

Autism AIM's 10th Anniversary

Commemorative booklet

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Finding the pages

If you are reading this in PDF format and want to read a specific page in the booklet, please click on the text next to the relevant page number.

For those of you who are reading this booklet in print, feel free to write and make notes wherever is convenient e.g. on the puzzle pages or in the Notes section towards the end.



Event Rooms

On this page, we have information on the different rooms we are using for the event and what is going on inside them.

Shire Oak Hall: Talks

This is where all of our speakers and talks will take place. It is also where we will be serving refreshments on the day.

This room is downstairs, close to the main entrance to the HEART Centre.

Beckett Room: Activities

This room will be set aside for creative activities. These include colouring in and making additions to a larger version of the AIM mural you'll see on pages 22-23 of this booklet.

This room is downstairs, near the Shire Oak Hall and Buckingham Room.

Buckingham Room: Quiet Room

If you are feeling overloaded and/or stressed and need to get away from it all for a little while, we have a quiet room. In this room, we will also have some fidget toys for you to use if needed.

This room is also downstairs, close to both the Shire Oak Hall and Beckett Room.

Claremont Room: Networking

We have set aside a space for networking with other guests. Here, you can talk about things like some of AIM's work or what the guests do if working for another service or organisation.

This room is upstairs and can either be accessed via the main staircase or the lift if needed.

Event Schedule

Here is a list of what's happening at our 10th anniversary celebration event, from 4pm to 7pm:

- 4pm** **Guest arrival and registration**
- 4:15pm** **Opening remarks and housekeeping**
Angela Ellis - Chief Executive, The Advonet Group
- 4:20pm** **Brief history of Autism AIM's journey over the past 10 years**
Wendy Cork - Development Director, The Advonet Group
- 4:30pm** **Our Vision and the future**
Owen Walker - Autism AIM Senior Manager
- 4:40pm** **30-minute break for refreshments, food and networking**
- 5:10pm** **Guest Speakers: Sharing partnership stories and successes**
Stacey Leonard, Bradford Council
Dr Conor Davidson, Leeds Autism Diagnostic Service (LADS)
- 5:40pm** **Activities and Networking**
Networking room
Showcasing our resources
Mentimeter showing live feedback on your thoughts about AIM
- 6:40pm** **Closing remarks and speeches**
Peter Gruen, Chair of The Advonet Group
- 7pm** **End of event**

About This Booklet

This booklet has been made to mark 10 years of The Advonet Group's Autism AIM service! Inside, we have some fun activities, information about what we do and a timeline of our major milestones.

Since launching in 2014, a lot has happened. We have seen the service grow, adding to and adapting our initial offer of advocacy, information and mentoring. One-to-one peer support and post-diagnostic support, peer-led groups, health access work and projects to help improve access to mental health services have been launched.

Expanding our offer

In recent years, we have expanded into other parts of West Yorkshire – our Bradford and Craven Autism AIM service is proof of that. We have also provided training for professionals throughout the county.

This booklet and our celebration event on **Wednesday 2nd April** are all about what we have achieved. We hope you enjoy reading it and learning about how we have supported hundreds of autistic adults in Leeds and beyond!



“10 years is a long time! For AIM to have kept going for a decade is a huge achievement.

“So much has been done in this time, from supporting people one-to-one to putting forward the needs of autistic adults to decision makers and important services.

“Here’s to more of the same for the next decade!”

Owen Walker, Senior Manager

AIM's Potted History

Our service was launched in November 2014 by The Advonet Group, a Leeds-based independent advocacy charity. AIM stands for Advocacy, Information and Mentoring, with Leeds Autism AIM initially offering all three.

After launching our Autism Hub in Leeds in January 2015, we added more services to our offer in the subsequent years. This included one-to-one peer support, post-diagnostic support and peer-led groups.



Adapting and expanding

When Covid-19 hit in 2020, we moved a lot of our services online and developed a range of free resources to help autistic adults plan and speak up for themselves.

Not long after, we launched the Autism AIM - Mental Health Equity Project. Its' aim was to help improve access to mental health services for autistic adults in West Yorkshire, as well as provide and aid peer support groups.

Then, we expanded into Bradford and Craven with a pilot project which has since become more permanent. Specific projects around accessing GP and community mental health services were also launched in recent years, whilst new resources around mental health have been created.

Some of the highlights of the past decade are in a timeline on the next page!

Our Timeline

In 10 years, we have managed to pack a lot in! From launching new services in Leeds and Bradford to creating resources and winning awards, the past decade has certainly been eventful. Here is a rundown of the key milestones in Autism AIM's history.



2012-14

We were funded to develop initial autism volunteer provision and developed engagement and advocacy with the autistic community. We supported autistic involvement and fed in themes into the newly developed Autism Partnership board in Leeds and the first local Autism Strategy.



2014/15

AIM developed an autistic-led steering group to guide project direction according to what was needed and sought out key autistic staff to help develop.

AIM developed its information and signposting provision based on needs people raised. It gained further funding to develop the Leeds Autism Directory and run the first Autism Information event in Leeds.



2015

Leeds Commissioners funded pilot autism project work based on a "One Stop Shop" model. Leeds Autism AIM's first drop-in Autism Hub session at Lovell Park was held in January of that year. AIM began developing partnerships to increase the hub offer and consultation or training to improve access in wider services.



2016

We gained additional funding to support the further development of our autism volunteering provision and our autism Mentoring offer.



2016/17

AIM focused on partnership work to improve access. Working with LTHT on the Autism Hospital Passport, autism web pages and training health staff. A second hub was piloted and increased work with LADS, housing and mental health services.



2018

We were able to expand our peer support, employment and mentoring/ volunteering offers through additional three-year funding from The National Lottery Community Fund and start to expand our autistic staff team. Numbers of people supported increased 47% year-on-year during this period.



2019

We piloted Leeds Autism AIM's one-to-one post-diagnostic peer support service for newly-diagnosed autistic adults, based on local need identified which then became part of our core offer.



2020

We began working with the new WY Neurodiversity Programme and supported the work Keeping People Connected during the Covid period. We expanded resources available for the autistic community, co-producing toolkits of free resources to help autistic adults cope and plan routines, further developed wider resources.



2020

Health Access Project: We were funded to pilot work increasing access to GP surgeries, providing peer support to autistic patients and consultation/training to health staff, which was later expanded and evaluated.



2021

Mental Health Equity: We were funded for four years to increase access to mental health services regionally for autistic adults. We worked with Leeds Mind to develop autistic-led peer support in mental health services and provided training/consultation and an autistic voice to improve access across West Yorkshire.



2022

We recruited a number of skilled autistic staff to work across all our projects. They worked on areas including post-diagnostic/peer support, creating self-advocacy resources and conducting sensory audits of mental health inpatient settings.



