

**Organisation: Derbyshire County Council**

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Adults ASYE programme

Child and family ASYE programme

Adults and child and family ASYE programme      **Adults and Children**

**Number of NQSWs in your current cohort: 100+**

### **The practice identified**

Raising awareness and acceptance across adult and childrens social care departments of how neurodivergent characteristics might affect learners on the ASYE programme.

Empowering learners with neurodivergent characteristics to seek support and develop coping strategies in an anti-discriminatory way.

### **Element(s) of the NEC/NEC+ to which the example relates**

This submission relates to NEC: A4 and A6

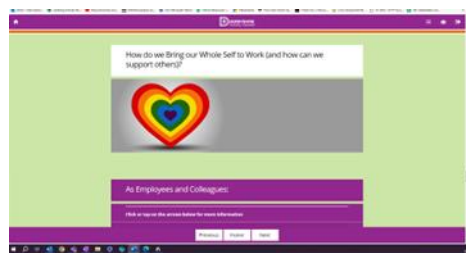
We have:

- Derbyshire is a large local authority and annually employs healthy numbers of NQSW's. The programme is rolling so NQSW's can join upon employment and/or once they have received their SWE registration. To assist adult and children's social care with the management and support element of the ASYE the Learning and Development (L&D) Practice Development Team (PDT) provide a wide range of support. A practice development lead is allocated to each locality within the county providing the NQSW's and Assessors with the consistency of having a 'go to' person.
- The Practice Development Team has inclusivity at the centre of its practice. Whilst recognizing and addressing formal support plans for NQSW's who have a formal diagnosis of a neurodivergent condition we are aware there will be others who, for whatever reason, do not have recognition of additional needs that they live with. It is for this reason we also promote the ideology that all learners are individuals who have learning needs specific to them and as a learning and development team we should be assisting learners to develop strategies to minimize the impact of these on their professional development. .
- Well-being and area specific enhanced support sessions facilitated by practice development leads, create safe spaces giving NQSW's the opportunity to share or seek support around their challenges which may be linked to their neuro-differences and explore coping strategies whilst enhancing strengths.

- One to One support is offered to NQSWs to complete their portfolios if required. For example, if a NQSW is finding it hard to get started with writing a piece of evidence, we would support them to develop ideas for how they might overcome this barrier.
- NQSWs have the opportunity to attend Schwartz sessions. Some of these sessions have a focus on neurodiversity and are led by social workers who are neurodivergent. Titles of topics include: 'Don't judge me, I'm different.' 'Its just me' and 'Managing expectations.'
- Some of the mandatory ASYE workshops (Getting Started on the ASYE, Reflective Writing and Portfolio Building) are designed to raise the NQSW's awareness of neurodiverse characteristics and normalize conversations about the subject. We encourage the learners to consider how they learn, learning styles and what supports their learning and development.
- At learning agreement meetings NQSW's are asked to share how they feel they learn best. Information on support available within the local authority is shared with all new starters. This includes contact details for all EDI network groups, including the neurodiversity network. During this meeting ASYE assessors are also asked about their learning styles/needs and if they feel they may need any additional support.
- Support (action) plans are utilized if needed to ensure the right support is being accessed and provide structure to help the NQSW complete the ASYE programme alongside practice. Extensions to hand in dates are considered as part of a support plan if deemed necessary.

## Evidence to support the submission to the NQAP

The local authority has mandatory e-learning EDI training which has a specific section on neurodiversity.



The Professional Development Teams culture is to focus on normalising neuro-differences, and enhancing people's strengths. We encourage creativity and try to be flexible in our approach. Examples:

- NQSWs are supported to decide between presentation or Critical log for their 12 month review and whether they prefer in person or virtually. This is in response to feedback from NQSW's who have requested support..
- The NQSWs and Assessors' documentation is held on an online learning platform that the practice development leads have access to. Checklists are provided with any outstanding tasks (see Appendix 1). NQSWs and Assessors who are neurodivergent find this very helpful it simplifies the process and puts it into a structure that is very clear. Previously, many NQSWs had reported feeling confused and overwhelmed by all the different documents
- The practice development team have created a Microsoft Teams Channel – with separate spaces for NQSWs and Assessors in which they are encouraged to share resources in relation to learning, including neurodiversity, current research and peer support. This provides an inclusive structured space for information as well as a space for questions and discussion.
- Practice development leads are available to join supervision with an Assessor and NQSW who is neurodivergent to facilitate a discussion around learning/development and offer guidance.
- A Neuro-inclusive support checklist for students and newly qualified social workers is given to NQSWs and Assessors to enhance their knowledge, understanding of self and ensure a fair assessment of practice (see Appendix 2).

