

The value of autistic participation

Understanding the value and impact of increasing autism participation –moving from tokenism to a fully participatory approach

One of the presentations given at the multiplier event in Greece was titled *Working with autistic adults*, delivered by Damien Milton, a member of the UK team. The key message was summed up in the quote by Jim Sinclair, ‘nothing about us without us.’ It changed our thinking about autistic participation which can often be tokenistic and helped us to understand that an autonomous voice is a requirement for the well-being of those with autism and that genuine engagement is essential for change.

We were empowered to take back this message to the Communication/Autism Team (CAT), a team of advisory teachers working in mainstream schools in Birmingham to support children and young people (CYP) with autism, their parents and school staff. It led to a strong focus on re-evaluating current thinking and practice within the team. To support this process, we invited Damien to speak at our team development day which provided a context for our next steps. Outcomes included a focus on the genuine participation of CYP in the My story section of their EHCP and the development of an All About Me tool to support gaining pupil views. This is now used in the majority of schools to capture hopes and aspirations of the CYP for their future.

Other outcomes included a further team development day by Nick Hodges on the subject of the *Autism –A Rights based agenda*. This focused on working practice that respected the rights of individuals, their entitlement to have their voice heard and our responsibility to ensure opportunities that placed a value on genuine participation. This is reflected in our messages to schools, our training and the importance we place on regularly inviting adults with autism to speak at our events.