2023

Bradford and Craven Autism AIM : Funding for a pilot project was granted to expand hub support into the Bradford area. This was continued after the initial pilot and our websites were re-developed to support this.

We won two awards. One was for Partnership for the Mental Health Equity Project's sensory auditing work in the Celebrate as One awards.

The other was for Outstanding Service at the 2023 National Advocacy Awards.



2024

Mental Health Access Project: we were funded to provide support to mental health services in Leeds, working with the new community mental health hubs to support better autism access.

Demand and numbers supported through the core work continues to increase



2024

We developed a range of new and expanded resources based on needs the local autistic community raised, including a new PIP guide. Visits to the website for information and download of resources saw a high increase and positive feedback from the community.

Part of The Advonet Group

As shown in the timeline, we are part of The Advonet Group, which is an advocacy charity. Being so means we take an advocacy approach to what we do, ensuring we help autistic adults in Leeds, Bradford and Craven to get their voices heard and rights upheld.

We do this in a number of ways, including through self-advocacy resources and advocating for our clients' needs when communicating with services.



Links to other services

Being part of an advocacy organisation means we are able to link in with advocacy services, sharing expertise with them on supporting autistic clients and making sure their rights are upheld.

If anyone comes to us asking for advocacy support and we cannot help, we put them in touch with the relevant service.

In addition to that, we link in with Leep1 and Asking You! on the volunteering side, with our and their Volunteer Coordinators working together on joint inductions and sharing ways of supporting volunteers.

Finally, we work with CHANGE on producing accessible resources where needed, sharing our teams' expertise with one another.

Recognition

Over the years, we have enjoyed getting recognition in many forms for our work. We have received plenty of positive feedback from autistic clients, professionals and partner organisations about our resources, one-to-one work and training, among other things.

In 2023, we saw this recognition reach new heights by receiving not one, but two awards!



Partnership prize

In the autumn of that year, the Autism AIM - Mental Health Equity Project team and Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust picked up the Partnership award in the 2023 Celebrate as One Awards. This was for our work on doing sensory audits of mental health inpatient settings in Leeds.

Not long after that, we won the Outstanding Service prize at the 2023 National Advocacy Awards. We were up against some brilliant services from across the UK. It was a great honour to pick up this prize and attend the award ceremony in Birmingham!

Big thanks to everyone who has ever sent us a compliment, passed on feedback about our service or given us an award - all of that makes what we do worthwhile.

Partnerships

We have collaborated with numerous services in Leeds and beyond, all dedicated to enhancing the support and services available for autistic adults.

We would like to express our gratitude to everyone who has partnered with Autism AIM. A heartfelt thank you to all of the following partners, both past and present:



Steering Group

As well as a staff team of 15 people at the time of writing, we also have a Steering Group. They are a group of autistic volunteers who help to make sure we are doing our best to support the people we work with. They have been a big part of AIM from the start, with some members going on to become paid members of staff.

Thanking all our members

Huge thanks go to all of our current Steering Group members for giving their time and sharing their expertise and skills with us:

**Anna
Sharon
Ray
Jonathan
Sam
Connie**

**Emily
Saraya
Yael
Roisin
Sarah**

We would also like to thank all of our former Steering Group members for their contribution to helping make AIM what it is today:

**Debbie
Anthony
Trudi
Luke
David**

**Jason
Hazel
Alex
Maisie
Georgia B**

Our old colleagues

Thanks go to all of our ex-colleagues who worked with us over the decade:

**Wendy
Kevin
Lesley
Kirsten
Flora
Sam O
Pesha**

**Emily
Harry
Erin
Fay
Roodi
Jane
Sara**

**Chris
Beth
Sam J
Sam P
Eli
Cat
June**

The AIM Team

The AIM Team has expanded over the years, and while we've had to say goodbye to a few members along the way, we would like to express our gratitude to the 34 individuals who have been part of our journey on this special occasion!



Trudi
MHAP Deputy Manager



Owen
Senior Manager



Georgia
MHEP Deputy Manager



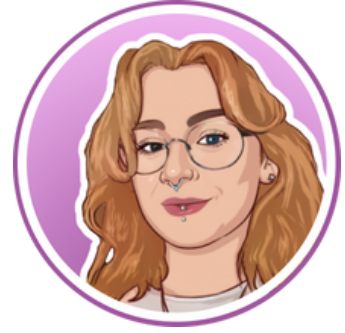
Luke
Information Officer



Danielle
Training & Audits
Coordinator



Kelsie
Leeds AIM Coordinator



Nelly
Peer Dev. Worker



Gill
Peer Dev. Worker



David
Hub Supporter



Lawrence
Peer Dev. Worker



Lex
Peer Dev. Worker

Volunteering Celebration

Volunteers have played a vital role in shaping Autism AIM, helping create a service that truly reflects the needs and experiences of autistic adults locally. From co-producing resources and running mentoring and peer support sessions, to offering valuable insights from lived experience, and even cooking meals at our hub. Our volunteers bring knowledge, passion and dedication that make a real difference.



Their contributions help ensure that Leeds Autism AIM remains an inclusive, supportive, and empowering space for the community.

Below, some of our volunteers share their experiences of being part of Autism AIM and the impact it has had on them:

'I really love the people I mentor; it makes a really big difference to them, and I get very positive feedback. It makes people more interactive, and it helps me understand the condition of autism more'

'My mentee responds more to me as a volunteer than maybe she would to professionals, it's great for her to talk to someone who has the same life experience as her'

