



Include Autism

Developing a toolkit for autism inclusive youth
groups
November 2018 - April 2019



Prepared by
Sarah O'Brien-Quilty and Emily
Niner, Participation Team at
Ambitious about Autism

Developed by the Ambitious
about Autism Youth Council



Include Autism

FUNDED
BY

**COMIC
RELIEF**



**Ambitious
about Autism**



WHAT IS INCLUDE AUTISM?

Include Autism

Include Autism was devised as a short-term project, funded by Comic Relief, which was tasked with producing resources which could give youth professionals practical tips and advice to include and support autistic young people in youth groups.

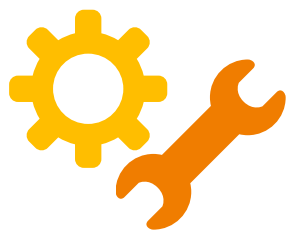
The project began from the negative experiences of the Ambitious about Autism Youth Patrons who had been excluded, turned away and bullied at youth groups because of their differences from their non-autistic peers.



Youth Council meeting before Include Autism began

Ambitious about Autism runs an all autistic Youth Council which enables autistic young people to meet other autistic young people, work on projects that they lead and be supported in an environment that caters to them.

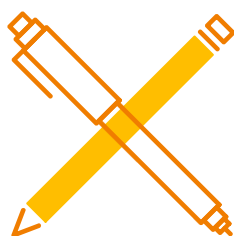
TOOLKIT, WORKSHOP AND GOAL



A toolkit for all

The Include Autism resources include a toolkit with tools, tips and information that can be used by professionals, parents and young people to foster youth group spaces that are inclusive of everyone's needs.

This toolkit forms part of a wider cultural shift to change how autistic young people are viewed and treated in their community.



A workshop for all

The Include Autism workshop is a practical session delivered with the Youth Patrons that is suitable for youth professionals and young people to explain what autism is and changes that can be made to youth groups, so they are more inclusive.



Inclusion for all

Autistic young people deserve to be included everywhere. Include Autism is the first step in creating and fostering inclusive spaces.

FIRST MEETING:

Introduce the project and gather ideas

To gather the information needed to create a resource with autistic young people we first needed to create a means for collecting their stories.

To be inclusive of the diversity of the Youth Council we created structured worksheets that the Youth Patrons could fill out alone or with help as needed.

The worksheets asked the Youth Patrons what their experiences were of youth groups in the past, what they liked about youth groups and what they think could have made their experiences better.

With these experiences and ideas as a foundation of what best practice in a youth group is, we would be able to develop tips and tools for the changes that could be part of the toolkit and workshop.

Roles and responsibilities

We also developed clear role descriptions for the Youth Patrons about the ways they could get involved with the project. This helped the young people know what they could do and the support they would have in each role.

"Include Autism is important to me because autism is a disability which some people think means they should treat people differently."

Grace, Youth Patron



Plan how to enable the autistic Youth Patrons to talk about their experiences of youth clubs. Develop a questionnaire to capture these responses and prompt answers to create the toolkit.



Collate feedback from the Youth Patrons to gain a diverse range of experiences of youth groups at different ages and in different areas.



DECEMBER MEETING

The roles and ways to get involved for the Youth Patrons were:

- Providing a case study example of good or bad inclusive practice in youth groups
- Designing the Include Autism Toolkit
- Writing the Include Autism Toolkit
- Recording their progress with photographs and video
- Designing the Include Autism workshop
- Inviting youth group leaders to the workshops
- Delivering the Include Autism workshop

