

Developing inclusive school environments: Optimising the provision of staff training to support positive mental health in autistic young people.



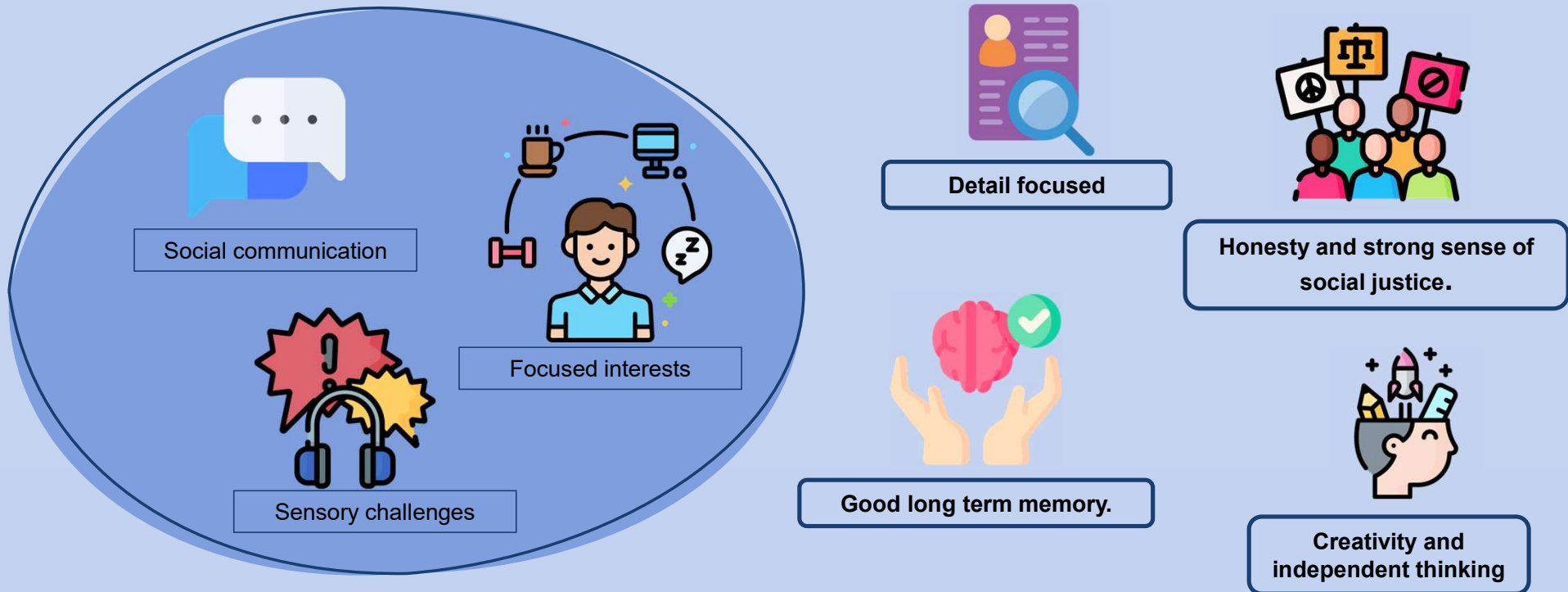
Dr Angela Wearn and Miss Zoe Collier on behalf of the project team
NIHR NENC ARC Conference, 24th May 2023



