

## **Slide 1 – West Cheshire Autism Hub – A welcoming space for everyone.**

### **The future of Social care commission**

- The West Cheshire Autism hub opened in May (2021). It currently has 3 part time dedicated staff, and a handful of volunteers.
- Our service supports autistic adults (age 16 plus) either diagnosed, those who self identify and those on the pathway to diagnosis. It also supports their families/partners/carers.

### **Slide 2 - A snap-shot of our service:**

- Between May and December 212 individuals engaged with the hub. These adults are in addition to those referred to us by social workers or prescribers.
- In terms of engagement, every individual equates to an average of 10 appointments, signposting to other resources/ services etc.
- Some notable recurring themes require highlighting to the social care commission.

### **Slide 3 - Common themes:**

- Of the 212 individuals mentioned on the previous slide, most have difficulty with day-to day-living
- 23 per cent have significant difficulties
- These manifest in ways such as poor mental health, poor self-care, unemployment, debt, threatened cessation of tenancies or homelessness or exploitation
- Staff and volunteers at the hub are clear that these people have always needed a level of care and support.

- Yet, when they engage with us, they are not receiving any.
- Proactive, pre-emptive measures would have prevented crisis.

#### **Slide 4 - Underestimating difficulties:**

- At the autism hub we are concerned that the gate keepers to support are underestimating the level of support required.
- It is common for autistic individuals to have islets of ability, yet still struggle with many aspects of their life.
- Verbal ability can mask the level of disability
- There is a difference between expressive and receptive communication ability. For example, an individual may be able to express themselves verbally, but this can hide a need for extra processing time, difficulty remembering information etc.
- Often our members have been labelled as “high functioning” but cannot manage their bills or plan their meals

#### **Slide 5 - Autism understanding**

- There is a clear need for more training in the care system and services
- Autism understanding is often based on outdated or inaccurate stereotypes
- One example, is the needs of females on the autistic spectrum being overlooked. Another is, autism without a learning disability being seen as only “mild”.
- Training should include awareness of issues such as masking which highly increases the chance of poor mental health outcomes such as anxiety,

depression and burnout.

Autism + Knowledge = good outcomes

(Beardon, 2019)

### **Slide 6 - Case study:**

- C is a qualified electrician, who used to be the 'star' employee on the building site, as he could wire and certify houses quicker than anyone they'd ever come across. When he was employed, C had his own rented home, set up the way he liked it. He has high sensory issues and OCD around cleanliness. Through unemployment, anxiety and deteriorating mental health, he ended up homeless. C has since lived in three homeless hostels which is exacerbating his mental health issues. C likes to live healthily, he doesn't drink, smoke or take drugs, but he is surrounded by people who do. He was removed from one hostel due to stuffing a towel under his door, and therefore being accused of smoking in his room - he was in fact trying to block out the smell of cannabis from outside his room. He likes to cook but is unable to use the unsanitary shared kitchen due to his sensory and OCD issues. When he tried to use cooking equipment in his own room, the equipment was removed. When he left cooking equipment in shared areas it was stolen. Some days he presents well, on other days he doesn't. He will only access the shared bathrooms if they've been recently cleaned. C states 'if I am in control of my environment, I can move mountains. In the hell hole I live in now, I just can't function, I don't eat for days.

### **Slide 7 - Case study**

- B also in his 30s, is also highly intelligent. He is articulate, but when stressed his

speech becomes unintelligible. When he is overwhelmed, he paces and talks to himself which has led to a -number of cautions and arrests for being apparently under the influence of drugs or alcohol - he wasn't. He spent most of his life in care after childhood abuse. B has been exploited financially in the past and presented to us at the point of eviction. The Hub have been supporting him to move somewhere more suitable. Only by the Hub advocating strongly for him, was it recognised that he needed a low-level care setting - finding somewhere however, is proving difficult. On entering his current home, support staff found he had little furniture or possessions, few clothes and no food. He is unable to plan, shop and cook without support.

### **Slide 8 - Conclusion**

- In the experience of the Autism hub staff, adults such as those highlighted by our case studies are frequently seen as coping and left without support. The truth is that they're not, and without support they end up in crisis.