



here
to **help**

Suicide Prevention -
Autism

Here to Help: Project Evaluation

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Executive Summary



Funded by the Department for Health and Social Care's Suicide Prevention Fund, **Here to Help** project, aimed at addressing the mental health and suicide prevention needs of autistic people in the Tees Valley area.

The project, led by SJOG Hospitalier Services in partnership with Middlesbrough charity, MAIN, was developed in response to alarming statistics indicating that a significant percentage of autistic individuals at risk of suicide, with the Northeast region having one of the highest suicide rates in the UK.

Project Goals and Objectives

The primary aim of the Here to Help was to raise awareness of suicide risks among autistic individuals and provide a toolkit for prevention. This involved a co-designed mental health support toolkit and an online platform offering resources and training. The project also engaged the wider community, charities, NHS, and local authorities to enhance support for autistic individuals and their families.

Our impact

Over 12 months, Here to Help was engaged with over 78,000 times, and directly supported 1,085 autistic people and 204 family members through workshops and drop-in sessions. By March 2025, over 2,042 resources had been downloaded from the Here to Help website from UK the UK and beyond.

Here to Help successfully addressed critical gaps in mental health support for autistic people. Specifically, Here to Help had a significant impact on raising awareness and providing support; our training sessions were well-received, with over 1,730 professionals who may interact with autistic people, engaged. Filling this emergent gap meant that Here to Help developed bespoke resources and support techniques for crisis call operatives (e.g. Samaritans volunteers) to adapt language and communication to be more autism friendly.

The combination of bespoke online resources and in person support led Here to Help to be selected as one of nine projects from across Europe in the Caritas Europa Social Innovation Festival 2025.

Future Directions

There is ongoing demand for training and resources which Here to Help has shaped. This will continue for the next two years, with funding secured from the Albert Gubay Charitable Foundation. Here to Help is here to meet more need and prevent suicide.

Introduction



Background

Navigating life with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can be challenging. Research indicates that between 11% and 66% of autistic adults have contemplated suicide in their lifetime, with up to 35% having made suicide plans or attempts (Hedley & Uljarević, 2018). Furthermore, autistic people often encounter a dearth of suitable mental health and suicide prevention services (Camm-Brosbie et al., 2019), resulting in a higher prevalence of unmet needs when compared to the general population.

The Northeast region has the second highest percentage of suicides in the United Kingdom at 14.9% and Darlington has the highest suicide rate nationally with 19.6 per 100,000 people. Redcar & Cleveland and Middlesbrough are also rated significantly higher than the rest of the Northeast.

In 2023 The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) established a £10 Million Suicide Prevention Grant Fund, launched in August 2023, to run from 2023 to March 2025. The fund was designed to support voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations to develop diverse and innovative approaches to preventing suicide in identified priority groups.

This fund coincided with the publication of a new strategy aimed at reducing the rates of suicide across in England and Wales, The Department of Health and Social Care Suicide prevention in England: 5-year cross sector strategy (2023). This strategy identifies autistic people as a priority group *‘that could particularly benefit from more bespoke support’*.

To address this, SJOG Hospitalier Services (SJOG) in partnership with Middlesbrough based charity, MAIN, established ‘Here to Help’.

The Tees Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan identifies autistic people as a priority group but approaches to providing autism specific support is not explicit and does not address the risk factors associated with autism and suicidality. For example, autistic men and women are equally likely to die by suicide whereas in the general population men have a significantly higher prevalence, (Newell, V. 2023).



Prevalence rates are also higher for transgender and gender non-conforming autistic individuals, (Strauss, P. 2021) as well as those receiving a late autism diagnosis.

Funded by the Department for Health and Social Care's Suicide Prevention Fund, Here to Help worked across Tees Valley local authority, to raise awareness of the risk of suicide for autistic people and deliver a usable, preventative toolkit.

Developing Here to Help

The vision for Here to Help was to establish a resource for communities across the Tees Valley area to raise awareness of risks of suicide for autistic people and prevent people at risk of suicide through toolkits and training.