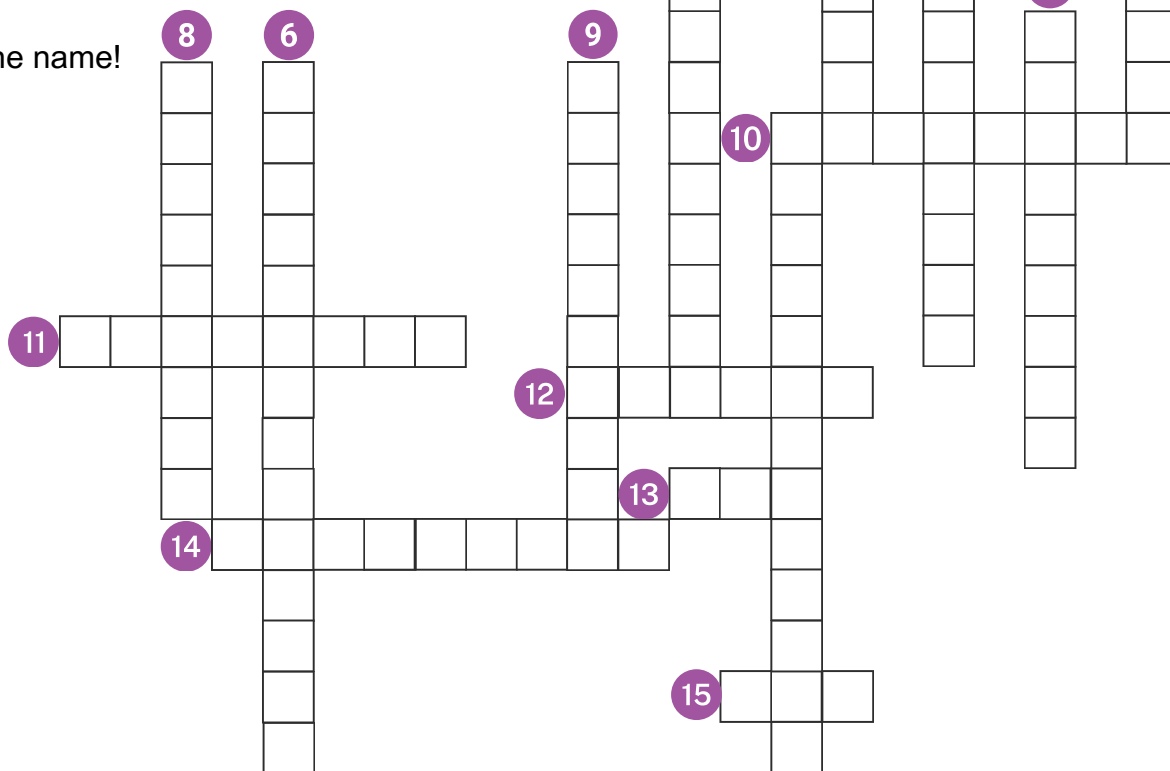
'I adore volunteering for Advonet. I think it is a fantastic organisation and I hope to be able to work with you all for many years to come. You have the balance between professionalism and accessible warmth just right. When I retired I knew I wanted to do some voluntary work but because of my disability didn't know how I could help. This opportunity has been amazing. I think it resonates so much because I know what a difference it would have made to the younger me who was finding life so difficult to navigate. Just having someone who understands the struggles would have helped so much.'

'I hadn't really worked as a mentor or in any type of role like this before and I really developed my ability to lead sessions and organise information to try and help my mentee.'

'Meeting all the drop in clients has been lovely, they always appreciate the food I cook, ask for the recipes and are always up for a chat and a check in. AIM has been understanding to my needs and made the volunteer experience accessible and fun'

Across

- 2 A city on the River Aire in West Yorkshire, Northern England.
- 10 Getting support from another person to help you express your views and wishes, and helps you stand up for your rights.
- 11 A circumstance, situation or obstacle, that keeps people from or prevents communication or progress, or prevents people from living a full rewarding lives.
- 12 A neurodevelopmental condition that has lifelong effects; it means your brain works in a different way from others.
- 13 Where we hold our groups and social spaces, where you can get peer support from your community.
- 14 Someone who willingly gives their time to support someone or something.
- 15 Our goals: It's in the name!



Down

- 1 A free tool that can be used to help communicate your needs when you are out and about.
- 3 An organisation whose purpose is to give help to those who need it.
- 4 When someone uses their own experience and lived experience of autism to support another autistic person.
- 5 One-to-one support with a volunteer to work on goals and overcome barriers
- 6 One-to-one support after diagnosis to understand yourself and your experiences.
- 7 Knowledge and understanding that something is happening or exists.
- 8 Useful information co-produced by autistic people on a series of different topics.
- 9 Embracing autistic people as they are, with strengths and weaknesses.
- 10 To be able to obtain, use, approach or enter something or somewhere.



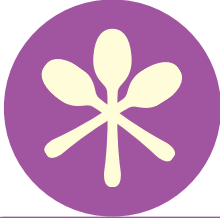

AIM Crossword



Energy Accounting Activity

Everyone starts their day with energy. Some people have more than others, but for those who are autistic, our energy can get depleted by things that wouldn't affect neurotypical people as much. Examples include socialising, which can be draining for some autistic people, but is energising to others. In this activity, we want you to think about your energy in a day. Each thing you do will have effects on your energy. Each unit of energy is represented by a spoon. This is called 'Spoon theory'.

If you only had 12 spoons per day, how would you use them? Write into each box the activity which you feel uses up the least energy such as watching TV, to the most amount of energy such as going to work.

			
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

Write some activities that help with your wellbeing, either by making you feel energised or peaceful. These are things you can turn to when you need to self-regulate.

	<div></div>
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Imagine AIM!

Fill-in-the-Blank Challenge

Imagine AIM! A fun Fill-in-the-Blank Challenge. Let's get creative! Fill in the blanks with your ideas to design the ultimate AIM experience.

If AIM had a **Theme Song**, it would be:

If AIM had a **Slogan**, it would be:

If AIM had Its own **Merchandise**...
The must-have item would be:

If AIM Were a **City**, It would have:

If AIM Were a **Game**,
the type of game would be:

The goal would be:

If AIM Were a **Movie**
the title would be:

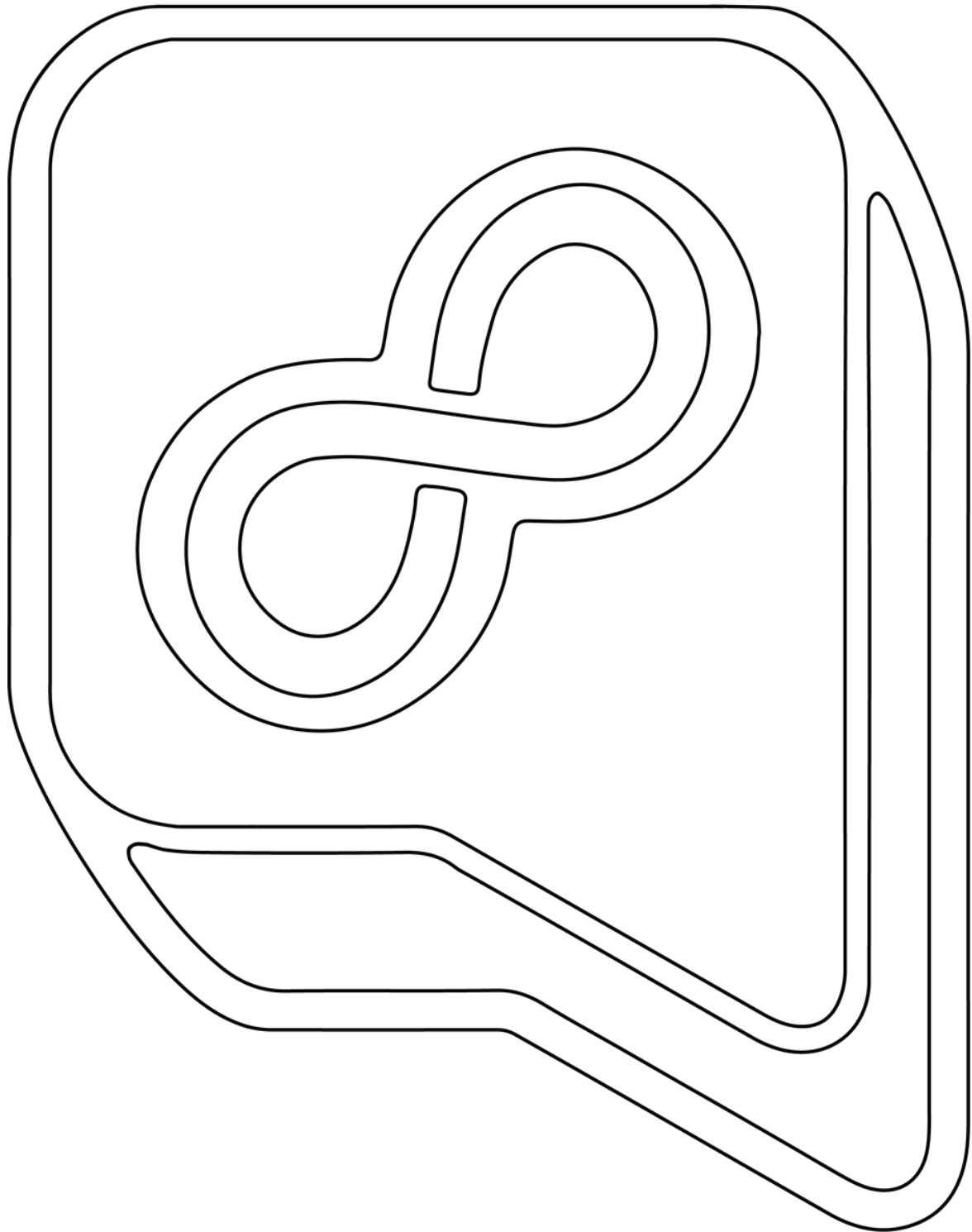
the plot would be about:

If AIM Had a **Mascot**, it would be:
(draw below or write)

If AIM Hosted a **Festival**...
The main attractions would be:

If you could assemble a "**Dream Team**"
of autism advocates (real or fictional),
who would be on it?

Re-design and colour our AIM logo! Doodle to your heart's content.



Self-Care and Reflection

Your Ideal Support System - draw/write about your own support network.

What's in your Self-Care Toolkit? – draw/write personal self-care strategies.

Make your own meh-scale, draw in one side, write a feeling in the other

1

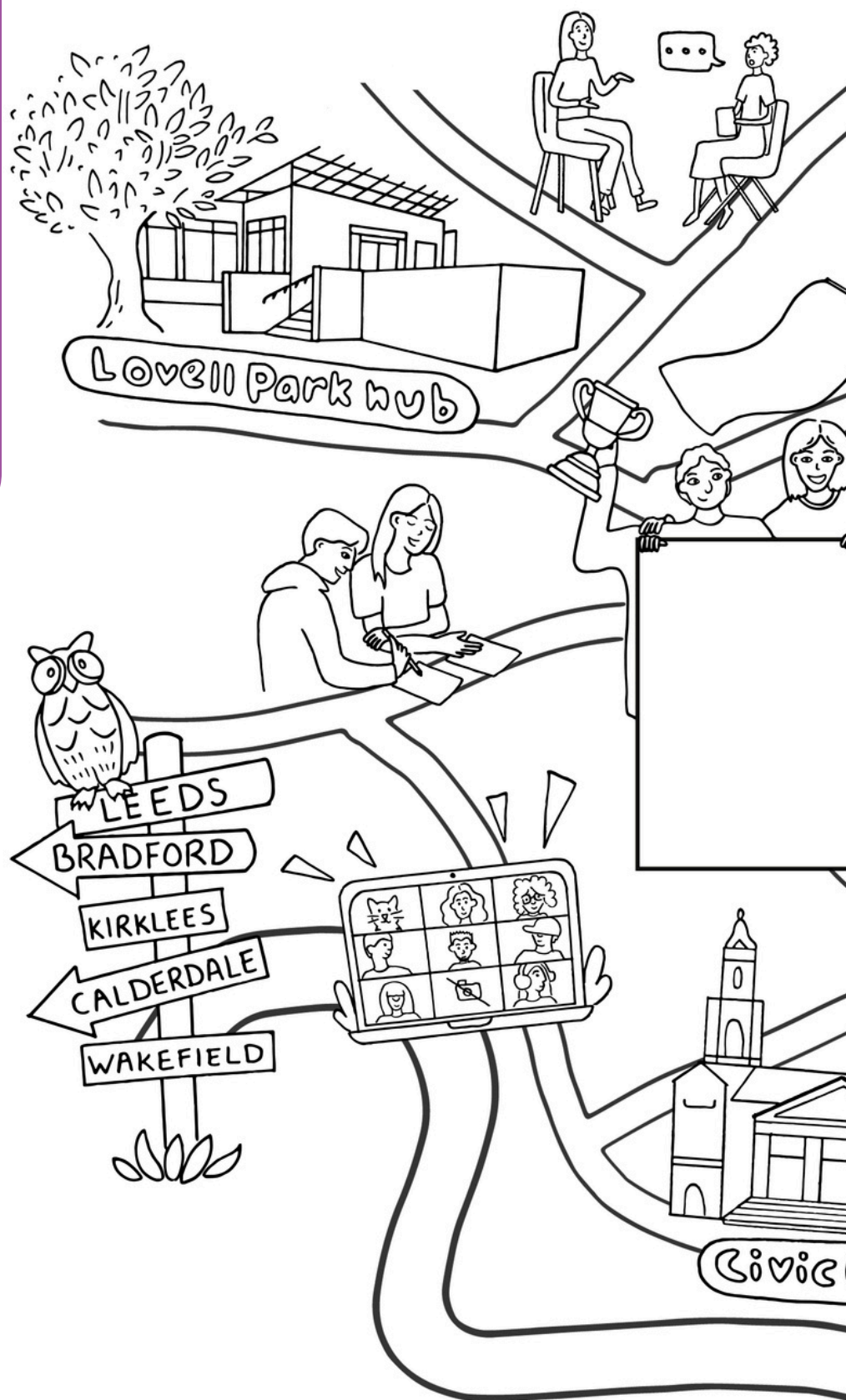
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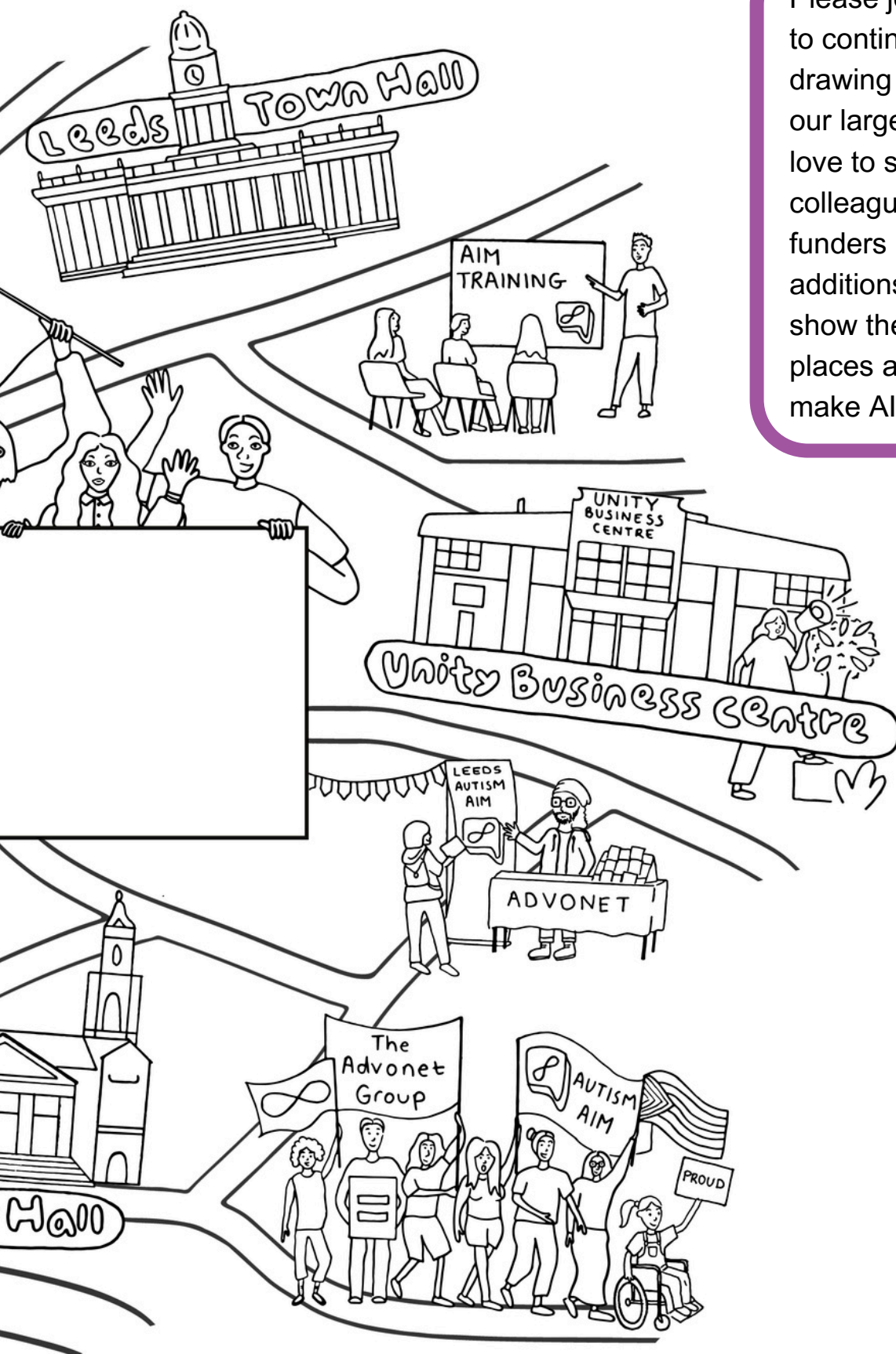
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5

