Older Autistic People, Technology and Quality of Life: A Co-Production Approach

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1. Introduction

- The presentation reports the work of two co-production funded research projects.

- Technology was developed to improve the quality of life of older autistic people, their employment, leisure and other options, and support networking and developing a community of older autistic people.

- The perspectives, experiences and voices of older autistic people are central to all stages of the work.

- Team of three older autistic people, an academic researcher and two peer researchers, supported in the first project by an advisory committee of older autistic people.

2. The Current Situation

- Older autistic people experience stereotyping, discrimination and disadvantage due to being both older and autistic.

- Research and service provision for autistic people has focused on children.

- Those for older adults have ignored the sensory, communication and other needs of older autistic people.

- Unions have a diverse membership, including neurodivergent people, who may not be 'out' and may have other equality characteristics.

3. Research

- Survey to investigate the experiences and support needs of older autistic people – 78 responses.
- Greatest interest in information about autistic friendly spaces and services and systems to support executive functioning.
- Follow-up focus groups (three) and five interviews to obtain more detailed information.
- Results used to draw up website specifications - information about autistic friendly spaces and services
- Further research will be needed to develop a system to support executive functioning.

4. Software Development

- Working with a small software firm to develop the Calm Spaces website and the forum.

- The website provides reviews of venues and services, including online ones, by older autistic people for older autistic people.

- It is open to the general public, but only older autistic people can register and provide reviews.

- The forum supports the development of a community of older autistic people – the only group that can register and post on it.

5. Ongoing Developments

- The website and forum are being tested and further developed to improve their functionality and user friendliness.

- Making the software available free to groups of (older) autistic people in other countries to set up similar sites, and possibly other groups of older or marginalise people.

- Setting up social firm run by older autistic people to support the website forum and other developments – panic, we are not entrepreneurs!

6. Conclusions

- Providing information empowers people and increases autonomy and choices.

- Older autistic people taking control helps to overcome stereotypes.

- Providing information about autistic friendly spaces and services will also encourage some other services providers to consider the needs of (older) autistic people.

- Small steps to change can lead to bigger things!

7. Contact and Acknowledgments

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