To do so, four key areas of work were established and delivered in two parts.

PART 1:

Co-design aimed to capture the voice of people with autism to shape the direction of Here to Help through:

1. A Here to Help Toolkit: A comprehensive, co-designed, mental health support toolkit offering strategies for aiding autistic people who experience suicidal thoughts and promoting preventive mental health measures.
2. Here to Help web platform: An online resource hub, "Here to Help" optimised for use on mobile devices hosting the downloadable here to help toolkits, and prerecorded webinars, providing information, advice, and guidance for people with autism aged 14 and above.

PART 2:

Implementation through promotion and campaigning through the region. Specifically, this was:

3. A Suicide Awareness Campaign: A roadshow tour across Tees Valley communities to educate on suicide risks among autistic people delivering information, advice, and guidance.
4. Training and drop-in sessions: Twice weekly drop-in sessions in Middlesbrough, hosted at MAIN, providing advice on using the toolkit and access to information, referrals and partners.



Methodology of Evaluation



The evaluation aimed to explore concepts of prevention, education and destigmatisation around suicide and autism, whilst also reflecting on empowerment tools which were developed along with support networks.

To do so, the methodology combined descriptive statistics detailing numbers of people supported, direct and ancillary engagement with the project, and consequential encounters with project materials through stakeholder sharing. Qualitative and reflective feedback on what worked and what could be improved was considered periodically throughout the project and used to contextualise the descriptive statistics provided.

The project team worked closely with all stakeholders in the project and ensured a hands-on approach, where feedback was provided during weekly meetings and through steering groups to aid the project objectives.

The voice of the people we support was embedded during the delivery of the project and helped inform the design and delivery of resources and support sessions. This co-design is described throughout the subsequent sections and formed part of the evaluation.



Project Description



Project Mobilisation

The first 3 months of Here to Help focused on developing an innovative project to meet the varying needs of autistic people and those supporting/living with an autistic person.

First, the context was more deeply explored. It is widely identified in research (Uljarevic, M., Hamilton, A. 2013 & Samson, A. C., Huber, O., & Gross, J. J. 2012) that autistic individuals may struggle with identifying and communicating their emotions (alexithymia), leading to heightened frustration (Guy-Evans., O, 2024) and often disengagement from services or support planning approaches.

Currently only 11% of local areas have mental health crisis services that support autistic people who don't have a learning disability (Public Health England, 2019). Delays in diagnosis can also significantly impact accessibility to mental health crisis services and it is indicated in the Journal of Molecular Autism that 41% of adults with a lifetime history of suicide attempt (s) were found to score above the clinical threshold for autistic traits but had not received a formal diagnosis. (Richards, G., Cassidy, S., Baron-Cohen, S. et al 2019).

At the launch of Here to Help in June 2024 the number of patients with an open suspected autism referral in the UK stood at 163,666. These referrals had been open for at least 13 weeks without receiving a care contact appointment.

Understanding the context in more detail clearly evidenced the needs for Here to Help.

Content Development

When designing the project, we recognised traditional approaches to developing and delivering preventative support would need in depth consideration to safeguard its efficacy.

A project steering group, comprising members from the local authority, the Integrated Care Board (ICB), and autistic people and their families, was established to convene five times over the 13-month project to ensure that the delivery aligns with local priorities and needs. Steering group meetings took place with parents and professionals, and materials were co-produced with input from autistic people.



Embedding steering groups into the early stages of project design helped target our approach more effectively. We initially consulted with professionals from local ICB Suicide Prevention Leads, academics, and Local Authority community practitioners.

Working with allied professionals helped us to shape our information resources, web content and workshop structures to provide validity to our content. Content was then shared with our parent/carer steering committee for evaluation of understanding. We asked for feedback on areas such as:

- Ease of understanding
- Use of language and terminology
- Practicality of toolkits
- Relevance

Once we had established a structured approach to the design of our information, we continued to consult with steering group members throughout the project for any new pieces of work that we undertook. This approach solidified our local relationships and supported recognition of the project.

