

Case study



Making reasonable adjustments for autistic people

Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust

Karen Scorer

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About Karen

Karen Scorer is a clinical lead OT in a neurodevelopmental diagnostic service. The service offers unique support to people with neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism, developmental co-ordination disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Karen started her career as an occupational therapy technical instructor working with older people with mental health problems.

She qualified as an OT and specialised in mental health, later also gaining experience in a forensic learning disability service.

In this setting, she became aware of the impact of neurodivergence on people's experience of services. It helped her reflect on how to improve mental health care.

Listening with empathy to autistic people shapes her approach, helping her appreciate the experience of people she works with.

Karen is now an advocate for neurodivergent people, driving change in mental health services for the better.

About the innovation

In 2019, about two thirds of autistic people said that services are not adjusting for their needs ([APPG/NAS 2019](#)). The NHS long-term plan (DoH 2019) committed funding to improve support for autistic people.

Karen and her team of an occupational therapist, an autistic expert by experience and a psychologist, won funding for a three-year project.

Their project is improving the experiences of autistic people with mental health needs in Coventry and Warwickshire by offering support to inpatient services in their trust, such as:

- consultations about adapting communication, adjusting therapeutic interventions and sensory based approaches
- developing resources such as autism pathways within services, an environmental audit and signposting information
- co-produced training including online modules about autism, reasonable adjustment workshops and workshops about meeting the sensory needs of autistic individuals.

Impact

The team has gathered data about the impact of their input using a pre and post intervention questionnaires. Prior to involvement, 21% of staff felt they did not have the skills to work with autistic adults. Following input no one reported lacking skills.

Although, pre-consultation data suggests that 57% of staff were confident to work with autistic adults, this rose to 67% post consultation. Those who continued to lack confidence, reported this was due to difficulties making changes to the inpatient environment.

94% of staff who attended training with the team felt it would change their practice. Participants reported changes such as working more consistently and considering the impact of the sensory environment.

Below are some quotes from the recipients of the team's support:

'There are areas I would not have thought of [without your support] and resources I was not aware of.'

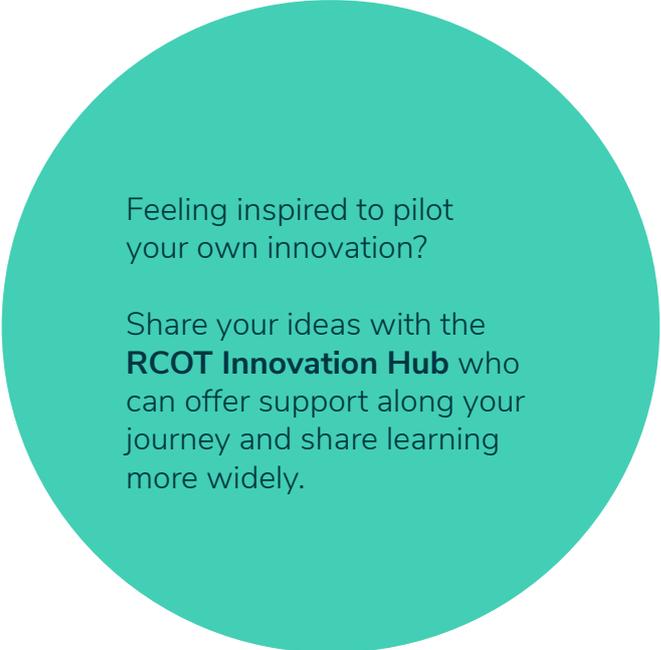
'There would be unmet needs without this project.'

'It was really useful to have a space and the knowledge/expertise from a neurodevelopmental perspective. It has enabled me to think more fully about the needs of the person I am working with.'

'It is so nice to have a space for a fuller case discussion! And work together with a service that

has the knowledge and skills to complement what we do.'

The team continue to collect pre and post intervention data which will influence future services, including the proposed clinical model for autistic people with mental health problems within the Trust.



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

All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism (2019) The Autism Act: 10 years on London: APPG <https://pearsfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/APPGA-Autism-Act-Inquiry-Report.pdf>

Department of Health (2019) The NHS long term plan DOH: [London NHS Long Term Plan v1.2 August 2019](#)