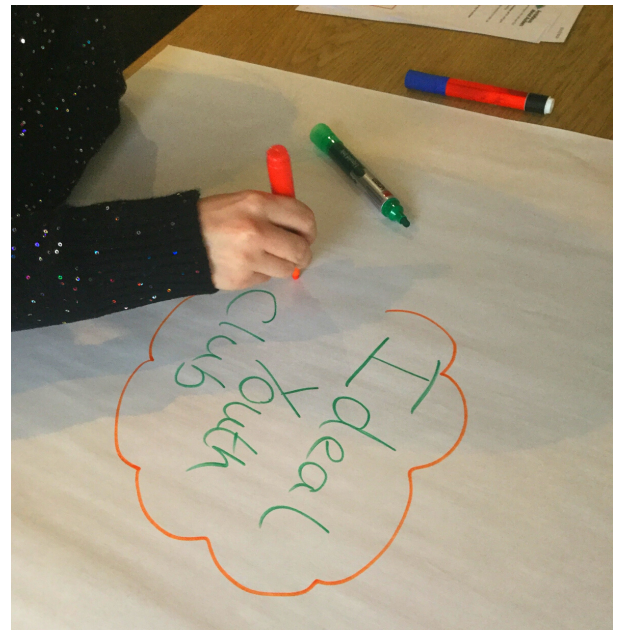
During the meeting

During the first session we introduced the Include Autism project, our aims and objectives and explained to the Youth Patrons what the project could mean for the future and autistic young people like them.

The Youth Patrons worked in small groups to share their experiences and work through their worksheets. From these discussions many of the same ideas came up: peers aren't always nice, autism isn't always invisible, staff don't always know how to help, and the environment can be a huge barrier to accessing a youth group.

"Going to the disability specific group was a level playing field where you could meet people like you."

Georgia H, Youth Patron



What does an ideal youth group look like?



Mind map of the impact the environment can have for an autistic young person

"The staff must be nice, helpful and supportive."

Shane, Youth Patron

FEEDBACK FROM DECEMBER

The Youth Patrons found that not all experiences of youth groups were universally bad. The Youth Patrons, like many autistic people have very diverse but specific interests that bring them joy, it is often groups focused on interests where they feel the most included, as they are given the opportunity to explore their interests.

They also said that groups where they could be themselves without judging were where they wanted to be as they were much more welcomed than bullied.



"I am proud to be helping others to be able to access the same opportunities."

Georgia E, Youth Patron

Some of the Youth Patrons went to mainstream groups, some went to disability specific groups and some also went to sports clubs.

The most important thing the young people told us is that they liked the groups where they felt welcome and safe to explore the things they were interested in.

Planning resources

The plan moving forward from this initial meeting had a couple of steps:

- Explore best practice in generating opinions from autistic young people, some of whom have co-occurring learning disabilities, learning difficulties, mental health issues and differences in expressive communication.
- Collate responses from the Youth Patrons of their good experiences, bad experiences and improvements.
- Develop resources that can be used in different youth group contexts.



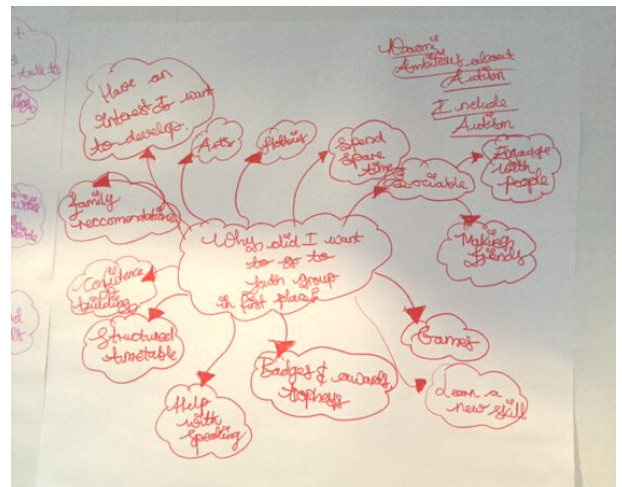
To prepare the group we always provide clear agendas and worksheet resources beforehand in clear language



HIGHLIGHTS FROM DECEMBER

Highlights from the initial meeting for the Youth Patrons including being able to share experiences with others, to find out that other people had similar experiences of youth group exclusion and hear about the positives others had felt.

The Youth Patrons have become accustomed to looking out for good autism practice and enjoy sharing what they think will help others with reasoning as to why.