#### Ongoing work

- The practice development team are aiming to provide opportunities for NQSWs who are neurodivergent to lead EDI sessions on the specific support needs that are relevant to them should they wish to do so.
- Building on the EDI e-learning, the Practice Development Team are in the process of creating workshops specifically for ASYE assessors/managers to further develop their understanding of neurodivergent characteristics and ways to support NQSW's who are experiencing difficulties engaging with the ASYE programme as a result of these traits.
- The Practice Development Team continue to work in conjunction with the BASW (British Association of Social Workers) Neurodivergent Social Workers Special Interest Group, ensuring we are applying research, guidance and the voices of lived experience in our work.

## Appendix 1

Name of NQSW:

Time frame	Document	Complete?	Actions
<b>Start</b>	Initial professional development meeting		
<b>Support Agreement meeting</b>	Professional development plan first 3 months		
	Support and Assessment Agreement		
<b>3 month review</b>	RSPA Foundational review at 3 months		
	Supporting information		
	Verification of documents		
	Direct observation		
	Feedback from professionals		
	Feedback from Service user		
	PDP for 3 – 6 months		
<b>6 month review</b>	RSPA 3 – 6 Months interim assessment		
	Critical reflection 0 – 6 months		
	Verification of professional documentation		
	Direct observation 2		

	Feedback from other professionals		
	Feedback from service users		
	PDP 6-9 months		
<b>9 month review</b>	Progressive development meeting		
	PDP 9 – 12 months		
<b>12 month review</b>	RSPA 6 – 12 months final review		
	Critical reflection 6 – 12 months/presentation		
	Verification of professional documents		
	Direct observation 3		
	Feedback from professionals		
	Feedback from service users		
	PDP for post ASYE		

## Appendix 2

### **Neuro – Inclusive support for students and newly qualified social workers**

Neurodiversity is the diversity or variation of cognitive functioning in people. Everyone has a unique brain and therefore different skills, abilities, and needs.

Some of the challenges students and NQSW's have experienced:

- Disrupted thinking/concentration from being in a loud open spaced room
- Expectation to verbally contribute in a shared space with no time to prepare
- No time to process information
- Exhaustion

Things to watch out for:

- Individual struggling to retain information or retrieve information quickly
- Skills in practical work but written work not always to standard, or late
- Individual working over and above the work day hours to keep up
- Feeling unable to share challenges and becoming withdrawn
- Time management concerns
- Difficulty transitioning between tasks
- Hyperfocus or lack of focus

There may be many more signs and it is important to consider what might be happening before considering capability concerns.

How to support:

- Make sure you create a space of safety for the individual to share any challenges. [1. Psychological Safety for Neurodivergent Social Workers - A Series Introduction \(ndsocialworker.wixsite.com\)](https://www.ndsocialworker.wixsite.com)
- Do not expect the person to know what they need – this should be a collaborative discussion between you to understand where help might be useful.
- Think about the environment – is there a quiet space, where is the work space situated, is there external stimulus that could cause sensory distress?
- Consider communication – be clear and use the “what, why and when” method (what you want, when you want it and why its needed).
- Avoid sarcasm or ambiguity
- Incorporate visual element if needed – flow chart or diagrams to explain complex work
- Give context to open questions
- Ask questions – does the person need information in writing? Bullet points?
- Provide check – ins, but make sure they are scheduled rather than interrupting to ask if things are ok.

- Help create a healthy culture of breaks, movement and taking lunch.
- Provide agendas and inform of changes
- Understand energy accounting in neurodivergent people and be flexible [The unique experience of neurodivergent burnout - Creased Puddle](#)

#### Supervision:

- Is the purpose clear?
- Is the space safe?
- Enable the person to plan and prepare – and give time for them to process questions
- No judgement if a person needs to use something to focus – stimming toys, or doesn't hold eye contact
- Keep tasks focused and clear with agreed deadlines
- Provide an environment that enables the individual to remain focused on the task – eg not asking them to write supervision notes during the meeting, or introducing too many topics.
- Provide constructive, timely and balanced feedback, including positive feedback.

There are a number of strengths that come with different ways of thinking, and these need to be explored and encouraged in balance with any identified needs.

Please refer to the staff network group for support and guidance.

[Neurodiversity group - Our Derbyshire](#)