Web Design

For autistic people who cannot always get their sensory and communication needs met in physical venues and public spaces, digital platforms and services offer unique opportunities and advantages. Despite this, digital platforms often fall short in meeting the specific needs of this population through poor accessibility, shutting many people out of services (Koteyko N., Manni S., & Featherstone C., et al. 2023).

Our plans for a web-based platform were to increase our reach and provide an alternative approach to information sharing for autistic people and their families. It was essential that we provided an enabling online space that considered the needs of autistic people but was also tailored to families and professionals seeking insight and support into autism and suicidality.

Our prototype website was designed with SJOG autism practitioners and members of the project team. We then established a user experience (UX) feedback methodology involving 14 autistic people across our services and the local community.

This included the participants understanding of 'browsing' and their confidence in navigating the web platform prototype. Reflection on the the general layout, colours used, and ability to locate specific information were recorded.

The feedback was analysed to identify themes and commonality in responses; this feedback became our foundation for making the suggested amendments and establishing an accessible platform both visually and operationally. By month 5 of the project, we were able to begin adding our resources to the Here to Help web platform and plan the launch of our project publicly.



Creating Awareness

Working with SJOGs communication and social media team, we developed a campaign to raise awareness of the project. The campaign fronted a dual approach of social media awareness and a physical presence across the 72 communities in which we aimed to reach in the Tees Valley area.

Social media posts were planned to provide insight into the plans for the project and to recruit members to our steering committees. This approach complemented SJOG's already established, Autism Support Page on Facebook and supported us to build a wider following on additional social media platforms such as Tik Tok and Instagram.

Our Magic Space Mobile Sensory unit took the project on a roadshow across the Tees Valley to share information about Here to Help. We visited local landmarks and places of interest to promote recognition of our geographical reach but to also appeal to members of the public who may not have ease of access to social media platforms. Magic Space held leaflets and key contact information for the project, and we joined local events as a static display.



We continued to drive awareness of Here to Help by meeting with local MPs to raise awareness of the need for Here to Help on a regional level. The Mayor of Darlington also attended our project launch and shared his attendance across his social media platforms raising further awareness.

Additionally, Here to Help was featured in the following local media:

- Hits Radio Teesside
- BBC Radio Tees
- Zetland Radio
- Red Radio
- Radio Hartlepool
- The Evening Gazette



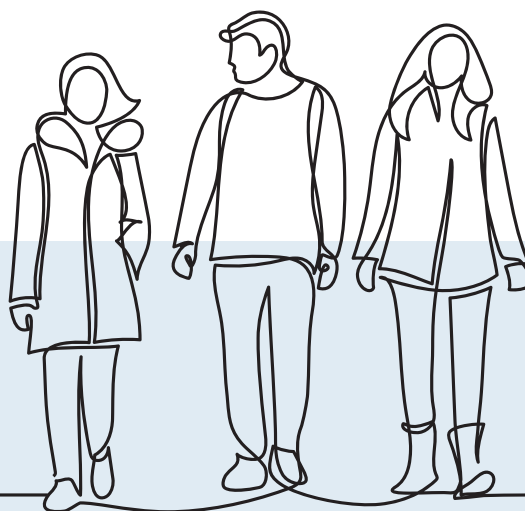
Project Launch

To drive awareness of the project and ensure we maximised our reach we planned two project launches in the month of June 2024. Our 'soft' launch was designed to attract community partners from across the Tees Valley and was held in North Ormesby with our partner charity, MAIN.

This event was attended by 41 colleagues across the Tees Valley Area and allowed us to share the project aims and objectives with professionals from a range of services including ICB and local charities. The public launch was then held as a drop-in opportunity for families and autistic people to find out more information about the project. The Here to Help website went live on 1st July 2024.



