



Autism and Policing

Best Practice in Education and Training

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Churchill Fellow 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Fellowship was undertaken to answer the question “what is best-practice in training police officers in autism awareness?”

The projects visited all contained similar themes, which I believe cover this best practice. They are, in no particular order:

- Instructors must have personal experience of both autism and of policing
- Training is far more effective if it includes the community
- Consideration should be given to increasing Initial Training courses, and providing further opportunity for Continuous Professional Development for more experienced officers
- Training should be tailored to suit different policing roles.
- Increased autism awareness will help staff as well as the public

During my travels, the information I came across covered an area so much wider than my initial question, and I will include as much as possible in this report, as I hope its relevance both to autism training and policing in general will be clear.

Author's note:

I have used both identity-first and person-first language in this report, and this is done on purpose. My own preference is for identity-first, however I recognise others feel differently, therefore both have been used interchangeably. I have also used the terms 'neurodiverse' in reference to people with autism and other conditions such as Dyslexia or AD(H)D, and 'neurotypical' for people without these.

I also acknowledge that the autistic spectrum is wide ranging and encompasses people with a myriad of abilities. Not everything referred to in this report will apply to every person with autism, but it is intended to create ideas and debate which will help those who need it.

INTRODUCTION

The National Autistic Society (NAS) states that there are more than 700,000 autistic people in the UK (autism.org.uk, 2019). That is over 1% of the population. However in 2018, the US Center for Disease Control released findings suggesting that the figure for autism prevalence was actually 1 in 59 in some States (Baio, Wiggins, Christensen et al, 2018). Whatever the true figure, statistics like these mean that it is certain that a police officer will come into contact with an autistic person during the course of their career – either as a witness, suspect, or victim of crime; or indeed as a colleague. How an officer interacts with an autistic person can have lasting impacts for both parties, influencing experiences and criminal justice outcomes both positively and negatively.

While it is acknowledged that pockets of expertise exist – as the development of the National Police Autism Association (NPAA) proves – for the most part training on autism spectrum condition in UK policing is bit-part or non-existent. A study by Crane et al in 2016 suggested that only 37% of police officers had received training in autism, but that 92% would find it useful. The same study found that almost 70% of autistic adults surveyed who had come into contact with the police were dissatisfied with the encounter. This view seems to be supported by publication of the latest Scottish Strategy for Autism (2018), which calls for more training and education of professionals across the board amongst its identified Outcomes and Priorities.

The UK has 48 police forces (including non-territorial forces like the British Transport Police) plus the National Crime Agency. Despite the establishment of the College of Policing in 2013 to encourage consistency, this means there are currently 49 different training methods across the country. In my own force, Police Scotland, training in

autism awareness consists of watching three short films depicting how someone with autism might behave in certain situations. These are included in the Scottish Police Emergency Life Saving (SPELS) online training package which officers repeat yearly. From my point of view, as both an autistic person and a police officer, this is not enough.

From personal research, I had heard of projects in the USA which were training officers – mostly, it must be said, as a result of poorly-handled




National Police Autism Association

NPAA was founded in 2015 as an independent support group for officers, staff and volunteers affected by autism and other neurodiverse conditions. This could be personally, as a family member or carer, or professionally.

There are co-ordinators in almost every police force in the UK, and they work to educate, support and share best practice amongst their colleagues.

Contact details can be found in the 'Further Information' section.



