**Autism Friendly Hour: Harry Potter Book Night, 2nd February 2017**

**Lucy Carlton-Walker, Children & Young Person's Librarian, Stockton Library Service**

[lucy.carlton-walker@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:lucy.carlton-walker@stockton.gov.uk)

We decided to have an Autism Friendly Hour as part of are Harry Potter Book Night Celebrations on Thursday 2nd February, so from 4pm to 5pm it was an Autism Friendly and then from 5pm to 7pm it was general admission. This was clear on all of the advertising for the event and we used Event Brite for people to book their free tickets were it was also very clear that there were two separate sessions and who each session was for. We decided to have this session as we felt that it was important that children and families with Autism or other special education needs that would struggle with the noise and crowds in a general session had the opportunity to have a quieter session where we limited the numbers so that they could enjoy themselves with their families and friends. 60 people attended the Autism Friendly session

**Training** It’s important to let you know that all of the library staff as well as customer service staff are going through Autism Awareness Training which has been developed by Daisy Chain a local charity who support families with children with Autism in the Tees Valley. My colleague Deb McDonagh (this is Debs email if you would like to contact her about this [Debbie.McDonagh@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:Debbie.McDonagh@stockton.gov.uk)) has developed this and we are all currently having the sessions I think this is important so that all staff have a general awareness of what Autism is and what we can do in libraries to support families before we start offering these sessions to the public.

**Marketing** As we already had a partnership with Daisy Chain they advertised the sessions for us, I also contact a range of organisations which I have listed below, to be honest most of them never got back to me so I am not sure if they shared the information about the event on their website or social media pages. The marketing for the event went out to all schools, was listed in the newspapers local what’s on, Primary Times, Raring2go and through a range of social media as well posters in the local museum, sports centres, soft play centres, art centre, etc… I do feel that a lot of it will be word of mouth now as once people are aware that we are offering these sessions they will let other people know.

* <http://www.ne-as.org.uk/>
* <http://www.nas.org.uk/services/local/england/north-east.aspx>
* <http://www.autismlinks.co.uk/support-groups#group-support-north-east>
* <http://www.ttht.co.uk/contact>
* <https://www.iammain.org.uk/contact-2/#.WG40GNKLTcs>
* <http://www.daisychainproject.co.uk/>
* <http://www.teesjsna.org.uk/stockton/>
* <http://www.autism-matters.co.uk/contact>
* <http://www.autism-alliance.org.uk/>
* <http://www.autism.org.uk/>
* <http://www.autismnortheast.org.uk/p/news.html>
* <http://www.childautism.org.uk/>
* <http://www.aukids.co.uk/links.shtml>

**Activities** We had a range of activities and I didn’t deliberately have any of them targeted at being Autism Friendly I just let all of the activity providers know that the first hour would be Autism Friendly so they were aware. The activities included crafts, potion show, magic show, indoor archery, animals from a local wildlife centre, Wii, sweets and treats to buy and face painting.

**Extra Resources** We provided a Visual Timetable which I have attached which was very easy to create and was useful for the children to be able to follow so they knew what activities were happening and were to find them, at the reception for the event we also had ear defenders and timers that families could borrow if they would like to for the event. These are resources that we can now have available at events and activities when appropriate.

**Autism Chill Room** We used a small meeting room that we have and took some of the furniture out and put in bean bags and a variety of sensory items this included different fabrics, balls that had different textures and a variety of lights. This was available throughout the event for people to use but is not there permanently if someone did need an area to use when we didn’t have the Chill Room set up then we would find them an alternative quiet space to use.

**Feedback**

* Autism Chill Room – Wonderful to have this space, it has been a life-saver, Thank you!
* The quiet Autism hour was great – it made a massive difference to us
* Loved the Autism Friendly idea
* Really great event, 1 hour Autism Friendly session great, meant all family could relax. Everyone present has understanding of kid’s needs.
* Keep the same – thanks for all the hard work – my Autistic Grandson loved it and me!!!
* Good, love the early Autism session
* The calm environment for Autistic children

