

# Amplified Trailblazer: Case Study



Routeways are a Plymouth based local charity that supports children, young people, families and individuals to overcome disadvantage.

Working in partnership with CAMHS, they provide parent peer support groups. The focus of their Trailblazer project was supporting families of children with autism. They used their Trailblazers consultancy to work with families to plan their ongoing projects, as well as co-produce PDF resources to support parents and professionals around autistic young people's mental health.

We interviewed Rose Taylor, local CAMHS Participation Lead, and also Project Co-ordinator for Routeways, based at their Devonport Park centre:

## **YMs: Tell us about what motivated this project / campaign**

It was about hearing parents say the same things over and over again. The struggle to have an identification of mental health issues and effective support alongside young people's ASD diagnosis. We want to change perception that every problem in their lives was because of autism. My nephew went through a period of grief; his autism made it difficult to process – but he needed more help, not less. That was my story, but all these families were also saying the same. It felt wrong.

## **YMs: What were key barriers to it being successful?**

It's that thing about getting people into the room. Finding time to meet with a family. Getting people out of the house and getting to events is difficult, so we try to engage in other ways. Getting a collective voice. It's worked and grown because people are passionate about it and want the best for the people who show up – every story we hear is one of fighting for the rights for their child and their family. When people hear of ways to improve that for themselves and other families, then if they can be there they will be.

## **YMs: What expertise or skills did you have in your team/organisation, what did you need to bring in from outside? Whose buy-in was important and how was it demonstrated?**

YoungMinds were great as they provided expertise, networking, project development skills – and a reputation to get on board with, because we're a small local charity and we need help with that.

We want to be better seen because we want parents to feel they're not alone, that they're part of a collective.

Rachel Rule and Jade Hedges-Stearn are Occupational Therapy students at Plymouth University. Both students have experience of supporting people with Autism, learning difficulties and mental



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health conditions and they are employed as paediatric enablers, working part time alongside their degree. They run the 'Rooted' project for our young people, enabling them to engage in outdoor, gardening, baking or craft activities whilst teaching them social skills and offering emotional support.

Through attending the group with service users, Rachel and Jade recognised that the premises did not have somewhere for young people to escape to when they felt overwhelmed or needed some space. In line with our current focus on becoming a mental health and wellbeing hub, whilst making the group accessible for young people with mental health conditions in addition to Autism, Rachel and Jade decided to volunteer to create this space at the group over their summer break from University.

We really value that our parent participation group (Children's Mind, Families Matter) is attended by Community CAMHS Service Lead (Ruth Houghton) and the Children's Development Centre Lead (Nick Cook). They'll turn up on a Saturday afternoon – showing up every month; that's a big deal for our families.

We've also had great support from Martha Hocking - she's the lead Occupational Therapist for Derriford Hospital. Martha comes to us to run sensory sessions, parent workshops, and supervises the development of our new Sense-Aware centre.

**YMs: What did you learn along the journey about co-production and participation?**

I think we need more participation. It was good for me as a CAMHS participation worker – we learned to be more creative, and use the tools that are out there and to in different ways. Also, it turns out old fashioned word-of-mouth still works. Word of mouth becomes new Facebook contacts; it's a new spin on an old method.

**YMs: What are your Top Tips to other organisations wanting to develop a participation project with a group like this?**

Keep banging on at it, keep the momentum going, and make full use of engaging people. Ask for help, ask for support – it's out there. Many voices are stronger.

**YMs: What, if any, additional safeguarding considerations were there?**

We're really lucky as we do have a great safeguarding officer – but you do get told things. There's a line between participation and therapy, and I'm not a trained therapist. You need to be able to signpost when someone tells you a story; not leaving someone hanging is crucial. We're lucky to have a system in place that can do that. That's why, with our future plans, we want to include a quiet drop-in space to be able to manage concerns more effectively. We have a duty of care.



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### YMs: What impact have you had? What impact do you hope to have?

I think the impact is that CAMHS in Plymouth are more and more going with this model. Our parent support group (Children's Minds, Families Matter) operates on the understanding that the whole family is affected by a young person's mental health. We focus on supporting parents and siblings to support the young person.

### YMs: What comes next for your project?

We're really grateful to Rachel and Jade for their work with the Rooted – thanks to them, we've now been awarded a grant from the Aviva Community Fund to provide a range of sensory equipment, to educate others about the importance of supporting the management of sensory needs within this population and finally set up a sensory room within the already existing Routeways group, to benefit those with Autism and facilitate their engagement in a range of activities. It's great to have a new place to set up our group on the premises! The children have been so excited for this venture to commence after everybody's hard work. The benefits that it could have for children/young people in the community could be vast - sensory based interventions are often used to support children to begin to recognise and regulate their own behaviour, in addition to learning about how they can affect themselves and others. Our parents and families have also really gotten on board to help plan and fundraise, and the Friends of Devonport Park have supported too. It's a real community effort.

[www.youngminds.org.uk/amplified](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/amplified)



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