To celebrate Autism AIM, we have made a colouring-in page of the highlights of our service, from our beginnings at the Lovell Park Hub and being part of The Advonet Group, expanding into other parts of West Yorkshire, and to show our growing offer.



Mural



Please join us in the art space to continue the artwork, by drawing your own parts on our larger mural. We would love to see all our clients, colleagues, trustees and funders make their own additions. They will help to show the many people, places and services that make AIM what it is today.

Your AIM Legacy and Vision

“Your AIM Legacy” Reflect on how you have helped AIM grow and change or how AIM has helped you grow and change?

If AIM had Unlimited Funding... Brainstorm, write or doodle ideas for dream projects AIM could do with more resources. Where do you think AIM should go next?



Autism and Advocacy Around the World



Reflecting the wide diversity in the places Autism AIM supports, here's some key words in languages across the world

English	Autism	Autistic	Advocacy	Advocate
Spanish	Autismo	Autista	Abogacía	Defensora (feminine) Defensor (masculine)
French	Autisme	Autistique	Plaidoyer	Avocate (feminine) Avocat (masculine)
German	Autismus	Autistisch	Befürwortung	Befürworten
Polish	Autyzm	Autystyczny	Rzecznictwo	
Romanian	Autism	Autistă (feminine) Autist (masculine)	Advocacy	Avocat
Chinese	自闭症 (zì bì zhèng)	自闭症 (zì bì zhèng)	倡议 (chàng yì)	提倡 (tíchàng)
Japanese	自閉症 (jibyōshō)	自閉症 (jibishō)	倡议 (chàng yì)	支持する (shijisuru)
Korean	자폐성 (japyeseong)	자폐증 (japyejeung)	주창 (juchang)	지지하다 (jijida)
Arabic	التوحد (tawahud)	متوحد (mutawahid)	الدعوة (aldaewa)	الدِّفاع (difae)
Punjabi	ਔਟਿਜ਼ਮ (Auṭizama)	ਆਟਿਸਟਿਕ (Āṭisaṭika)	ਵਕਾਲਤ (Vakālata)	ਐਡਵੋਕੇਟ (Aiḍavōkēṭa)
Urdu	آٹزم (autism)	آٹسٹک (autistic)	وکالت (vekalt)	مدافع (madafe)

Sensory Guidance

Stim Tool recommendations and tips

Reduction tools: Reduction tools help lower sensory overload by reducing input from the environment, like noise, light, or other overwhelming stimuli. Common examples include noise-cancelling headphones, sunglasses, or even apps that block notifications.

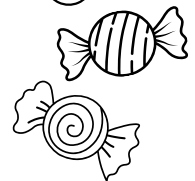
Lamps: Lamps create controlled lighting environments. Soft, warm lights, colour-changing lamps, or lava lamps can create a calm, cosy atmosphere and reduce harsh overhead lighting.

Sweets: A soothing sensory tool through taste and texture. It can provide oral sensory input and help with focus or calming.

Weighted blankets: They provide deep pressure stimulation, which can promote relaxation, reduce anxiety, and improve sleep. Choose a blanket that's around 10% of your body weight for best comfort.