Mind mapping why youth groups are important to young people



Shane taking notes during the first Include Autism meeting

This meeting was also an opportunity for some of the members from the Ambitious about Autism Youth Council to meet the Autism Education Trust Young Person's Panel.

To get as many experiences as possible the two groups came together to talk about what youth groups were like in their area.

As part of the project the Youth Patrons have been tasked with creatively reporting on the work of the team.

This includes taking photographs, representing their ideas graphically and recording their process using film and paper.

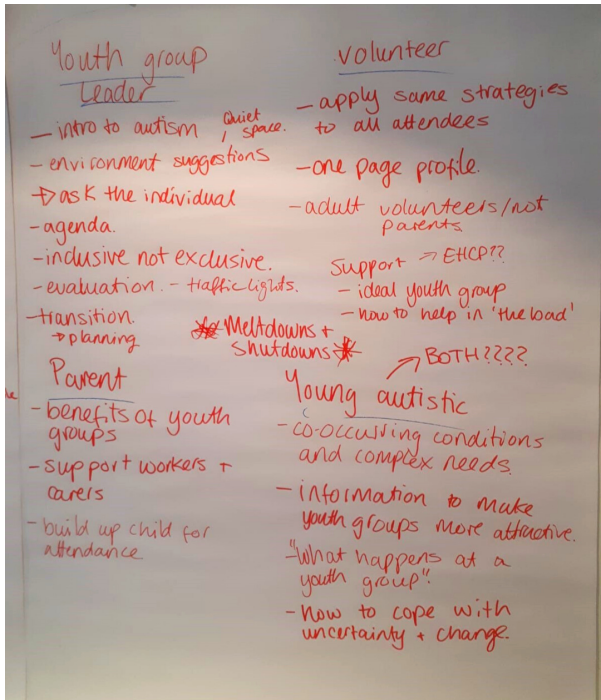


Georgia E (top left), Bella (centre), Sam (top right) and Craig (bottom left) working on Include Autism

PLANNING FOR JANUARY



To turn these experiences into a toolkit that youth professionals could use, and autistic young people can share, we needed to gather the best practice and develop tools that can be easily accessible to youth professionals who are often volunteers with limited resources.



The Youth Patrons wanted multiple audiences to use the toolkit so we had to figure out what audiences needed.

To develop resources into a functional toolkit and workshop package we needed to decide on what youth professionals would need and an accessible format for young and professional audiences.

For the second Include Autism planning session we therefore tasked the youth patrons with designing the Include Autism toolkit.

In the initial planning meeting, the Youth Patrons had described their ideal youth group, now the task was illustrating that in a toolkit form.

For the toolkit we needed to think about:

- Who should the toolkit be for?
- Where are they going to find it?
- What tools and resources do we want included?
- How do the youth patrons describe autism?
- Why should people think this is important?

From these questions we would be able to build a contents of what needed to be in the toolkit and concepts that the Youth Patrons deemed essential for youth professionals to know.

The Participation team built an agenda and worksheets for the Youth Patrons to work through to help build the toolkit content and layout. By providing a clear structure for the activities before the session, the Youth Patrons could have a longer processing time and visualise what the activities would involve.



Youth Patrons deciding on how to introduce Include Autism to youth professionals.





JANUARY: CONTENT CREATION AND DESIGN

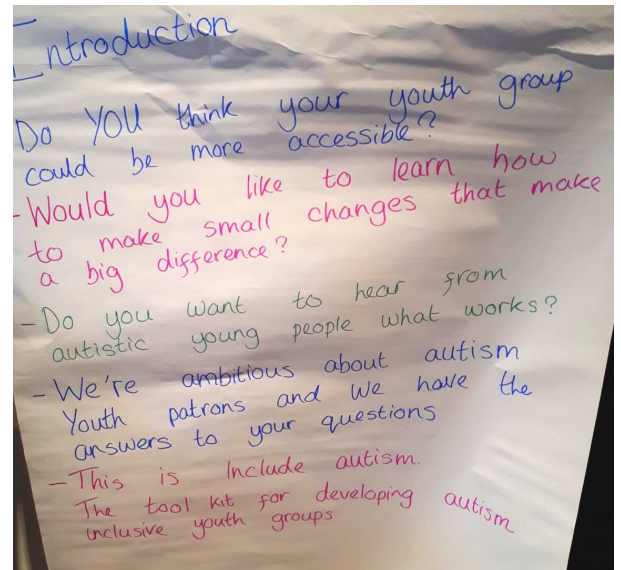
The toolkit design ideas needed to be agreed the Youth Patrons

In the second planning session we needed to plan content for the toolkit and plan what the Youth Patrons wanted the content to look like on the page.

