas with the **RCOT Innovation Hub** who can offer support along your journey and share learning more widely.

## References

Department of Health (2021) The Government's National Autism Strategy for Children, Young People and Adults 2021-2026 London: [DOH National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92422/doh-national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026.pdf)

NHS England (2022) Working in partnership with people and communities: statutory guidance London: [DOH NHS England » Working in partnership with people and communities: statutory guidance](https://www.nhs.uk/publications/working-in-partnership-with-people-and-communities-statutory-guidance/)