**University of
Sunderland**

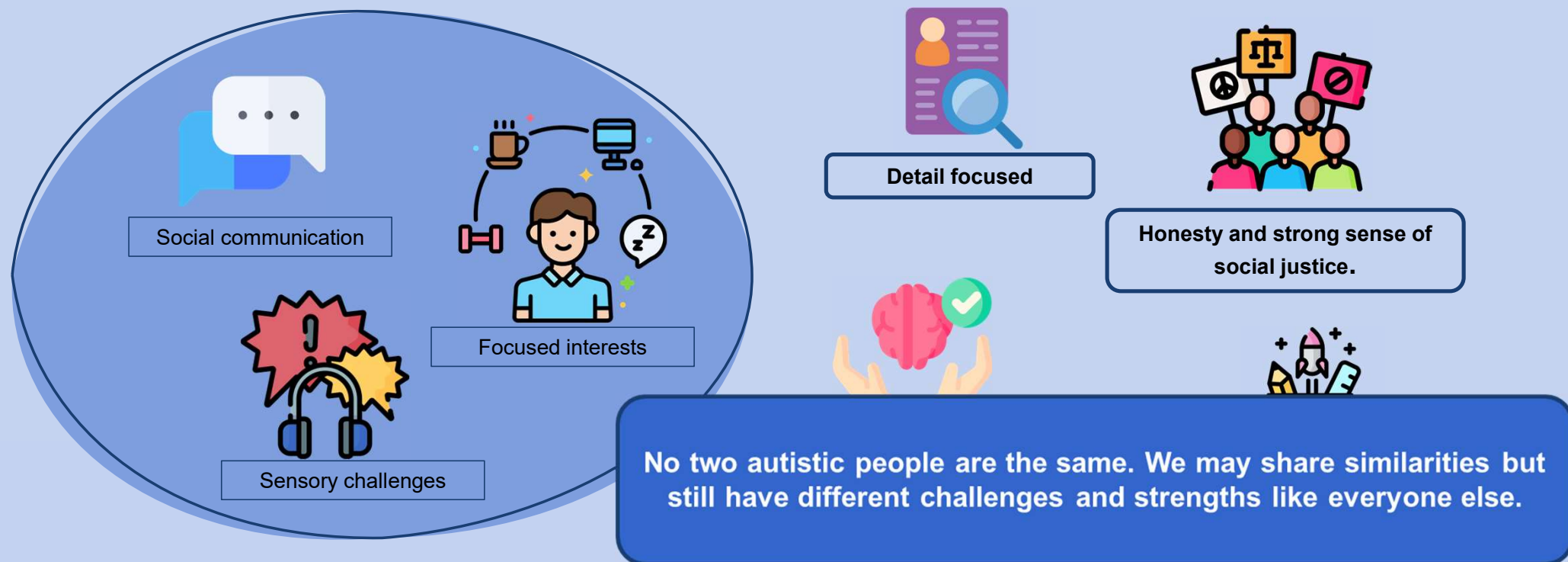
Background

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Background: Autism and mental health