Stim tools: Gives your body a way to release energy, focus, or calm through repetitive movements, textures, or motions.

Soft toys: Provide comfort through their familiar texture and emotional connection. They can offer emotional grounding and a sense of security.



Sensory Grounding Techniques

- **5-4-3-2-1:** Name five things you see, four things you feel, three things you hear, two things you smell, and one thing you taste
- **Body awareness:** Focus on sensations in your body, like the feel of your feet on the ground
- **Stretch:** Ease muscle tension by stretching
- **Nature connection:** Feel the warmth of the sun or the rhythm of your heartbeat
- **Smell:** Smell an essential oil or a flower
- **Listen:** Listen to soothing music or the sounds of nature
- **Taste:** Chew something slowly and mindfully
- **Sight:** Notice details about your surroundings

AIM's Guides and Resources

Over the past decade, AIM has created a variety of guides and resources. Whenever we identify a need, we create a guide to support the autistic people we work with.

Self-Advocacy and Planning tools:



Includes an autism alert card, daily and weekly planners and a communication profile. To see them, scan the QR code or visit tinyurl.com/aimselfadvo

Strategy Guides:



Covering topics such as health, communication, work and travel. To see them, scan the QR code or visit tinyurl.com/aimstrategies

Mental Health Equity Project resources:



Includes guides to Personal Independence Payment (PIP), sensory needs, masking and work stress. To see them, scan the QR code or visit tinyurl.com/mhepresources

Mental Health Access Project resources:



Includes a guide to accessing mental health support via your GP and GP appointment planner. To see them, scan the QR code or visit tinyurl.com/aimmhapresources

Resources for Professionals:



Includes guides to making info accessible for neurodivergent people and to local mental health services. To see them, scan the QR code or visit tinyurl.com/aimprofresources

Autism and Health Resources:






Includes a symptom diary, pain scale and mental fatigue scale. To see them, scan the QR code or visit tinyurl.com/ahapresources

Autism Alert Card

In 2017, we started to create free, personalised autism alert cards for autistic adults in Leeds. A few years later, we partnered with West Yorkshire Police, Specialist Autism Services and others to create a pilot autism alert card.

This version of the alert card can come in print format, digital format for display on smartphones or both. To date, we have made alert cards for more than 300 autistic adults in the Leeds area.

<p>Hello, my name is</p> <p>Joe Blogs (he/him)</p> <p>but you can call me</p> <p>Jojo</p> <p>I am Autistic</p> <p>  </p> <p><small>This card is to aid the holder to communicate a need or difficulty. It is not an identity card or proof of a clinical diagnosis</small></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I may struggle with bright lights/colours• Making/maintaining eye contact is hard• Give me a quiet space when I am distressed or anxious• I may struggle with lots of background noise• I am asthmatic and use a preventer inhaler daily• I experience verbal tics• I may not be able to respond verbally• I need clear, concise information• I carry emergency medication	<p>Emergency Contact</p> <p>Name Joe Blogs Sr.</p> <p>Relationship Parent</p> <p>Phone number 07438435094</p> <p>For more info scan below</p> 
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The cards can be used in emergency or stressful situations to help communicate your needs if you are unable to verbalise them. They all come with a QR code that links to more information about autism.

How to request one

If you are an autistic adult aged 18 and over and live in the Leeds City Council area, you are eligible for an alert card.

On the card, you can list your name, pronouns and list anything you would like people seeing the card to know about you and your needs.

To request one, please either scan the QR code to the right or visit our website at leedsautismaim.org.uk/resources/leeds-autism-alert-card

Leeds Autism Alert Card



Scan the QR Code to find out more!

Autism Hub

Back in January 2015, Leeds Autism AIM started to run weekly drop-in Autism Hub sessions at the Lovell Park Hub. There, we offered a mix of information and signposting, informal peer support and one-to-one sessions for peer support, post-diagnostic support and with partner organisations.

To date, we have held more than 600 Hub sessions, a combination of drop-ins and booked appointment-only dates.



Autistic-led

At the Hubs, we have a strong presence from autistic members of staff and volunteers. This has helped us to communicate with autistic people passing through the Hub's doors.

We also aim to make each session as welcoming as possible. To aid that, we provide refreshments and hot food during drop-ins, as well as a quiet room for anyone who is feeling overwhelmed. Where needed, anyone visiting the Hub can meet with an AIM staff member one-to-one.

At the time of writing, we are on the hunt for a new venue in Leeds for drop-ins. We will make sure it is as accessible and welcoming as the Lovell Park Hub was and hope to make plenty of new memories there!

Post-Diagnostic Support

Starting in 2019, we have provided one-to-one sessions for newly-diagnosed autistic adults in Leeds. Post-diagnostic support is delivered by autistic members of our staff team to autistic adults whose first appointment is within a year of them receiving a formal autism diagnosis.

This service has also been part of Bradford and Craven Autism AIM's offer as well, since its' launch in 2023.



What post-diagnostic support covers

Post-diagnostic support is over up to four one-to-one sessions. Its' aim is to help the person receiving it to know more about their autism and to plan strategies for managing day-to-day. It covers topics such as:

- Families and relationships
- Help to put forward your needs
- Sensory issues
- Disclosing your diagnosis

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we offered this service remotely via video call. To this day, we offer clients a choice of meeting remotely, in-person or via text chat - whichever suits their needs.

To date, hundreds of autistic adults in Leeds, Bradford and Craven have received post-diagnostic support from our service.

Peer-Led Groups

Since 2017, we have been running at least one peer-led group for autistic adults in Leeds. Starting at the Autism Hub, we ran our Women-Aligned Group and Gaming Group on a monthly basis. Both were fairly well-attended, but with the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to adapt.

The Women-Aligned Group moved online, whilst we set up a remote version of our Gaming Group, aided by Discord and BoardGameArena.



Reducing isolation

During the pandemic, we were unable to run in-person groups or Autism Hubs. To provide something to help reduce isolation in a difficult period, we set up a monthly online peer support group, which is still going strong today.

That and the Women-Aligned Group regularly get more than 10 visitors every month. The latter has themed topics, chosen by its' members.

Another peer group was added to our offer in 2022, with the Autism AIM - Mental Health Equity Project (MHEP) launching its' in-person mental health-focused peer support groups in Leeds. The group discussed topics chosen by its' members and made a range of resources around them.

Today, MHEP runs two monthly groups for Leeds - one in-person and the other online. From the middle of 2024, they run one online group for autistic adults in Bradford and Craven as well.

Peer Support

From 2018 onwards, Leeds Autism AIM have provided one-to-one peer support for autistic adults looking to learn more about their autism from someone with similar lived experience.

This is provided in-person and remotely and like other services we offer, is free. All one-to-one peer support sessions have been delivered by some of our Peer Development Workers.