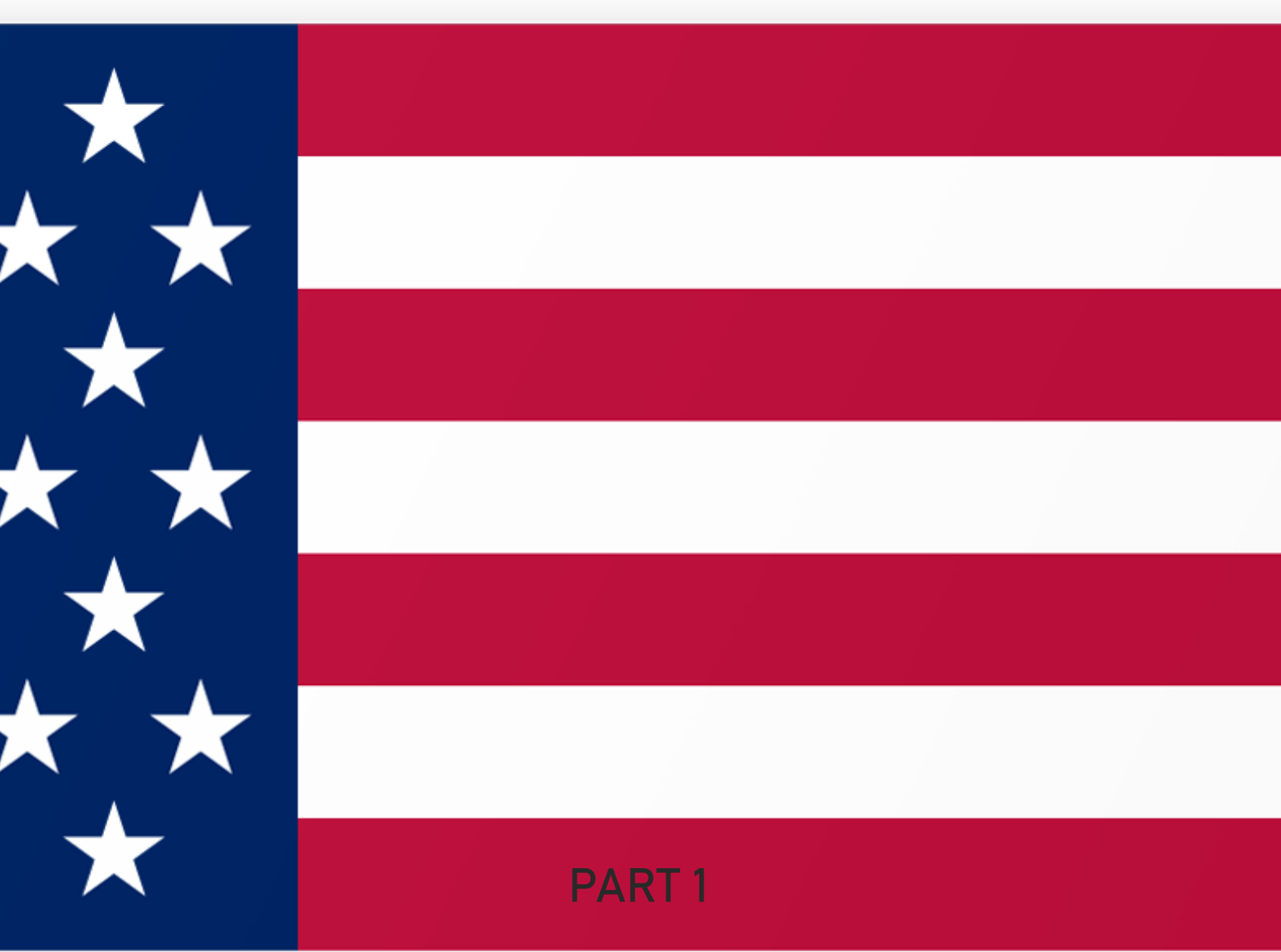
incidents which resulted in harm being done to people. These projects had been developed by parties (officers/families) who recognised the problem and wanted to do something about it. Sessions were in addition to initial police training, which is the situation we in the UK are currently in – any training an officer receives is on top of their basic training, so time and funding must be found.

The purpose of this Fellowship was to visit some of those projects and take on board the learning and development they had already been through and bring it back to the UK to share.

Basic police training in the US is similar in length to ours, albeit the use of firearms means their training and operational world is very different.

In comparison, I also wanted to look at forces in Europe, most of whose education in autism was done in initial officer training at police college. What form did this take? Did it make a difference? Police training in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands is an initial two-year course. In Scotland new officers attend college for eleven weeks. What impact does this difference have? These are some of the wider issues I referenced in the Executive Summary, and I will bring them into the report as it progresses.

I have set out this report as a review of each of the projects or organisations I visited. I then recap the learning points and set out recommendations for implementing best practice in Scotland (and the wider UK). This is not a formal academic paper, my research was based on observations, and meeting and speaking with people involved in training. It should also be noted that my viewpoint is also rooted in my background of Response & Community Policing and therefore mostly takes the viewpoint of a First Responder preventing or de-escalating incidents. I hope that colleagues reading this report will consider how they might implement or adapt some of the ideas in their own areas of policing.



PART 1

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

COPS AUTISM RESPONSE EDUCATION

ST PAUL, MINNESOTA

Cops Autism Response Education (CARE) was developed in 2015 by Officer Rob Zink of the St Paul Police Department. CARE was initially established following several incidents that had been poorly managed by the police, and the force wanted to improve the situation. As the father of two autistic sons, Officer Zink stepped forward, and has worked closely with the Autism Society of Minnesota (AuSM) and the wider community to develop the programme.

CARE works not only to educate police officers in autism awareness and understanding, but also to educate families and autistic people themselves to help them better understand police procedure and methods of keeping themselves and their families safe.