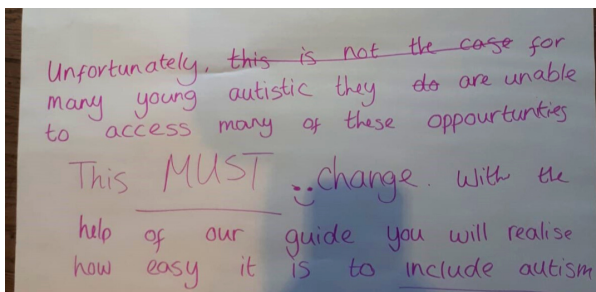
The content of the toolkit needed to be accessible, informative and functional for the target groups.

To achieve this aim, the Youth Patrons designed a content structure to guide the creation of information and resources.

Some of the Youth Patrons worked directly to draft content to explain what autism is, the importance of Include Autism for youth professionals and ideas for how to support autistic young people.



The Youth Patrons knew what they wanted to say to their audiences.



Youth Patrons wrote parts of the toolkit during this session.

Some of the key ideas from the Youth Patrons for the toolkit content were:

- What autism means for me from Youth Patron voices
- It must be short and easy to read
- The toolkit must show that inclusive practice is beneficial to staff by presenting the business case
- Include a reminder that not everyone has a formal diagnosis so inclusive practice is better for all
- Templates of support plans, agendas and strategies for inclusion
- Include information about those who don't communicate verbally all or some of the time
- Not too wordy, pictures can be useful too

"The most important thing is that the Include Autism is accessible to all. Professionals, parents and young people need to access resources for inclusion."

Sam, Youth Patron

FEBRUARY: TOOLKIT DESIGN



Once content had been co-developed, designs needed to be agreed and the workshop developed from this.

Taking the initial design ideas gathered in the January meeting, three design ideas were developed offering options for the Youth Patrons to choose from.

The Youth Patrons were keen to have their collective voice represented, they were given the three design options and chose the aspects they preferred from each design.



Youth Patrons looked at examples of toolkits to decide on what they wanted their's to look like

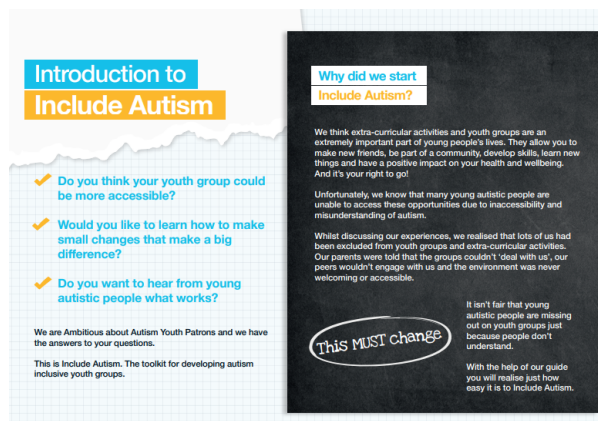
They preferred the first option's graphic inclusion to make it appealing to a young audience and the clarity of option three for professionals who would also be concerned with printing resources.

Taking the elements from the three designs and the established Youth Patron concepts from their 'Know Your Normal' report a cohesive and distinct design was decided.

Collaborative work with the Youth Patrons often means differing opinions that had to be reconciled and accommodated to produce a toolkit that represented each voice.