Formal and informal

Over up to four sessions per year, we have helped clients accessing this service by giving:

- Information on what it means to be autistic
- Tips on managing day-to-day
- Information on any services you can access
- Greater understanding of different issues that affect autistic people

In addition to formal peer support in one-to-one appointments, there is also informal peer support happening at our drop-in Autism Hubs. This is where people visiting the Hubs connect with one another, talking about issues that affect them.

At the Hubs, autistic clients have made friends and learned more about themselves and how being autistic affects them.

Information and Signposting

The 'I' in AIM stands for Information! Passing on information to autistic adults is a major part of what we do, whether it's at our Autism Hubs, via our website, on social media or by phone or email.

In the beginning, we had a range of leaflets from local services at the Hubs in Leeds, as well as the now-defunct Autism Leeds Directory. Once the Directory closed, we set up a website for Leeds Autism AIM.



Year-on-year growth

Since it launched in 2017, the Leeds Autism AIM website has seen visitor numbers grow year-on-year. In the 11 months up to and including February 2025, more than 20,000 people visited it!

Information also comes in the form of our many resources, including our strategy guides and the range of guides made by the Mental Health Access Project and Mental Health Equity Project.

We also do plenty of signposting. This involves pointing anyone who is looking for the right support for what they need in the direction of services that can help them. Signposting is offered at our Hub sessions, via email, in one-to-one appointments (both in-person and remotely) and over the phone.

Information and signposting is provided by both Leeds Autism AIM and Bradford and Craven Autism AIM.



Mental Health Equity Project

We delivered training to 160+ advocates and cofacilitators in 2024/2025, both in-person and via webinar.



After receiving a grant from Comic Relief's Changemakers Fund in 2021, we launched the Autism AIM - Mental Health Equity Project (MHEP).

We have delivered:

- Autism Equity and Advocacy Training for Professionals
- Mental Health Peer Support Groups in Leeds and Bradford
- Sensory Audits of Acute Mental Health Wards
- Produced Autism-Specific Mental Health Resources

Training for Advocates, Social Prescribers and Cofacilitators

Training was person-centered, written and delivered by autistic staff members.

Staff learning outcomes from our training sessions helps to improve autistic access to vital support and services, such as statutory advocacy.



The training explored autistic access barriers and how to address these, such as referral processes and wait times.

"It was the best training I think I have attended on autism. I learned lots and it reinforced knowledge. I feel better equipped to advocate for my family members and clients in my work role."



Educated on Autism Specific Resources

In training, we shared AIM Resources:

- Autism Alert Cards
- Health Passports
- Mental Health Guides
- Advocacy Tools

Sensory Audits and Reporting

We delivered sensory audits to six acute mental health wards and rehabilitation centres across Leeds and Bradford. The reporting informed environmental retrofitting plans and we consulted on two 'Make it Your Own Space' sensory rooms linking with the NHS.



The Mental Health Equity Project won an award for our partnership work alongside the NHS at the Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership Awards, 'Celebrate as One' in 2023.





Mental Health Equity Project

1,160+ individuals have accessed and been supported by our service and staff via peer support groups, training, audits and partnership.

100%

Of advocacy trainees felt more confident supporting autistic clients after training.



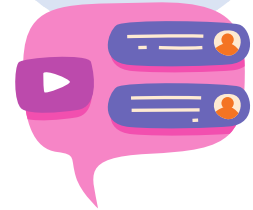
89%

Cofacilitators said they felt more confident using autism specific resources



4,370+

Downloads on Bradford/Leeds AIM Website of MHEP Resources 2024/5



Autistic Mental Health In-Person Group: Leeds



The in-person groups offer autistic-led mental health peer support for autistic adults.

We provide drinks, snacks and sensory tools for all to share in a supportive environment.



Autistic Mental Health Online Group Bradford

We have had 110 people attend our Leeds Online Group from April 2024 to March 2025.

These groups offer a safe space for people to share tips, and learn from community.



Autistic Mental Health Online Group: Bradford

The Bradford Mental Health Peer Support Group launched in July 2024 and we have had 64 individual attendees in this timeframe.

We discussed topics such as autistic parenting, sensory needs, loss and grief, and autistic burnout.

Upcoming Events:



- 2 April: AIM Celebration Day
- 9 April: Online Bradford MH Group
- 10 April: In-Person Leeds MH Group
- 24 April: Online Leeds MH Group
- April/May TBC: Talking to MESMAC's Neuro-Queer Group about our PIP guides

Mental Health Access Project

Since its launch last year, our Mental Health Access Project (MHAP) has been bustling with activity. From providing one-to-one support for autistic clients navigating the mental health system, to developing training sessions for mental health professionals in Leeds, as well as conducting Sensory Environment Audits of community mental health facilities.

Mental Health Facilitators

A major part of the project was providing one-to-one support for autistic clients to identify barriers to accessing local community mental health services. We supported 45 clients in up to four sessions with one of our Mental Health Facilitators.

In the one-to-one sessions, our team helped clients to:

- Navigate mental health services in Leeds and understand the pathways to making a referral for support
- Identify any barriers preventing them from accessing appropriate mental health support
- Prepare for helpful conversations, meetings or similar assessments with mental health professionals

We also offered a follow-up meeting to address any new or ongoing issues, advice with therapy, treatments and reasonable adjustments.

Sensory Audits and Reporting

We conducted Sensory Environment Audits of four NHS Community Mental Health facilities in Leeds including Leeds Autism Diagnostic Service (LADS) at Aire Court.

Often, the diagnostic process is carried out whilst people are accessing CMHT, which can influence the treatment options they receive. The findings in our Sensory Audit reports, help make environments more accessible by recommending improvements and ensuring approaches are adapted.

Sensory Audits are carried out by our autistic staff team giving us a unique insight and understanding into the difficulties and barriers faced by autistic people when trying to access mental health services. With the aim of producing more positive outcomes.

Training

As part of the Community Mental Health Transformation programme, third sector organisations like Leeds Autism AIM, play a vital role in helping to improve local mental health services.

So our team developed and delivered autism and mental health awareness training for mental health professionals from other third sector organisations including Community Wellbeing Connectors, Healthy Minds Practitioners, Mental Health Advisors, admin and reception staff.

The training aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and barriers faced by autistic people when accessing mental health services. By equipping professionals with the knowledge and skills to identify, assess, and treat these complexities, the training empowers staff to provide more tailored, compassionate care.

We emphasised the importance of person-centered approaches and recognising the diverse needs of autistic people, to ensure professionals are equipped with strategies for effective communication, sensory needs and therapeutic interventions to improve outcomes for autistic people accessing mental health support, and fostering a more inclusive and accessible mental health care system.

