

Report for Foundation for PSA

The grant received went towards course fees for MSc Psychiatry (Neurodevelopmental Studies). The course ran from September 2023 to September 2024 and funding was used to complete the dissertation module of the MSc.

I have been a qualified mental health nurse since 2002 and have worked in older peoples, adult and children and young people crisis services though out most of my career.

During the training I worked as a clinical lead then team manager in children's and adolescent mental health services working with young people presenting in crisis as part of the Mental Health Implementation Plans developing crisis care provision for young people. Part of this provision is providing an all-age crisis line service for people to contact in self-defined crisis. The team I work in provide the children's and young people's crisis line service for this population.

Completing this course has provided me with increased knowledge and skills working with neurodiverse young people and their carers in providing crisis provision. As part of this training, I have taken on the role as an Autism Champion within my trust, helping me drive improvements in services and support the trust with its Autism Strategy.

This module has provided me with academic support and time to complete a small-scale study entitled 'Why do autistic children, young people and their carers contact a mental health crisis line – A small scale retrospective study'. There is strong evidence that autistic young people are more likely to present with psychiatric symptoms than their peers and 1/3 of parents report that their child has experienced at least one mental health crisis in a three-month period. There is little research into understanding why autistic young people access crisis services.

The study identified fifteen calls from autistic young people (0-18) and their carers or those awaiting an autism assessment and utilised a thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke 2006) to identify themes and sub-themes from these call recordings.

Five primary themes were identified with associated sub-themes. Masking and meltdowns, School with sub-themes of adjustments that school have/haven't made to support young people and emotionally based school avoidance, Aggression both child to parent and child to child, Mental health concerns with sub-themes of self-harm/suicidal ideation and obsessive-compulsive disorder and finally the impact on parents, both parental mental health and parents feeling lost in the system.

The findings were linked to research around each theme and possible suggestions for service development were identified. Limitations of the study were discussed with some suggestions for how future studies could be improved and suggestions for future research were made.

I will use the results of this study to develop a range of resources which can be shared with young people and their families and develop training for crisis line staff so that they are more equipped to support this group of young people. I also hope to seek publication of my study findings both through local trust conferences and more widely.

I found this module challenging but it has also motivated me to drive service improvement and to ensure that we provide a high-quality service that meets the needs of those that we serve. The course has also provided me with valuable knowledge and skills in evaluating, designing and leading research. This will be invaluable in my new role as a team manager as we continue to develop our

service, constantly evaluating its quality and effectiveness so that we can support young people and their families through times of crisis.