Design concept 1: bright and vibrant to appeal to a younger audience with elements drawn from Youth Council's 'Know Your Normal' research



Design concept 2: school based theme with emphasis through background textures



Design concept 3: minimal with bold colours and printer friendly

1

2

3

FEBRUARY: WORKSHOP DESIGN

Designing the workshop content with the Youth Patrons

The workshop needed to be designed with and by the Youth Patrons so that their ideas were clearly embedded in the workshop design and delivery.

With the Youth Patrons we wrote sections of the workshop and designed interactive activities.



Youth Patrons looking thinking about what makes a good workshop.

Using the content of the toolkit as a guide the Youth Patrons wanted to add personal stories and the impact of autistic diversity to the workshops- to ensure that

By splitting into two groups the Youth Patrons were able to design half of the workshop in each group. When they came back together to share their ideas and plans each side provided feedback.

Youth Patrons worked on personal case studies to highlight the best experiences and worst experiences of youth group for professionals and other young people to learn from.

The workshop pilot partners included:

- Young Londoners, a network for participation youth workers
- The Mix, an online support charity for under 25's.
- The Young Quakers, professionals who run the youth participation aspect of the religious group.
- Wandsworth Youth Council, a local youth council and their youth professionals.
- North London Scouts, Scout leaders in the North London area.



The Include Autism Workshop

Pledge Card

Name:

- I will adapt my session plans to fit my group's needs, thinking about the four areas of difference and environmental factors
- Where possible, I will send the agenda or schedule to parents/ carers/ young people ____ days before the youth group
- I will speak to the autistic individuals in my youth group and asked the suggested support plan questions
- I will designate an area or room as a quiet space that will be respected as such
- The support plans or One Page Profiles for autistic individuals in my youth group will be filled in
- I will check the space in which we deliver the group / club with noise/light/access in mind and make adjustments where possible
- I will use the Goal Planner to help young people achieve tangible goals and develop skills
- I endeavour to teach the whole group, including all staff, about autism and inclusivity using the information from this workshop and in the Include Autism toolkit
- We will work on an inclusive code of conduct as a group to ensure everyone knows what is expected of them

Include Autism Workshop

- ✓ Light
- ✓ Sounds
- ✓ Layout / space
- ✓ Temperature
- ✓ Equipment available

#includeAutism

The group wanted a workshop that was interactive with lots of activities. They also wanted to share their experiences alongside facts.

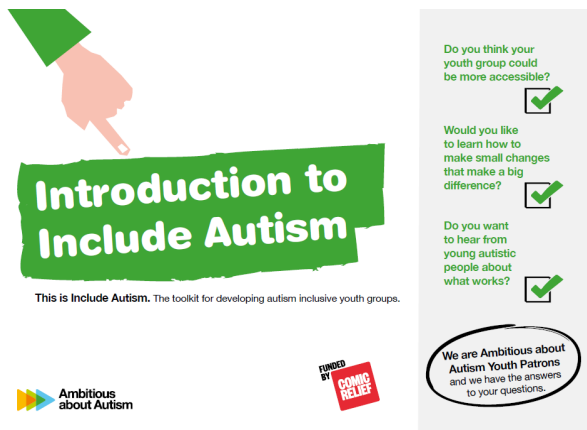
With such a diverse group of audiences the workshop needed to cater to youth professionals and young people with different priorities and questions.

Each audience also had a differing amount of time available for the workshop so the Youth Patrons also had to prioritise their key messages and what they wanted people to know about Include Autism.

MARCH: TOOLKIT FINALISED



The toolkit design amendments were sent back to the designer to collate the Youth Patrons ideas into one design. The Youth Patrons feedback centred around the need for a resource that focuses on accessibility for all audiences, printer friendly and distinctly made by young people.



Initial toolkit cover



Final toolkit cover with the Youth Patrons amendments and inclusion of fun graphics to appeal to young and professional audiences

The toolkit went through several amendments to ensure that it would be as useful for the intended audiences as possible.