Webinar

Last year, Lex and Lawrence from our team delivered a webinar on accessing mental health services as an autistic adult.

In it, they talk about the barriers and what to do when trying to access the most appropriate support.

The webinar can be watched for free on Leeds Autism AIM's YouTube channel! To see it, please either scan the QR code to the right or visit tinyurl.com/accessingmh



Bradford and Craven AIM

In spring 2023, a pilot project from Autism AIM was launched. Bradford and Craven Autism AIM was set up, initially funded for a year. Its' aims were to provide information and signposting, help to access GP services through its' Health Access Project and create a range of free resources.

The project was funded by grants from the West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership and Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership.



Second year growth

After a successful first year, we were awarded funding for another 12 months to help grow our service. As part of that, we added a post-diagnostic support to our offer.

We also launched a monthly mental-health focused peer support group, meeting online. The group sessions are facilitated by the Autism AIM - Mental Health Equity Project team. On top of that, we created a website for the service, with information on all of our services and links to our resources.

Bradford and Craven Autism AIM covers a wide area, which includes the entire Bradford District - Bradford, Airedale (Shipley, Bingley, Baildon, Keighley) and Wharfedale (Ilkley, Menston, Burley-in-Wharfedale).

It also covers the Craven area of North Yorkshire, including Skipton, Settle, Grassington, Ingleton, Bentham and Cross Hills.

To help get the word out about Bradford and Craven Autism AIM, we attended a range of events. They included a Preparing for Adulthood (PFA) event and employment event in Bradford.

We also held joint stalls with our friends from CHANGE at Bradford Pride and Keighley Pride in 2023 and returned to the latter in 2024.

More recently, we have engaged with many local services. They include Yorkshire MESMAC, Healthy Minds, Mind Bradford District and Craven, Equality Together and Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust.



A third year

This spring, Bradford and Craven AIM is about to enter its' third year! This is a massive achievement for us and we couldn't have done it without the help of our funders and supporters, including Bradford Council.

This year, we will do more partnership work and aim to find a new Hub venue. The partnership work includes involvement in creating a new health profile for Bradford with other voluntary services and the local NHS.

We look forward to doing more to support autistic adults in Bradford and Craven, be it through one-to-one appointments, signposting or by creating useful resources to help them self-advocate and know what help is available.



Bradford and Craven Autism AIM is funded by grants from **Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership** and **West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership**.

Advocacy and Self-Advocacy

Between 2015 and 2023, Leeds Autism AIM had a dedicated member of staff to provide one-to-one advocacy. This involved supporting clients to get their voice heard and rights upheld when trying to access services or benefits such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

Although funding for this service ended, we still provide advocacy in a few different ways.



Advocating in forums

Some of our team regularly attend forums, where decision makers from local authorities and services hear from us about what our clients have been saying. In doing this, we are advocating for the needs of autistic adults to be met across Leeds, Bradford and beyond, with some success.

We also advocate for autistic people's needs through training professionals such as advocates and social prescribers. This has been done by both our Mental Health Equity Project and Mental Health Access Project teams.

Finally, we provide a range of free self-advocacy resources, made by and for autistic adults. These include our Services Profile, Communications Profile and Leeds Autism Alert Card.

All of the above and more can help autistic adults to speak up for themselves by planning what they want and need to say.

Our Other Work

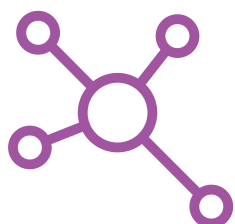


Autism Health Access Project

Between 2020 and 2024, Leeds Autism AIM had a project which aimed to support autistic adults to communicate their healthcare needs and access local GP services.

The Health Access Project team also made a series of free resources, all of which are still available to download from the Leeds and Bradford and Craven AIM websites.

There is a Health Access Project for Bradford and Craven running right now, providing one-to-one support and helping to improve access to GP services for autistic adults in that part of the world.



Keeping Neurodivergent People Connected

A project run during the Covid-19 pandemic, it aimed to signpost people with neurodivergent conditions in Leeds to relevant services and support available.

We worked with The Advonet Group's First Contact Team to answer queries via email and phone to ensure clients got the information they needed.



Peer Support Volunteering

This project paired a volunteer Peer Support Worker with an autistic adult. The volunteer would meet with their match to help them know more about their autism diagnosis.

They would also help their match to develop strategies for managing day-to-day. All volunteers received training, including autism awareness and for the role itself.

Saying Thanks

As we head towards the end of this booklet, there are a lot of people we would like to thank for helping Autism AIM to reach this special milestone. Here is a list of all the funders we are extremely grateful to for helping to make sure we were able to fund our work:

- NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- The National Lottery Community Fund
- Comic Relief
- West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership
- Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership
- Live Well Leeds
- Leeds Community Foundation
- Health and Social Care Volunteering Fund
- The Brelms Trust
- Jimbo's Fund
- Leeds City Council

Supporters

As well as all of our funders and partner organisations (see Page 10), we would also like to thank the following services and individuals for supporting Autism AIM's work:

- Leeds City Council
- Bradford Council
- The West Yorkshire VCSE Alliance
- Leeds Health and Care Partnership (HCP)
- Helen Gee, former Autism Commissioning Lead for Leeds City Council
- Shelley Russell, the Learning Disability and Neurodiversity Programme Manager at West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership
- Philip Chan, the Neurodiversity Commissioning Programme Leader for Leeds City Council
- Stacey Leonard, the Neurodiversity Commissioning Manager for Bradford Council

Notes and Answers

If you would like to make any notes, please write them down in the space below as you please.

AIM Crossword Solutions (Page 14)

Across

- 2. Leeds
- 10. Advocacy
- 11. Barriers
- 12. Autism
- 13. Hub
- 14. Volunteer
- 15. AIM

Down

- 1. Alert Card
- 3. Charity
- 4. Peer Support
- 5. Mentoring
- 6. Post Diagnostic
- 7. Awareness
- 8. Resources
- 9. Acceptance
- 10. Accessibility

Requesting a digital copy

We will publish a PDF version of this booklet on the Leeds Autism AIM, Bradford and Craven Autism AIM and Advonet Group websites shortly after our celebration event.

If you want a PDF copy, please email aimenquiries@advonet.org.uk and we will send one to you.



Thank you!

Follow us online



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Website: bradfordautismaim.org.uk
Facebook/Instagram/Threads: @leedsautismaim



Facebook: @mhequityproject

We are funded by:



Leeds Autism AIM (including the Mental Health Access Project) is funded by grants from the NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board, The National Lottery Community Fund and Live Well Leeds.

The Autism AIM - Mental Health Equity Project is funded by a grant from Comic Relief's Change Makers Fund.

Bradford and Craven Autism AIM is funded by grants from the West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership and Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership.



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