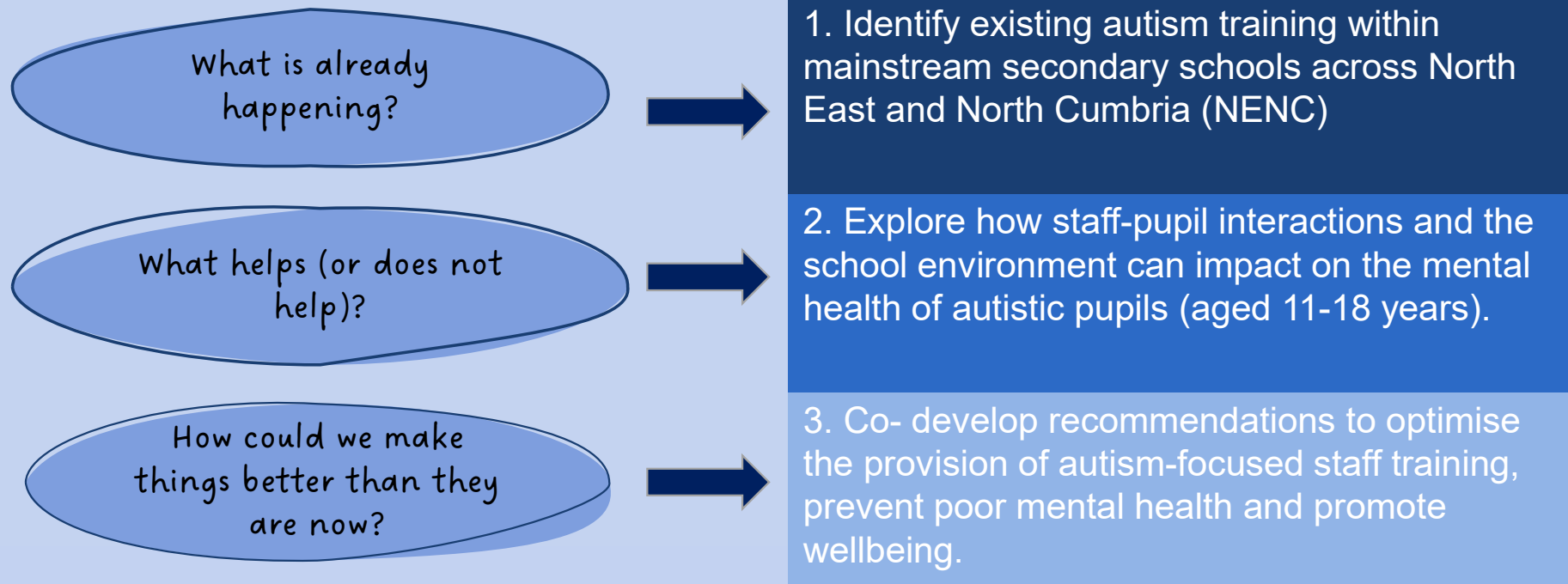


- Sometimes autism is associated with mental health because many autistic people experience severe mental health challenges.
- We often find that these mental health challenges begin in adolescence (around 10-19 years) and have often been attributed to experiences within secondary school.



- Many autistic pupils' feel there is poor **understanding** and **acceptance** across the school community.
 - School staff, and the training they have access to, can have a big impact.
 - Well trained staff are likely to better understand and appreciate the needs of autistic pupils.

Project aims



Our project

- Qualitative, peer research approach across 3 linked work packages, regional focus.