- The support information needed to be easily identified and **adaptable** to different needs.
- The Youth Patrons wanted **young people, professionals and parents** to have resources they could use.
- Resources were based on **best practice** from evidence gathering and idea generation and then tested for feasibility with young people, professionals and parents.
- The toolkit was kept as a **digital rather than print** resource to reflect the audiences that would be accessing it and the opportunity to update resources with new learning.
- The toolkit was also made to **easily editable** and configurable for users to add their information with suggestions to kick start answers.
- Designs were signed off by the Youth Patrons who saw the project from its inception through the development of their ideas as a resource.

To meet the needs of different audiences the toolkit was split into four versions which professionals, parents and young people could download.

- The whole toolkit with all resources, information and tools.
- A toolkit for professionals
- A toolkit for autistic young people
- A toolkit for parents
- Individual tools to download



Final audience section cover (example is autistic young people)





INCLUDE AUTISM WORKSHOP PILOTS

The Include Autism workshop launched with a presentation to Young Londoners Participation Network. Three Youth Patrons presented the project and a brief workshop to youth professionals at London City Hall.

Two Youth Patrons presented the first iteration of the full workshop at The Mix, a social change and support charity based in London.

Our next workshop was to Wandsworth Youth Council, a group of 11-18 year olds delivered by two youth Patrons.

Based on feedback the workshop changed for the third workshop with the Quakers in which three Youth Patrons delivered the workshop in an hour and a half.



Shane and Sam at the Scouts Include Autism workshop

The fourth pilot workshop was with Scout leaders of North London and focused on practical support tips as they are largely unable to alter their environment.

A final workshop was delivered in May to a primary school to finish their Autism Awareness Month celebrations.

Overall, Include Autism was delivered to children, young people, parent volunteers and youth workers.

The Include Autism workshop content and design developed through the piloting and evaluation process.



First pilot workshop title slide



Second pilot workshop title slide as an Include Autism brand developed



Final pilot workshop title slide as the workshop branding was developed and bespoke elements created for consistency between toolkit and workshop

WHERE HAS INCLUDE AUTISM BEEN?

During the launch of the Include Autism Toolkit it was sent out to the Department for Education SEND Newsletter, all staff at City Hall, National Theatre, Uk Youth, British Youth Council and the Council for Disabled Children. This promotion helped Include Autism reach thousands of professionals.

Youth Patrons shared Include Autism with their local youth groups and schools.

HPA East Dulwich @HPAEastDulwich · May 1
 Thank you Emily & Sarah from Ambitious About Autism for leading our assembly today & talking to the children about how they can support other children living with Autism. Emily and Sarah were really impressed with how knowledgeable our children already were @AmbitiousAutism



Harris Primary Academy welcomed Include Autism with open ears in their reception to year four cohort.

The Mix @TheMixUK · Mar 22
 Was amazing to have @AmbitiousAutism over to @TheMixUK HQ to help us understand how our service can be inclusive for young people with autism. #includeautism



The Mix, an online support charity had training for all of their support staff and youth engagement team/

The Include Autism workshop was delivered to a wide variety of groups with ages ranging from 4 to 70 for those in the audience!



As part of their work with Include Autism the Youth Patrons developed their message into a campaign for World Autism Awareness Month. They created top tips for different parts of autistic life.



SHARING THE NEWS

From local press to national news, Include Autism reached multiple audiences in the press.

As part of the pilot workshop tour Include Autism was delivered around London and the home counties in youth groups, conferences and at schools.



Youth Patrons Georgia and Kieran with Alison from Ambitious about Autism on Channel 5 News.

Youth Patrons spoke on Channel 5 news about Include Autism and the importance of including autistic young people in extra-curricular activities.

"Include Autism has had a positive impact, being a autistic person myself I have been able to see how we can share ideas together with other young people with autism. It seems we all get it and understand the purpose of this project."