Outcomes



PART 1: | Here to Help Toolkit

The website content and face to face sessions provided practical and accessible strategies and resources for suicide prevention. They were designed to support autistic people, families, and professionals in navigating online and local information easily. Advice and signposting were provided by Here to Help for those awaiting diagnosis or for individuals who thought they might be autistic as well.

Information on support groups and services, which helped reduce loneliness and isolation, was provided through the project website and social media accounts. A safe space was offered by the project team for individuals to meet others who may have been experiencing the same process. At this point, Here to Help delivered support to prevent suicide through effective information, advice and guidance.

In addition, the co-production process allowed people with lived experience of autism to continually co-design the tools and systems of Here to Help.

Initially, the project aimed to engage 2,000 people over the 9-month rollout of the toolkit, with expectations to reach 72 communities and approximately 1,440 individuals. Engagement was tracked through drop-in sessions, campaign tours, and website analytics, which provided insight into participation and resource usage.

By March 2025, 1,085 resources had been downloaded from the website—averaging 206.4 downloads per month—indicating strong interest and use of the materials in a shorter timescale than anticipated. This exceeded initial expectations and highlighted a positive response to the campaign.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the toolkit, people who used resources or drop-in sessions were invited to complete a brief questionnaire assessing the usefulness and accessibility of the materials. This feedback was collected through both the Here to Help portal and paper forms distributed at drop-in sessions and campaign events, providing a comprehensive understanding of community engagement and the toolkit's impact. QR Codes via SLIDO were provided for training and analysed on receipt of completed surveys.



No personal data was held for people who were met, but consent was requested to publish keywords from the feedback.

Example feedback is shown below.



“The sessions are proving valuable to different service users in different ways. Some of our service users are opening about how they are feeling during your sessions and after your sessions and this is good as we are encouraging them to talk. Some of our service users who won't always join in with activities in the main hall delivered by someone they don't know as well have been and this shows how at ease, they feel with you. Your sessions are done in a fun way but meaningful way and at the level our service users require to understand. Lots ask after you have gone when they will see you again.”

Anonymous

Web Platform

The Here to Help web platform was continuously refined and optimised for mobile devices, hosting downloadable Here to Help toolkits and pre-recorded webinars. Updates were guided by feedback from 14 user experience testers, including autistic people, parents, carers, and professionals, to ensure the content remained informative, accessible, and user-friendly, such as adding an option to switch colours from vivid to muted for sensory-friendly accessibility.

The web platform had global impact – reaching 53 countries (see table 1).

Table 1:
Engagement by country

☐	Country ▾ +	↓ Active users	New users	Engaged sessions	Engagement rate
☐	Total	5,135 100% of total	5,137 100% of total	2,440 100% of total	36.5% Avg 0%
☐	1 United Kingdom	3,669 (71.45%)	3,672 (71.48%)	1,950 (79.92%)	37.59%
☐	2 United States	590 (11.49%)	591 (11.5%)	291 (11.93%)	49.32%
☐	3 Netherlands	221 (4.3%)	222 (4.32%)	30 (1.23%)	13.57%
☐	4 Finland	153 (2.98%)	153 (2.98%)	22 (0.9%)	14.38%
☐	5 Ireland	152 (2.96%)	152 (2.96%)	24 (0.98%)	15.69%

Currently, 37 resources are available in the ‘**I need help for myself**’ section, which can be summarised as autism-specific support (e.g., easy read guides communication, masking), mental health and coping strategies (e.g., helplines and tools) and crisis and emergency resources (e.g., App recommendations). These are the direct responses to additional key factors outlined in the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention.



In our **'I need help for someone else'** section 31 resources are available which have been tailored to the target audience and feature items such as support for mental health (e.g., Behavioural Diary), Autism-Specific Support (e.g., Sleep Advice for Siblings of Autistic Individuals) and factsheets and toolkits (e.g., Double Empathy Problem Fact Sheet, sibling toolkit).

The website downloads by category showed that Toolkits, Fact sheets and Research and Practice had the highest numbers of downloaded materials. The Autism and Suicidality Fact Sheet and the Toolkit for Professionals were the most downloaded resources. See table 2 and 3.