Identifying existing autism-focused training

- Mapping work
- Staff survey/interviews



Exploring experiences of secondary school with autistic young people

- Peer-led focus groups

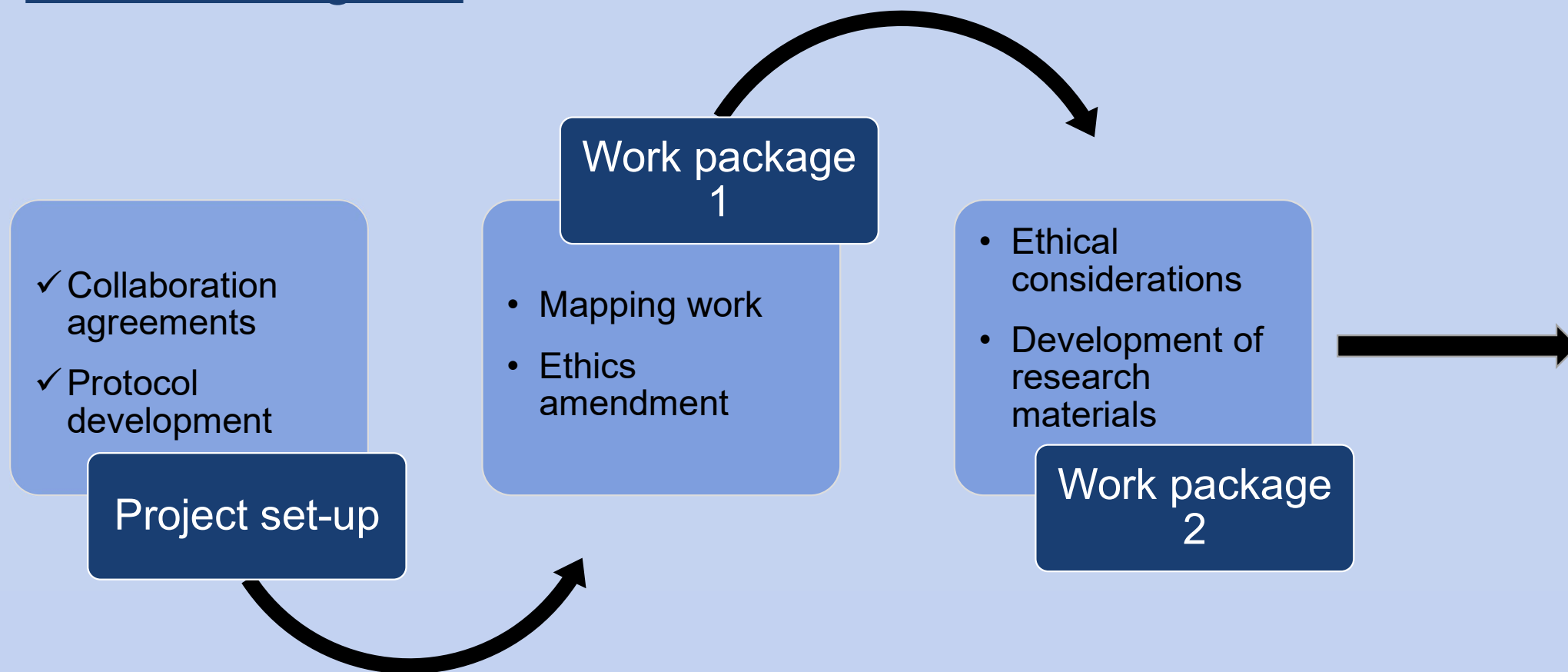


Identifying areas of good practice and areas for change

- Stakeholder workshops

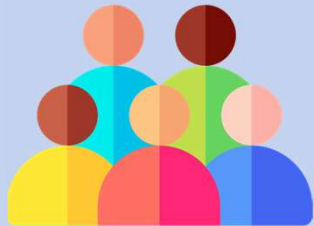


Current Progress



Our approach to co-production

- The NENC ARC Young Persons' advisory network identified this as a priority and wanted to develop a project around this area.



Core research team inc.

- Young co-investigators and peer researchers
- Autistic researchers
- PI professionals
- Others w/experience in CYP MH



Participatory workshop

- Children North East
- 15x young people
- 8x adults inc. researchers, support workers and VCSE partners



Stakeholder steering group

- Young people
- Schools
- Research
- VCSE sector
- Practice

Peer researcher training

Topics covered:

- Project overview
- The research process inc.
 - Equity & representation in research
 - Research ethics
 - Co-production, intro to data collection and analysis etc.
- Looking after ourselves in research



Young persons' experience:

- Zoe Collier

Comments from some of our other young partners:

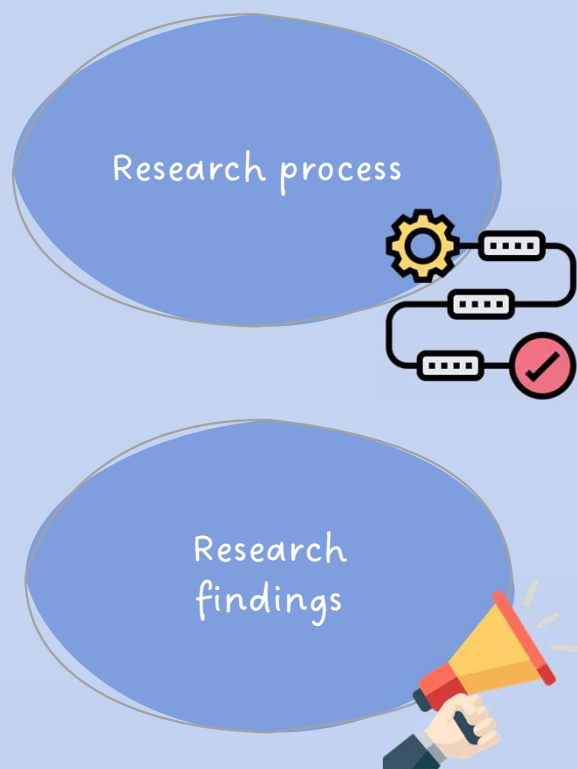
"It has been amazing to speak with and meet other people who are as interested and engaged with the project as I am".

