

The A Team Youth Club

Presented by: Jacqui Ghigi



Blackpool Council

BUILDING A BETTER COMMUNITY FOR ALL

The A Team Youth Club

In Blackpool we have our very own 'A Team', a youth club for young people with autistic spectrum conditions. It began in a small way as a social group for young people and we met monthly. The club has developed over the years and in partnership with the Youth Service we now meet fortnightly in a purpose built youth club complete with gym, computer suite, café and meeting rooms. A range of activities are on offer at the club as well as trips out to the theatre, golf, climbing wall, cinema etc. The young people decide at the beginning of each term what they would like to do and we then plan the trips. Most recently we have had our first residential weekend away in Appleby, which was a great success and the young people are keen to repeat this and have it as an annual event. The young people made a film of the weekend and this was shown during the presentation.

Our service completed an autism audit of local services this year. Some of the young people from the club participated in the audit by taping their views on services. Family support and behaviour concerns featured strongly and the availability of out of school leisure and play activities was highlighted as being of particular concern as were short break opportunities. The NAS 'I Exist' campaign (2008) indicated that adults with autism say they need a range of support and that the biggest gap is in the area of social support. A similar theme emerged in a local audit of Adult Services in Blackpool in relation to young people with Asperger syndrome.

Some of the young people who have attended the youth club have experienced mental health difficulties and some of them have opted out of school or college entirely, remaining in the home and becoming socially isolated. Anxiety and depression are common in young people who have a poor awareness of others and have difficulty fitting into other more 'mainstream' clubs. Support for families is fairly limited particularly if the young person doesn't meet the strict criteria as they are considered cognitively too able.

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Training youth workers and social care staff has enabled other young people sometimes with quite challenging behaviour to attend our club with support. Our weekend away took quite a bit of preparation and planning taking into account sensory difficulties and eating and sleeping difficulties as well as a number of fears and phobias. We used visual methods of communicating by reinforcing information with written and pictorial information before and during the weekend and we evaluated the weekend by having a 'Big Brother' style diary room at the end.

The Aiming High for Disabled Children funding will hopefully be able to provide short break provision to all categories of children and young people with autistic spectrum conditions. Our club is currently making a bid for some money from the fund to enable us to have another residential weekend away. The success of the last weekend away demonstrates how important it is to listen to what young people say they need and everybody has a right to fun and leisure.

Jacqui Ghigi
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The A Team Youth Club

- Social Club → Parent and Family Support Worker
- Partnership with Youth Service
- 20-25 attend
- Mainly males

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- Activities evaluated and planned termly
- Fortnightly → weekly
- Mental Health difficulties (?)
- Criminal Justice System

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- Other Youth Clubs, activities
- 1 in night / 1 out alternate
- Cookery, bowling, art/craft, archery, karaoke, snooker, cinema, climbing wall, golf, circus skills, gym

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- No computers – why?
 - Autism audit
- ↓
- Children's Adult

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- Transition Plan
- Person-centered
- Fitting a 'criteria'



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- Participation by A Team
- Weekend away – multi-media
- I Exist Campaign → 75% = no friends
- 72% want others company

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- All attend mainstream
- Poor awareness of others
- Difficulty fitting in
- Poor social skills

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- Sometimes aggressive acts
- Been bullied
- High anxiety levels
- Social isolation – family home
- Depression
- Toileting and sleep problems persist

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- LA's – not a learning disability/mental health
- Falling through the gaps

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- Aiming High for Disabled Children
- ↘ if transition fails
- Training for youth workers

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- Weekend away to Ormside Mill



- Powerpoint
 - Consent photos/video
- Special diet / Special interests
- Medication

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- Risk assessment – downside / great opportunities
- Sensory – noise, eating. Sleeping, sitting with others, fears and phobias.

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- Visual methods of communication and reinforcing information
- Friday – night walk
- Saturday – orienteering. Crystal Maze, cinema or games

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- Chores
- Sunday – Scavenger hunt
- Big brother – diary room
- Ensure short break provision offers a service to all categories

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- Giving disabled children and young people fun experiences away from their families will contribute to their personal and social development and reduce isolation.

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- Extensive training for all youth/social care staff
- 5 PIP workers to enable others more challenging to attend

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- Need to look at extending opportunities to a wider group of youngsters with ASC's

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- In discussion with Manager of Integrated Youth Services
- DVD
- Questions