

# Hertfordshire County Council recognises **The Positive Effects of NLP**

By Eve Menezes Cunningham

When most people think about NLP and communication, they think of public speaking and high flying executives. But NLP can help anyone who wants to improve their communication skills.

In the case of working with people with Asperger Syndrome (AS), it can feel more like a need to be understood. AS is an autism spectrum disorder. It affects non-verbal communication skills and empathy and is often confused with high-functioning autism.

In recent years, some awareness of the condition has been raised by TV characters with AS on programmes including Waterloo Road, Grey's Anatomy and The Shield.

And businesses are paying attention. Julie Inglis runs a programme ([www.pps-training.co.uk](http://www.pps-training.co.uk)) which uses NLP skills to help carers and parents as well as people with AS understand more and be understood.

Julie says, "There's lots of theory available around AS and there are lots of academics but my course is designed to be as practical as possible. If you have children with it or are working in the field you need practical tools. People used to say, 'There's nothing you can do' but that's not what I believe.

"Initially, I started going into schools. I'd do inset days, training teachers and doing mentoring work. Hertfordshire County Council found me at an exhibition. They were keen to do a pilot. They said, 'All these years, I've been coming here looking for someone like you and you're just up the road!'"

Since 2005, Julie's programme has trained

more than 200 people. They're contracted until 2010 with Hertfordshire and are talking to other London Boroughs and local councils.

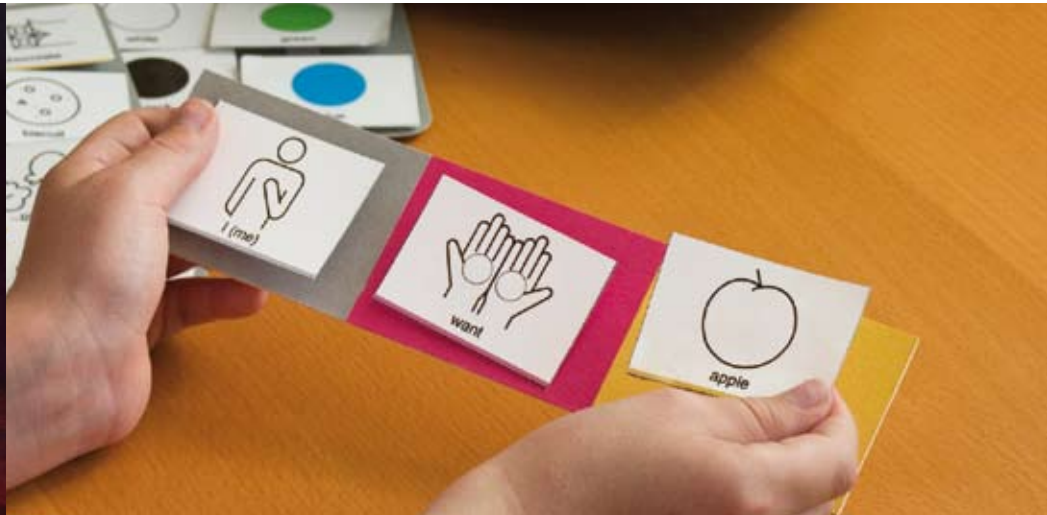
Julie can see things from both sides. She says, "I have children and stepchildren with Asperger's. I struggled for years. We had trouble with education, problems with the police and drug issues."

Julie says that AS is widespread: "It's much more common than people realise. My son, Toby, was diagnosed last summer. Everybody thought he had ADHD until he was 15. We had a coach working with us. As a parent, your life is falling apart. But at the same time, something's really badly wrong and everyone's telling you it's your fault. Having someone who's not caught up in that is really helpful.

"I wanted to do something about it. I started off as a coach, coaching families but it wasn't moving fast enough. I thought 'we need more coaches'. On my own, I could only get so much done. Largely, what happens is that people come to me because they are parents. When they've had some coaching, they start to see wood for trees and want to make a difference and use their expertise to help other parents.