"...I thought people my age weren't listened to by anyone....I think it's really important to involve young people if the research is about them".

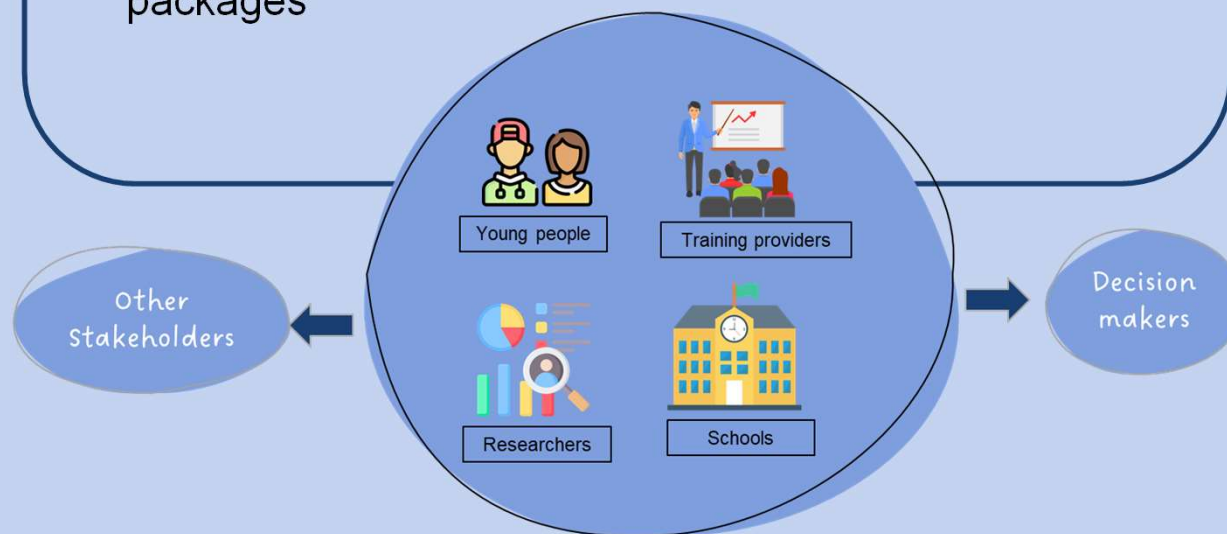
"I like how everyone accepts and listens to my opinion in our team meetings"

"...It's been a privilege to be able to share my own thoughts about the effect that the lack of inclusivity has on students within schools, something I've gained from my experiences as a mentor to autistic children in my school"

Pathways to impact



- Sharing examples of good practice
 - Priority setting with young people
 - Inclusive co-production
- Linking with ICS, VONNE and other partners
 - Co-produced safeguarding procedures
- Plans to directly inform development of specific training packages



Team members

Core Research Team: Angela Wearn, Felicity Shenton, Zoe Collier, Amy Pearson, Catherine El-Zerbi, Liam Spencer, Michelle Reid, Kai, Katie, Niamh, Lily, Wiki and Kacie.

Also special thanks to: Elaf, Sally, Alex, Andrew Purvis, Luke Bramhall, Emma Rogan, Dionne Hollis, Rhoda Morrow, Sarah Wigham and all of the other young people who have given their time to support and advise us in conducting this work so far.

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Thank you

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