Rayhan, Youth Patron

'Improve youth club access for autistic children' says Muswell Hill charity

PUBLISHED: 13:06 17 April 2019 Sam Volpe



Ambitious About Autism's youth patrons. Picture: Phil Ashley phil@philashley.com

Local paper Ham & High interviewed one of the autistic young people involved in Include Autism to find out more about the project

Include Autism in media - the numbers

Channel 5 News

1.74 million audience reach for the live broadcast (17/04/2019)
3,900 views on Twitter video of broadcast (22/05/2019)

Ham & High newspaper

43,000 reach with print media, not inclusive of online reach



Kieran in hair and make-up before the live Channel 5 News broadcast

PILOT WORKSHOP EVALUATION



Feedback from attendees was essential to ensure the learning objectives set out by the Youth Patrons had been met during each workshop session.

Feedback also ensured that the Youth Patrons could see their value in teaching others about autism inclusion.



Youth Patrons speaking to Young Londoner's Participation Network

Staff who attended the Include Autism pilot workshops gave oral feedback at the end of each workshop to the Youth Patrons and staff delivering the workshop.

All attendees were also encouraged to fill in pre- and post-workshop surveys to ensure that we could gather information on their learning and feedback on the delivery of the workshop.

Feedback from attendees was used to feed into the next workshop delivery to ensure that the voices of autistic young people matched the needs of different youth engagement organisations.

During the Include Autism workshop pilots we reached 415 people directly with many more taking the message of Include Autism into other areas of their work and networks.

Moving forward we still have youth organisations keen to hear about Include Autism, we plan to sustain this project by updating resources and hosting more workshops.

Feedback from pilot workshops:

95% of attendees felt the workshops achieved the objectives set out

92% of attendees felt confident to support an autistic person after the workshop

92% of attendees felt confident to adapt activities to meet needs after the workshop

80% of attendees felt confident to adapt their communication style

There was large the variation in time allocated, prior knowledge of attendees and needs of the young people involved in the workshops.



"The young people really brought the idea of autism to life. We weren't just hearing about autism from a professional but from first hand experience."



CONCLUSION

How can we include autistic people in youth groups?

Inclusion won't always be easy, as sometimes disabled people and autistic young people have conflicting needs.

By co-producing the Include Autism toolkit, workshops and ideas with autistic young people the resources made can ensure that youth professionals are better equipped to think about autism inclusion when designing spaces and activities.



"So many negative experiences facing autistic young people are just accepted because we're autistic and because we've never known anything else, but looking back on those times now I can see where the problems were and I hope Include Autism goes some way towards ensuring the next generation have better opportunities."

Georgia H - Youth Patron



- 1 Don't let others make fun on someone's differences, support them to be fully included and understood.
- 2 Create environments that are sensitive to peoples sensory needs. Not too loud, bright or warm. Enough room to move around.
- 3 Ask the young person what they want or need before putting support into place. That way it's meaningful and fits.
- 4 Small changes to language, the environment and how we treat others can make a big difference to other people's experiences.
- 5 Some people communicate differently, some understand information differently and some behave differently. We need to think about including these differences.



Youth Patrons delivering Include Autism to The Quakers.

The Include Autism project gave the Youth Patrons the chance to develop a project idea, work on all aspects of the project which is still continuing to grow and develop based on their expertise and voice.

Many of the Youth Patrons were also enabled to develop richer skills in presenting, articulating their ideas, talking to professionals and travelling to new places to increase the reach of Include Autism.

NEXT STEPS FOR INCLUDE AUTISM

The Include Autism Toolkit has been launched and Workshops have started delivery

Have a read of the toolkit, share it with young people to show to their group leaders and share with those involved with youth groups.

Take part in our co-produced workshop to get practical strategies, ask our autistic youth patrons some questions and find out more about how to get involved with our inclusion projects.

We'd like to thank Comic Relief for making this project possible, it's had a positive effect on not just the Youth Council but all those who have heard about the project.

Coming up:

We are delivering Include Autism at British Youth Council's annual conference and at London Council's summer conference.

Youth Patrons are involved in delivering Include Autism at these events to more youth professionals.

If you have feedback about the toolkit, want to have an Include Autism workshop or want to let Youth Patrons know your thoughts email Emily or Sarah at participation@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk



Get in touch



To download the Include Autism **Toolkit** head to:
www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/include-autism-toolkit



Keep up to date with Include Autism by following #IncludeAutism on social media.



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