"People with Asperger's take things very literally. They can't keep options open. They need closure. Everything you ever hear is taken in a





literal way. Think of all the metaphors we use without thinking, like ‘pull your socks up’.

“My son was in court because he was found holding a hammer in the middle of the night. The judge said, ‘You have to sleep at your house’. He was happy to sleep there during the day and thought that was enough. You really need to give specific instructions. Everything they hear is taken absolutely literally. If a judge knew that, it could make a huge difference with the way they sentence people.”

NLP models, such as rapport skills, perceptual positions and strategies offer practical solutions. For example, Julie says someone with AS who is visual, “which a lot of them are, doesn’t even have the 7%. They’re never going to visual cues up naturally. They don’t recognise when I’m angry, don’t recognise when I’m confused but I can teach them ‘This is what I look like when I am angry. This is what I look like when I’m sad.’ And the Perceptual Positions help them see other people’s points of view.

“Teaching them rapport skills enables them to have friends perhaps for the very first time. People with Asperger’s often want friends but have no idea how to build relationships so this is very empowering. The application of NLP can create ‘Ripples of Change’ (our trade mark) that develop and grow over time.”

Mark Dixon manages the Community Learning Disabilities Team for Hertfordshire County Council. He has been offering Julie’s training since 2005. Mark says, “A colleague of mine, Anne Lafferty, was on a course in London. I’d worked in partnership with her, assessing needs. We didn’t offer training at the time and Anne was aware that we were looking for a trainer.” When she saw Julie’s stand at an exhibition, things clicked.

Mark says the training has made a “vast” difference: “We engage with a private and

voluntary organisation called Robinia Support Solutions Care. Most of their staff have now been trained specifically for working with people with Asperger’s and high functioning autism. Appropriate staff can be employed to help them lead more fulfilling lives.”

## After staff had been trained, we went back to get feedback and they felt much more confident

The first group they worked with were “five young men with Asperger’s. The original remit was aiming for them to move on from the residential unit within three years. During the first few months, there was no discernable difference. But after staff had been trained, we went back to get feedback and they felt much more confident. They had a better understanding as well as tools and techniques which enabled them to work more effectively with them. Literally, within nine months, we had three of them moving into more independent living. They used to cost [Hertfordshire County Council] £89K per annum. Now two cost £35K and one is costing nothing. And there are no influences other than the training.

“More and more people being diagnosed across the autistic spectrum. Asperger’s was one of those things that wasn’t recognised but now we’re hoping we’ll have an effective and trained workforce. If we have a knowledgeable enough staff group, they can do some intervention work. In the past, we’ve only come across them when families are in crisis.

“We’ve engaged with a whole range of

services and we involve parents. Social workers don’t know everything by reading a book on Asperger’s. The training enables people to come away with a toolkit.”

Karen Moxom, ANLP Director and Rapport’s Publisher, attended one of Julie’s courses for carers and parents. She says, “It was a wonderful course. My eight-year-old has recently been diagnosed with Aspergers and ADHD, but it’s very interesting from a business angle, too.

“Julie has had funding from Hertfordshire County Council to run this course. They’re keen to get it piloted as they can already demonstrate considerable improvements through Care in the Community. And it’s beneficial for getting NLP out there.

“I think what Julie is doing is absolutely wonderful and really interesting. The course is aimed at parents, carers, people working with adolescents and adult learners, and yet there was so much of interest and relevance to anyone working with any age group. The five-day course was free for parents (funded by Hertfordshire County Council) and it’s such a valuable thing for any parent to do. Our consultant psychologist gave us a “clinical diagnosis” and then said we needed to find the tools and techniques for dealing with our son. This course easily and effectively delivers those techniques and creates an opportunity for parents and carers to make a real difference to those living with ASC and ADHD.” ●

For more information about Julie’s training programme and resources, please visit [www.pps-training.co.uk](http://www.pps-training.co.uk).

For more information about the initiatives at Hertfordshire County Council, visit [www.hertsdirect.org](http://www.hertsdirect.org).