The contents available on the platform directly align with the needs identified in suicide prevention efforts for autistic individuals. The resources are autism-specific, providing tailored guidance and practical strategies that support mental health and crisis intervention. Additionally, the availability of varied materials ensures that different audiences, including autistic individuals, families, and professionals, can access appropriate support.

Table 2:
Web platform data

Key Performance Indicators	Resource/Content	Project Outcomes (number of downloads)
Website Activity	Logged events on website (Google Analytics)	41,837
Overall Resource Downloads	Here to Help Web Platform	2,042
Number of downloads	Self-Help Information	102
Number of downloads	Research & Practice	131
Number of downloads	Toolkits	187
Number of downloads	Fact Sheets	162

Table 3:
Number of downloads by information page on website (n= number of people)

N=downloads by page	
I need help for myself	N=704
I need help for someone else	N=461
Miscellaneous Information	N=877



PART 2:

Promotion and Campaign

Suicide awareness roadshow across Teesside communities was a success.

SJOG was invited to participate in the Northeast and North Cumbria Suicide Prevention Strategy Programme, and we are continuing to explore additional opportunities to expand the awareness campaign. Central to our approach was the inclusion of people with lived experience of suicide, including those who have felt suicidal, made attempts, or been affected by suicide loss. Their voices were pivotal in shaping the planning, design, and decisions surrounding our suicide prevention efforts, as recommended by the DHSC (2023).

The impact of the project is predominantly measured through analytical data collected from the web and social media platforms. This quantitative data was analysed monthly. Overall, online engagement for the Here to Help project had a significant impact, reaching 47,087 users collectively on social media and website platforms. The user engagement metrics and volume of downloads confirm that the project has effectively disseminated fundamental information and resources.

Table 4:
Raising awareness

Key Performance Indicators	Source	Project Outcomes
People Reached via social media campaign	Facebook	N=23,855
	TikTok	N=7,881
	X (Formerly Twitter) *	N=1,110
	Instagram	N=1,801
	Linked In	N=12,440
People Reached through Project Events	Project Launches	N=95
	Promotion of Project through partner newsletter	N=5,212

**SJOG removed its social media account from X in January 2025.*



"I have current case of person with autism and feeling suicidal so this will really help me to engage with this person and how to get the best outcome"

Professional feedback

"That extra background knowledge and a source of information I can access quickly. Really good overview."

Professional feedback



Training and Drop-in Sessions

Training and drop-in sessions were aimed to be delivered in Middlesbrough (later expanded to Darlington, Redcar, and Hartlepool) to provide toolkit guidance, referrals, and peer support alongside autism-specific crisis communication training (e.g., Samaritans). This was largely linked to face-to-face/video conferencing for sharing resources. Collaboration with professionals was undertaken to ensure the content was both effective and validated. A total of n=1,730 professionals were supported through workshops, meetings, and training, but also include collaborations with Northumbria University and Teesside University, along with grassroots organisation (see table 5).

Table 5:
Training & workshops
(n=number of participants)

Key Performance Indicators	Content	Project Outcomes
Samaritans	Providing Telephone Crisis Support for Autistic People	N=900
Tees-wide Safeguarding Adults Week	Autism & Suicidality Awareness	N=100
Middlesbrough Borough Council	Autism, Mental Health and Suicidality	N=78
Tees, Esk Wear Valley ICB	Safeguarding Autistic People in Crisis	N=32
NECA – Adult Carers	Autism & Addiction	N=17

Additional support was provided to the following organisations:

- Tees Valley Sport – Autism Training to coaches
- Catalyst Stockton on Tees – Training to support Autistic Volunteers in the workplace
- Teesside University – Guest lecture on Autism and Suicide
- Arcus Counselling – Overview of autism, autism and LGBT & mental health training for counsellors
- Darlington Borough Council – Drop-in workshops and library sessions delivered to autistic people, family members and carers
- Newcastle University – Future training for facilitators & autism focused sessions
- Redcar Cleveland Borough Council – Training for colleagues in adult social services
- Girl Guiding UK – Autism Awareness workshops provided
- Sea Cadets – Autism and Communication information shared



