



## Event case study: National Autistic Society Ladbroke Grove Centre “Science Bonanza Week”

We ran a week of science-themed evenings. The main aim of the events was to explore different aspects of science in a relaxed and informal setting where the people we support and the wider community were able to access a range of scientific based themes and hands-on activities.

We wanted to show the enormous effect science has on our everyday lives, from the music we listen to our thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Our target audience was initially the people we support through the different services based at the centre (student support, supported living, outreach, 1:1 and social groups and the day centre). From this we opened the events up to local charities, councils and social services, colleges and the wider community as a whole.

### *People involved in planning and running*

- Five staff and service users from the day centre helped to plan and advertise the various nights
- Two NHS staff volunteered to help create a giant brain for the “Science of Autism and Language” night
- Two graduates from University College London who ran a workshop on Autism research
- One Specialist Speech and Language Therapist from the NHS and Windmill Autism Partnership, who ran a workshop and activities on the development of language
- One mental health advocate from St Charles Hospital
- People we support at the day centre helped with the marketing and ticket sales of the event

## Main steps of the organisation process

- Getting the idea

We received an email regarding the opportunity to apply for a British Science Week Community Grant. Between myself and two colleagues we brainstormed our areas of knowledge with regards to the different branches of science and what we could deliver. We were quite excited by the prospect of delivering a number of different events with a focus for each event from a different branch of science. As we all work with different



people, we were able to create events that would appeal to a wide range of people. The community grant appealed to us as we are trying to support the people we work with to be more involved in the local community, and it provided an opportunity to create and build on existing links we have within our area. With the grant we were able to put on events outside of the normal activities we run and away from the day centre. People with ASD can become very isolated with a small (or in some cases non-existent) social network outside of the people paid to support them. With a focus on science, we were able to create a range of events that would be both fun, informative and provide opportunities to socialise with people outside of the day centre.

Although we usually hold a social group once a week in the evening we are mainly a day based centre. We wanted the events to be open to people who might be at work or at university during the week

- Organising and creating

Initially we set up five evening events: Science of Autism and Language, Social Science, Science of Sound, Environmental Science and Space. We unfortunately had to drop the Environmental Science event as we found it difficult to find guest speakers or a focus for this evening.

In January, we emailed universities and local organisations with regards to guest speakers for the different nights. We also contacted local venues for the various nights. We did not want to have all nights based at the centre because we wanted it to be separate from the day centre and to make it more of a community focused event. We then brainstormed plans for the different events and the structure for each evening (i.e., focus of each evening and the materials and equipment needed for all).

In February we designed and created posters, flyers and tickets for the different events. These were sent out to local organisations, charities, social services and colleges to advertise the event. We also provided opportunities for other charities in the local area to participate in the organisation of the events.

- Delivering

For all of the evenings we had a rough outline of what would happen when, but this was a flexible plan that was adaptable to change on the night.

For the Science of Sound event, we set up the venue with eight different areas, all with hands-on activities. There were three different staff members who facilitated the different activities. At first we thought about having small groups of people to move around to the different activities with a staff member to support.



However, on the evening it worked out better to let people move around as they wanted and experience the different activities with staff on hand to help if needed and to explain the science behind the activities. What this allowed was for people to explore the different activities at their own pace, and for particular areas of interest they could remain longer or return to as and when they wanted. This removed the control of the organisers and put it into the hands of the people who attended the event.

- Results and feedback

From an organiser's point of view, it was quite full-on with so much happening in one week, but all the events were really successful. I am pleased we were able to provide such a variety of events and encourage the people we support and the other participants to think about the broader effect science has on every aspect of life.

It was definitely a team effort to make the topics so varied and the nights so successful, and I was fortunate that as part of the staff team at the centre we had a social science student and two musicians who had studied sound technology.

Of the people who attended the event we have had a very positive response with requests to do something for British Science Week again next year!

- Next steps

If we were to run another science based activity we would probably run a day of science based activities rather than a series of different events spread over a week. Providing a variety of activities allowed us to open the events up to a broader section of people and encouraged people to come to events that might not ordinarily appeal to them.

### **Successes and challenges**

Finding guest speakers was particularly difficult, despite numerous emails and calls to universities and local organisations. Fortunately the majority of the guest speakers and facilitators were provided by the staff team we have at the centre or friends and families of the staff team. External guest speakers or activity leaders were few, but of the ones we found they were very well received and provided an interesting and informative presentation.

The main achievement was creating events that were both accessible and enjoyable for people who typically do not experience such events or even get out into the community. Some of the people who attended the events were able to explore different areas of science that they would never experience normally.

With regards to the Science of Sound night, the involvement of all the participants was a great achievement. Some of the people who came along can usually be very prompt dependent and wait for staff to guide them towards different activities. However, with this event everyone was very involved and keen to try out all the different activities and were manipulating the different components to make noises and sounds that appealed to them.

Some of the people we support can find it difficult to accept others' opinions and viewpoints or to interact with each other. Because of this, the highlight in particular of the Social Science night was the discussions that were held and the interaction between people who usually find socialising in general a challenge.