

PRESS RELEASE

No: 34/2018

Date: 22nd January 2018

Ministry of Equality announces its fourth seminar under the Understanding Autism series – “Maximising Communication Opportunities for Children and Young Adults with Autism”

The Ministry of Equality is proud to announce the fourth seminar as part of the Government’s National Autism Strategy Understanding Autism series of seminars.

The seminars under the Understanding Autism series are primarily aimed at parents of children and adults on the autism spectrum and also at volunteers who work with people with autism. The overall objective of these seminars is to provide up to date information on how to improve the daily lives of people who are on the autism spectrum.

The speaker will be Mrs Gaynor Vatvani, who is presently the Head of Speech & Language Therapy Service at the Gibraltar Health Authority. Mrs Vatvani qualified as a Speech and Language therapist in 1987 and has been working with the GHA since then. She obtained a BPhil. in Autism at Birmingham University (Distance Learning) in 1996 as autism had taken a big part of her caseload. Gaynor went on to receive an MEd in Autism from the same university in 2014. She has helped to develop the Speech and Language Therapy Service in St. Martin’s School. She has also been instrumental in devising the local Diagnostic Autism Team as well as being an integral member of the team.

This seminar will focus on maximising communication opportunities for children and young adults with autism. Each seminar will cover the following:

1. A general outline of how communication skills develop in neuro-typical development and juxtaposing this with communication development in autism.
2. Different ways individuals with autism may communicate, including AAC (Alternative Augmentative Communication) such as electronic voice output devices, Makaton signing systems, Picture Exchange Communication (PECS) etc.

The seminar will also outline strategies to promote the use of these communication systems and how best to help individuals with autism become effective communicators.

Ministry of Housing and Equality

HM Government of Gibraltar • 14 Governor’s Parade • Gibraltar GX11 1AA

t +350 20066481 (Centrex 2364) f +350 20042509 (Centrex 2368) e equ&h@gibraltar.gov.gi w gibraltar.gov.gi



The Ministry of Equality has again organised sessions in the morning and afternoon specifically for parents and volunteers so as to facilitate attendance. These will be held at the Lecture Room, First Floor, John Mackintosh Hall on Wednesday 31st January, 4:30pm – 7.00pm and Thursday 1st February, 9:30am – 12.00pm.

Participation is free and given the interest and demand already expressed, available seating will be on a first come, first served basis to individuals who pre-register with the Ministry of Equality.

Training will also be delivered to HM Government of Gibraltar professionals and front-line staff that deal with children and young adults with autism.

The Minister for Equality, The Hon. Minister Samantha Sacramento, MP, said “Many children and young adults with autism become frustrated in their attempt to make their feelings, thoughts and needs known. They may act on their frustration through vocal outbursts or other behaviours. Communication skills are therefore essential for individuals with autism so as not to be reliant on others to figure out or interpret what they are saying for others to understand. All parents want to encourage and support their child to learn communication skills and this particular seminar will provide guidance and tips on communication, specific for children and young adults on the autism spectrum disorder; how to support communication development and what sort of support communication systems are available.

The Ministry for Equality has therefore developed this series of training seminars as part of the National Autism Strategy so as to educate and inform so that everyone can be better supported. It is by providing these seminars that professionals can use a platform to further share best practise information with parents and volunteers. This forum also provides an opportunity to network with peers, encourage a greater understanding of autism and increase support.

I would like to thank Mrs Gaynor Vatvani for her dedication and admirable work in relation to autism. I would also like to thank the Ministry of Equality’s consistent standard of excellence in bringing about autism awareness and delivering training.”