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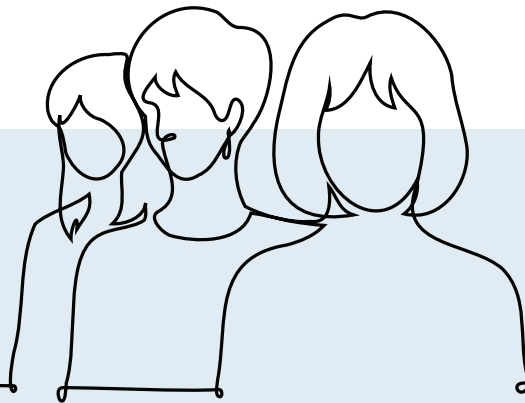
The high attendance at workshops indicates that the initiative was well-received and impactful, which was further confirmed through feedback collected after each training. Additionally, the reciprocity aspect of the initiative was evident, as training sessions were shared and delivered to various groups, contributing to a broader exchange of knowledge.

"I just want to say as an ADHD volunteer I am delighted by the content of this training, thank you so much for what you do."

Neurodivergent individual feedback



Discussion of Outcomes



Since the launch, regular drop-in sessions have been secured in Darlington, Redcar, and Hartlepool. Communication has reached significant number of individuals through newsletters, leaflets, and shared information with other providers regarding how to access support. Additionally, 899 autistic people and 204 family members have received direct support through the project.

Our approach to the delivery of support sessions changed on request from the autistic people in the initial group sessions delivered June-November 2024 (n=770). It was more valuable to the autistic people to meet on a one-to-one basis; this helped us gain a better insight into the support that we were providing, and we began to consistently offer individual sessions. Individual sessions were held face to face or via video conferencing and whilst this reduced our reach in terms of numbers, one-to-one sessions were more impactful on a smaller scale and were welcomed by the people supported (November 2024-January 2025 n=129).

A total of 45 drop-in sessions were conducted by SJOG, 31 of which occurred weekly, with ongoing support from MAIN. The sessions that were delivered by facilitators in MAIN followed the training and guidance by the service manager at Here to Help. 35 sessions have been delivered to 186 neurodivergent individuals at MAIN.

The sessions of the project successfully reached a wide audience, with significant engagement from professionals, autistic individuals, and family members. Feedback received from a drop-in session highlights the effectiveness of the support.



"I found the training very informative, and the trainer had extensive knowledge which aided the fluidity of the training session."

"When working with individuals who relate to this workshop, I will be able to use correct terminology and know where to seek support."

Professionals training feedback



The objectives of the Here to Help project were achieved - far surpassing the original target of 2,000 autistic people and families (table 6). The need for autism-specific suicide prevention and mental health support was addressed through the co-designed toolkit, web platform, trainings, and drop-in sessions, which provided accessible resources and support systems tailored to community needs. Positive feedback reflected the relevance and impact of the project, as indicated by high engagement levels. Providing training, sessions, drop-in services, and roadshows reinforced alignment with professional, and community needs that highlights the project's success in delivering practical, inclusive solutions.

Table 6:
Overall engagement
in project

Key Performance Indicators	Resource/Content	Project Outcomes
Magic space	Roadshow Locations to promote Here to Help	72 Communities
Engagement with Drop-in sessions	Overall	31 sessions delivered
Engagement in project – Professionals Training	Autism, Mental Health & Suicidality Awareness sessions	N=1127
Steering group meetings	Professionals	N=19 professionals engaged
Engagement in project – Professionals	Overall	1,730 professionals engaged
Engagement in project - Family members	Family Members Workshops	9 workshops delivered
Parent Steering Committee	Parents	1 session organised
Engagement in project – Family Members	Family-focused workshops, events	204 family members engaged
MAIN - Sessions	Understanding gratitude Journaling for gratitude	3 session, n=25
	Understanding joy, and creating a joy calendar	12 session, n=61



