



PRESS RELEASE

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Ministry of Equality holds successful third seminar in the Understanding Autism series – “Adolescence and Puberty: the emotional difficulties experienced during this transition”

The Ministry of Equality held its third seminar as part of the Government’s National Autism Strategy, ‘Understanding Autism’ series of seminars last week. This seminar focussed on the changes during adolescence and puberty, sexuality/relationships, body changes, social media influences and strategies in managing this difficult period.

The seminar held last week was composed of seven individual sessions. Two of the sessions were specifically aimed at public sector professionals and senior management. The Gibraltar Health Authority, Care Agency and Department of Education, three key stakeholders, were represented by their Managers, Social Worker Managers, Head Teachers, Deputy Head Teachers, Teachers, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists and representatives from senior staff levels. Two sessions were aimed at middle/junior management and frontline staff and these were represented by staff of the Gibraltar Health Authority, Care Agency, Department of Education, Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority and the Gibraltar Youth Service. Care Workers, Learning Support Assistants, Youth Workers and GHA Officers were participants of this seminar.

The other three sessions were aimed at parents of children and young adults on the Autism Spectrum and volunteers who work with people with disabilities, among attendees were parents, family members and also individuals on the autism spectrum. Volunteers were represented by members from Special Olympics Gibraltar, Gibraltar Girl Guides Association, Gibraltar Scouts and Duke of Edinburgh’s International Award Gibraltar.

In response to the feedback received from attendees at the last seminar, the format of the seminar was modified to smaller groups for there to be more of an opportunity for interaction between speaker and audience. For this purpose, the size of the audience was reduced and more sessions had to be made available. Sessions were split into different audiences thereby allowing the speaker to focus her presentation more specifically and effectively for each respective target audience.

The training was provided to over 160 people who attended over four days.

The Minister for Equality, The Hon. Minister Samantha Sacramento, MP, said “The two previous seminars related to subject matters which were relevant to children and young adults. However, the substance of this seminar was more specific as it related to the transition from childhood to adulthood, therefore, our target audience was smaller. I am nonetheless thrilled with the response

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received by all our target audience. I can even say that it was attended by young adults on the autism spectrum who wanted to learn more about the changes they were experiencing.

One of the seminars was attended by a child on the autism spectrum and the Ministry officials were extremely touched when they received a personal thank you from this child who also explained that they could make more sense as to what they were going through. There were much exchanges of personal experiences and discussions at the end of each session and many parents had the opportunities to have questions answered by Linda Woodcock. The fact that Ms Woodcock is a clinician and a parent of a young adult on the autism spectrum clearly came throughout her presentation as she gave the perspective from both angles.

I must convey my gratitude to all those involved, including the management of the relevant departments for supporting my Ministry, as well as all those who supported us by attending. I would also like to thank Mrs Linda Woodcock for providing yet another excellent seminar and to my team at the Ministry of Equality for approaching each seminar with much enthusiasm, for taking note of the feedback of those who attend and for actioning points raised whenever possible.”