



Co-Production in Action:

ASD Rainbows – Reflections
(who I am inside) Project

ICF Children and Young People/Autism

Many children and young people across the region experience issues with their mental health including anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidal thoughts.

These negative feelings can be further exasperated and often misunderstood for children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Recognising this, ASD Rainbows wants to give the children and young people they work with a purpose and a reason to keep going through targeted support that helps them to feel understood, accepted and cared for.

Since the project's conception, a high proportion of the referrals received has been to help children and young people with social anxiety, leading to them struggling to access school. As a result, these children and young people risk becoming socially isolated or developing and displaying extreme challenging behaviours. To reduce this risk and overcome some of the barriers associated with conditions like social anxiety, the ASD Rainbows Reflections project provides intensive 1-2-1 and whole family outreach work with the intention to build confidence through the reaffirming of identity.

Such work can only be completed successfully once a relationship of mutual trust and respect has been established, and this requires a lot of needs driven foundational level work to be conducted. ASD Rainbows achieves this by meeting families/family members/children and young people in a location chosen and agreed by them; somewhere where they feel safe and in control. Furthermore, the project works at the pace of the individual/family, allowing them (within reason) to dictate how and when sessions happen as well as what activities are undertaken through the programme. Activities are often linked to interest and have included things such as arts and crafts, Nordic Walking, and shop visits. Helping children and young people to be able to have a voice and design and complete their specific programme of activities has proven to have huge developmental impact, especially in nurturing a sense of personal value and achievement.

Once engaged at this foundational level, the project is then able to start to push the child or young person out of their comfort zone in small, agreed steps to help grow their confidence and discover their own coping strategies through experiential learning and emotional capacity building.

Through this needs and interest led approach to the work they do, the ASD Rainbows team are able to ensure that a holistic support plan is developed and implemented for each child or young person referred to the project. This includes, where needed, the creation of co-produced crisis management plans that outline targeted support mechanisms for wider contributors to the situation such as parents, siblings and teachers that compliments the work and outlined objectives of the project, and the individuals support plan. This is particularly important in ensuring that children and young people and/or their families do not become dependent on the project but instead grow into a place of independence and control.

This work has allowed ASD Rainbows to give families a sense of hope. They have helped children and young people learn to trust again, laugh, find joy and display excitement. They have been able to reassure lost and exhausted parents by being able to relate and empathise, whilst providing practical insight into coping strategies that build family resilience. They have ensured that those referred to them no longer feel alone but instead are equipped to take some ownership over their lives again and re-engage confidently in their school and community, overcoming the barriers of social anxiety that were previously holding them back.

“The families I work with struggle to get the right support at times and I rely on outreach workers such as ASD Rainbows to provide this extra support. The families who they have worked with have really enjoyed the specialist support that they provide.” **Lisa Bowen, RCT Parenting**



Engagement Tools utilised:

- Focused one-to-one conversations
- Home/Familiar meeting locations
- Interest based activities
- Whole family approach

Why is this co-production:

- Equal relationship of trust and respect between children and young people and the ASD Rainbows support team
- A process that aims to work in the best interests of all involved: Needs Driven and Holistic support
- Support Plans that are based on individualised personal outcomes that keep the child or young person at the centre of the work being conducted
- Development of individual responsibility and ownership generating a sense of self-worth and purpose

“Statutory services are not currently designed to be flexible and responsive in their support to families at the different developmental stages of a child with Autism and so families are left to fend for themselves, often becoming increasingly isolated. ASD Rainbows is the only organisation who understand and respond to this in our area due to their tailored, flexible and responsive approach. We would be lost without their interventions and wider support. They have opened up a whole new support mechanism for us with other autism families, and provide after school and sibling support, and this is not provided elsewhere in our locality” **Parent of a Child supported by ASD Rainbows**