Table 6: Overall engagement in project - continued

Key Performance Indicators	Resource/Content	Project Outcomes
MAIN - Sessions	Understanding anxiety and managing anxiety through mindfulness and energy accounting	6 session, n=33
	Understanding anger and creating a mood thermometer	6 session, n=30
	Emotion Wheel	1 session, n=6
	Self-esteem building: focusing on strength building and creating affirmation cards	4 session, n=31
	Hope Mapping: how to plan for the future	3 session, n=7
MAIN - Sessions	Overall	A total of 35 workshops were delivered to n=193
Engagement in project – Autistic People	Overall	1,085 autistic individuals engaged through Workshops, drop-in sessions, events
Engagement in project - social media	Social media - Overall	N=+47,087
Engagement in project - external	People reached through Partner Newsletter/ Secondary Communications/Email	N=5,212
Here to Help - Engagement	Total number of engagements in the project	N=78,866





“It was a fantastic workshop. Really informative and delivered in a way that was engaging and clear.”

“Really well presented and informative. information shared was well thought out and gave enough within the 90 minutes that was relevant and useful.”

Workshop feedback

Challenges

Here to Help was ambitious and the mobilisation yielding useful learning. We significantly underestimated the need for the project. We grew extremely quickly with calls for support being almost instantaneous from across the Tees Valley.

As awareness of Here to Help was recognised across the Northeast, calls for support and resources were often requested from outside of the initial project remit. Whilst Here to Help remained within the project objectives and geographical area of the Tees Valley, we worked hard not to exclude support requests from additional areas.

Our web platform and information were shared electronically with those requesting support and where we could influence and support larger organisations to increase awareness of autism and suicidality, we were able to invite individuals to online events and direct professionals and family members to our resources.



Impact Assessment



Targeted Impact

We wanted the impact of the Here to Help to increase awareness of suicidality in autistic people across the Tees Valley area in England.

As discussed, the target of reaching 2,000 autistic individuals and families was surpassed and this was evidenced by the number of engagements of people throughout multiple touchpoints of the project.

As the initiative expanded, the increased demand for training and information sessions highlighted the need for enhanced knowledge and resources to better support autistic people, particularly when communicating and managing crisis situations. Whilst impact from our training has not been measured, we have had the opportunity to enhance awareness and practice with a wide range of professionals supporting autistic people across the Tees Valley.

Feedback received following delivery of our sessions has been 100% positive and where ideas and suggestions have been proposed, the project team have strived to make additional resources and support available. This continues beyond the funding period and support local authority provision.

The longer-term impact of the project in relation to suicide prevention, and as part of the Department of Health and Social Care's Suicide Prevention in England: 5-year Cross-Sector Strategy (2023), includes:

- Reducing physical illness and risk
- Reducing isolation
- Reducing financial and economic adversity

While we cannot immediately measure these outcomes, the discussions and engagement during the sessions indicate that these topics are gaining attention. This increased awareness is expected to foster preventive actions in the long term, supported by Here to Help in the future.



Here to Help is the only current project in the area that has not charged for training or support provided. This has meant that there has been no barrier to entry and no restrictions to support provided within the project objectives – free at the point of need is clearly important for suicide prevention measures.

Our longer-term impact is focused on suicide among autistic people and has started to be embedded through:

- Prevention, by creating strategies and interventions to reduce the risk of suicide among autistic individuals.
- Education, focusing on raising awareness and providing information about the risks and signs of suicide.
- Destigmatisation around suicide and autism, aiming to reduce the negative stereotyped and misconceptions about autism and suicide, making it easier for people to seek help and support.

The long-term impact of Here to Help is evident through the increased engagement and awareness among people with autism, families, carers, and professionals. This interest is not only creating short-term changes but is also fostering long-term conversations on mental health and autism. The operational and strategic outcomes and impact below show the project's success and its potential for continued positive influence and growth.

