

East Renfrewshire Asperger Girls Group

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Background

- The idea had previously been discussed and considered by Outreach Service
- Parents contacted the service with similar idea
- Some concerns that girls with Asperger Syndrome were 'going under the radar'
- Both felt that group work with similar girls, specialist teachers and outside agencies would be beneficial

Target Pupils

- Total of 64 secondary outreach pupils, including 13 girls (almost exactly ratio of 1:4!)
- Existing S2 to S4 outreach pupils with Asperger diagnosis considered in the first instance (some declined/unable to attend)
- Remaining places extended to non-caseload pupils with Asperger diagnosis
- Girls chosen we thought would understand and identify with each other
- Final group consisted of 6 pupils (two each from S2, S3, S4)

Consultation

- Consultation questions given to girls beforehand to consider at home with parents
- Individual consultations at school with girls to discuss challenges, expectations, concerns
- Group consultation at first meeting:
 - Learning Intentions
 - Structure of meetings
 - Ethos of group

Individual Consultation

? use SHANAREE planning tool as a tool

- Re-assure myself that I am not alone.
- other guys know for group discussion? about how to use SHANAREE and/or one-page-profile
- How their family deals with things. (e.g. school problems) ^{learning from others experiences}

What I want to achieve

- A better understanding of other peoples situations.
- Self confidence and the ability to say no.

• How to manage anxiety and stress.

What I want to learn

- How they manage how others treat them.
- How to deal with unwanted ~~advantages~~ advances. (not really bothered)

• New connections with people that are similar to me.

• different techniques. e.g. zen, meditation.

• CBT, mindfulness

• positive conversation, • forum theatre.

how it needs to feel/be

- A calm environment.
- Freedom to express your opinions (don't be an ass if you disagree with something.)

• people laughing at un-funny things.

risks/ things that get in the way...

- too many distractions
- What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas.
- ditching in general.
- Not enough adults to facilitate.

• Everyone gets equal opportunities (no dominant characters.)

• Outside support e.g. coping strategies (Karen.)

• bluetac, something to fidget with.

Key Themes

- Similar themes from parents and pupils:
 - making and maintaining friendships
 - understanding Asperger Syndrome
 - sexual awareness and safety
 - managing emotions (CBT, Mindfulness, anger management, stress)
 - growing up with Asperger Syndrome

What We Want To Know

- Examples from group consultation:
- ‘What other people’s lives have been like.’
- ‘I want to learn how to control Aspergers.’
- ‘Have other people got (weird) obsessions?’
- ‘Coping with crowds and noise.’
- ‘How this has changed everyone’s lives since they found out.’
- ‘I want to learn more about Asperger's.’
- ‘How do you survive when no-one understands you?’

Planning

- Consultation used to plan series of meetings which met the individual needs of pupils and expectations of parents
- Collaborative planning and teaching between myself, primary Communication Outreach teacher and girls
- Outside agencies contacted for expertise in identified areas
 - Girls given opportunity to consider questions before meeting outside agencies
- Suitable place and time for all pupils (after school)
- Transport budget request

Structure

- Six initial meetings, each lasting 1.5 hours
- Evaluated weekly by teachers and pupils
- Following week's meeting planned with girls input
- Parents invited to attend presentation of girls learning after first six week block
- Girls presented their experience via PowerPoint or posters
- Further three meetings with input from outside agencies
- Final evaluation meeting with girls and parents

Outside Agencies

- CBT
- Yvonne Coyle, Educational Psychologist, East Renfrewshire Council
- Living with AS
- Catriona Stewart and Debi Brown, SWAN
- Relationships
- Alison Burton, East Renfrewshire Carers' Centre/
Family Planning Association

Ethos of Meetings

- Safe space – girls settled in with ice breakers, snacks, settling in time
- Familiar with each other, calm, comfortable and trusting before feeling confident to share with group
- Informal “It’s not school!!”
- We can be ourselves
- We respect confidentiality
- We feel valued and respected
- We have fun!
- We have choice – can opt in or out of discussions
- We have equality – to participate and be heard
- We feel calm and comfortable

Evaluation Process

- Evaluated weekly, and at end of each block
- Teachers, girls, parents involved in evaluation
- Evaluation questionnaire issued to girls
- Responses amalgamated
- Positive responses from all pupils
 - 80-100% agreed that their needs had been met
 - 0% disagreed
 - 0-20% didn't know

Questionnaire Results

Meeting Learner Needs (Q1 5.3)	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	Total
At the beginning of the group sessions we were given the opportunity to plan.	80%	0%	20%	100%
The things we covered helped me in certain aspects of my life (relevance).	100%	0%	0%	100%
The work we completed was appropriate to a young person my age (relevance).	80%	0%	20%	100%
I found the work we completed during the sessions enjoyable (enjoyment).	80%	0%	20%	100%
I got the opportunity to practice the things I need to improve on (breadth).	80%	0%	20%	100%
I got the opportunity to give my views on the tasks we completed.	100%	0%	0%	100%

The thing I liked best about the group was...

- Meeting new people like me.
- Meeting new people with the same issues (aspergers etc) as me and working out ways to deal with them.
- The last lesson where we designed posters and PowerPoints to present to parents.
- I liked the SWAN ladies and the sex education lesson was funny and helpful.
- Being able to meet new people and make new friends. Also learning more about my condition.
- Meeting people like me. Sharing problems.

One thing that would make the girls group better in the future would be...

- For everyone to remain calm when people are talking.
- Maybe have a larger group of girls from a wider area.
- To design more posters and have a bigger room.
- To make the CBT session more relevant to people my age.
- More variety of ages.

Legacy / Next Steps

- Termly 'reunions' with further input from teachers and outside agencies
- Pupils formed some lasting friendships
- Some parents discussed starting a charitable venture
- Girls were keen to support other girls with Asperger Syndrome in the authority
- Potential to provide similar support for another group of pupils next session