



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Autism Awareness Training held by the Ministry of Equality - “What is Autism?”**

Last week saw an incredibly successful series of seminars on autism. In total there were five seminars during the course of the week.

Tuesday 19th September saw the start of the Understanding Autism training seminars organised by the Ministry of Equality. This training forms part of the national autism strategy that the Government is pioneering. This seminar entitled “What is Autism?” was a follow-up to the seminar titled “Parental Strategies; Managing Behaviour” delivered by Mrs Linda Woodcock on the 31st March 2017 and is part of the Understanding Autism series of lectures. The Tuesday seminar was specifically aimed at professionals and management and was fully subscribed by members of staff from the Gibraltar Health Authority, Care Agency and Department of Education: all three being key stakeholders. General Practitioners, Occupational Therapists, Health Visitors and Speech and Language Therapists, Head Teachers, Teachers, Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCO), Social Workers, counsellors, Unit Managers of the Care Agency were all represented at this seminar. Feedback received from them clearly highlighted the benefits of undertaking the same training together.

Similarly, the Wednesday and Thursday morning sessions, which were specifically aimed at front line staff were also fully subscribed by staff from the Department of Education, Gibraltar Health Authority, Care Agency and also the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority. These sessions were attended by Learning Support Assistants (LSA), Special Needs Learning Support Assistants (SNLSA), Care Agency carers and Stay & Play volunteers. From the outset, frontline staff were eager to undertake further training in relation to matters pertinent to the requirements of their service users. Their participation has been vital for the purpose of understanding the requirements of people with autism.

There were also two sessions which were aimed at parents and volunteers. The provision of this core training to parents of young children and adults on the autism spectrum disorder is also fundamental to a holistic approach to the care provided 24/7 for someone with autism. In order to ensure that more parents could attend, a morning and afternoon session were organised and both were fully subscribed.



Parents are the primary contributors to the well-being of young children and adults on the autism spectrum. Their participation at these seminars has been invaluable as they have provided a direct insight into the issues they face. This training will assist them in the care of their loved ones as a continuation of the care already given by service providers. It has also given them a better understanding of what autism is and how to create an environment at home which will reduce stress levels.

The Minister for Equality, the Hon Samantha Sacramento MP, said: “From the outset, when we first advertised this seminar in August, we could see that the level of interest being generated was extremely high. However, it has exceeded our expectations with the Ministry of Equality having to secure larger premises in order to meet demand. We provided this training to almost 300 people over 4 days. This overwhelming response reflects the positive approach, eagerness and enthusiasm of our key stakeholder professionals in the public sector to their continued professional development which can only be but positive to our service users and the parents’ eagerness to learn more about a topic which they relate to so closely. I firmly believe that this is as a result of the prominence and the importance that this subject now has thanks to the excellent work that has been undertaken by the dedicated staff at the Ministry of Equality.

The mixing of professionals ensures a standardised approach in delivery, it is particularly important to ensure that there is a consistent message from all professionals in the public sector services, whether in health, care, education or sports.

The positive response that we have received from parents, at times very emotional, is extremely gratifying.

Everyone’s involvement and feedback, as stakeholders, helps inform us in the developing and formulation of our policies and therefore important and appreciated. I would like to thank the management of the relevant government departments for supporting the Ministry of Equality in the delivery of training and awareness under the National Autism Strategy Programme and the team at the Ministry of Equality for organising these fantastic seminars. I would also like to thank Mrs Linda Woodcock for giving five excellent informative seminars.

The Ministry of Equality will shortly be announcing further awareness seminars and training.”