Operational Impact

Some of the most significant operational outcomes to highlight from an operational perspective are:

- **Co-created content:** Co-design underpinned the content and support provided by the project. The content was accessible and reassuring of the needs of autistic people. Whilst the merits of co-design are well documented, the evidence here suggests that it created a channel for autistic people to influence change in how they are supported by services through steering groups. The steering groups also provide validity to the information produced by the project and offers a safe space for people to discuss their experiences.
- **Empowerment tools:** In addition to creating content and new safe spaces, the Here to Help team has examined and developed empowerment tools collaboratively with support networks, including family, friends and professionals. These efforts aim to expand beyond accessible content creation by raising awareness and educating participants, providing them with essential resources and strategies they understand, to support autistic people in managing their health and wellbeing.



- **Reach beyond Tees Valley area:** Thanks to the web platform our resources reached and have been downloaded in different areas of the UK and even other countries. Additionally, some of the training sessions were online proving the potential for expansion of the project as it develops in the future.

Strategic Impact

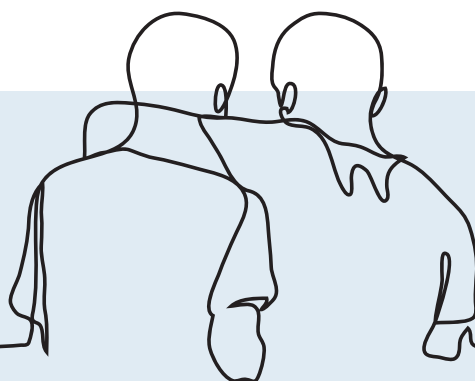
Since the project launch, Here to Help has been designed to operate within an ecosystem that addresses the needs of diverse individuals, including health care professionals. Our strategic impact is evident in how Here to Help supports autistic people and at the same time enhances the wider support system. By fostering meaningful relationships between stakeholders (ICB, local authorities, and the VCSE sector) and sharing the right tools, we are making it easier to provide more comprehensive and effective support for autistic people. Specifically, we see impact through:

- **Reciprocity:** Establishing mutually beneficial relationships within the sector is crucial to promote awareness and work towards reducing suicidality among autistic people in the long term, as well as addressing other mental health and well-being issues. We collaborated with local Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), Local Authority representatives, and various entities across the Tees Valley to achieve these objectives and strengthen the sector in these areas. These parties are also committed to raising awareness and providing support for autistic individuals within their communities due to the evident need – a shared vision and mission.
- **Knowledge shared:** the impact of our training extends beyond the sessions we delivered. The knowledge shared through Here to Help is highly significant as we are educating various communities on suicide prevention and recognising signs in autistic individuals. This information will cascade, as those trained can pass on their knowledge to others. Additionally, the availability of online resources ensures that this valuable information can be accessed 24/7 from anywhere.

The strategic impact and overall effectiveness of the project was recognised through awards. Here to Help was one of nine laureate projects from across Europe selected for recognition by the Caritas Europa Innovation Festival. The award was specifically within the festivals 'Threads of Hope: Stories of Social Innovation' category.



Being Here to Help



The impact of Here to Help will continue as the project is dynamic and has the potential to expand into areas beyond suicide prevention, such as mental health and alcohol misuse. This aligns with the desired long-term impact and can cover the three main points on prevention, education, and destigmatisation on the new themes that will be covered.

The platform and resources have the potential to reach a wider audience in the UK and beyond, as they are designed to be adaptable and varied in content. By the end of 2024, we stopped offering some of the sessions, but we received continuous requests to deliver them again, proving their need and usefulness.

Here to Help is in place, with an experience team, and funding from the Albert Gubay Charitable Foundation means there will be more benefit to more people. Over the next two years, support will continue in the model which has been established and evaluated here. We will continue to monitor effectiveness, respond to need, and champion the needs of autistic people at risk of suicide.

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