CARE has a three-pronged approach:

- Delivering training sessions to officers to help them better understand autism
- Delivering information sessions for individuals and families/carers on policing and protecting themselves/loved ones
- Outreach to autistic people and their families after they have been involved in a police incident

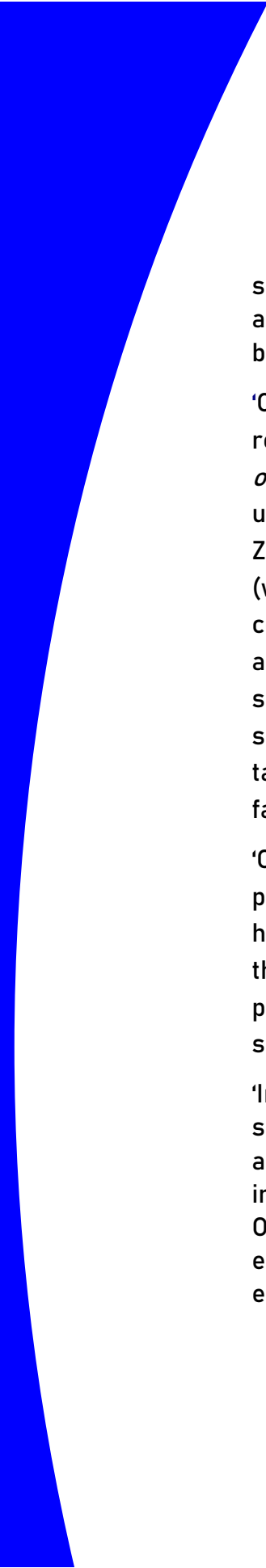


Police Training Sessions

These sessions are approximately four hours long in order to fit into a mandated training block. They are delivered by a police officer with direct experience of autism (i.e. a close family member on the spectrum) and a representative from AuSM. The sessions are split into four modules:

- Understanding Behaviours
- Call Response
- Officer Follow-up
- Interaction with Individual on the Spectrum

'Understanding Behaviours' is delivered by AuSM and is a theoretical look at autism,



some of the common themes or responses that officers might come across and some of the reasons behind them. The module gives a basic understanding of the autism spectrum.

‘Call Response’ is delivered by an officer. It gives advice on responding to a call involving an autistic person *from a police point of view*. This is the key point – the person giving the advice understands autism, but also understands police procedure. As Off. Zink points out, many of the things an autistic person might do (when overwhelmed or otherwise) – for example not make eye contact, struggle away from touch – are also signs police officers are trained to look out for as ‘warning signals’ to keep themselves safe. How to differentiate between the two is a vital part of this session, as is the message that officers should not be frightened to take action to keep people safe whatever circumstances they are faced with.

‘Officer Follow-up’ highlights the work St Paul PD does with autistic people and their families. If an incident with an autistic person is highlighted, particularly if it has gone badly, officers will work with the person and if necessary their families/carers to establish positive relationships and carry out preventative work (on both sides) to stop it from happening again.

‘Interaction with Individual on the Spectrum’ is a very clunky way of saying that at the end of each session there is an input from an autistic person which covers their experiences of previous police interactions or incidents, what helped them and what didn’t work. Officers can ask questions to gain better understanding – albeit it is emphasised that the person’s experience is theirs alone, as not every autistic person is the same.



Family Information Sessions

CARE holds frequent information sessions for autistic people, their families and carers. The sessions follow the same format as the police sessions, minus the 'Understanding Behaviours' section. The idea is to give people an understanding of how police respond to incidents, why they take certain actions, but also from a prevention point of view, to stop incidents from happening in the first place. To that end CARE emphasises information sharing, quite often through promotion of the Vitals App (See Appendix A). Families and carers are also asked to consider their expectations of police, given their new understanding of policy and training. Inputs are given by families who have previously experienced poor interaction with the police but have subsequently worked with CARE to improve knowledge and procedure.

Image: Officer Zink delivers a Family Session at St Paul Western District

Outreach

Officer Zink has established a small team of officers in St Paul who are the first port of call for incidents involving people on the autism spectrum. If possible, he encourages families to call him for support rather than calling 911 and even if he is off-duty he will take the call and find a trained officer to send if possible. This is an attempt to reduce negative experience for people with autism, their families and the officers involved.

If officers are involved in an incident with an autistic person, CARE will follow up the incident to make sure the person and the family are left with a positive outcome. For example if a young person has had a bad experience with police, a CARE officer will re-attend in the following days to try to rebuild the relationship and trust so that future outcomes will be different. This can take time and several visits, getting to know the individual and learning how to help. It is a key part of the CARE programme. The Family Care Sessions mentioned above emphasise the importance of building these relationships before anything goes wrong, rather than having to work to re-establish them afterwards.

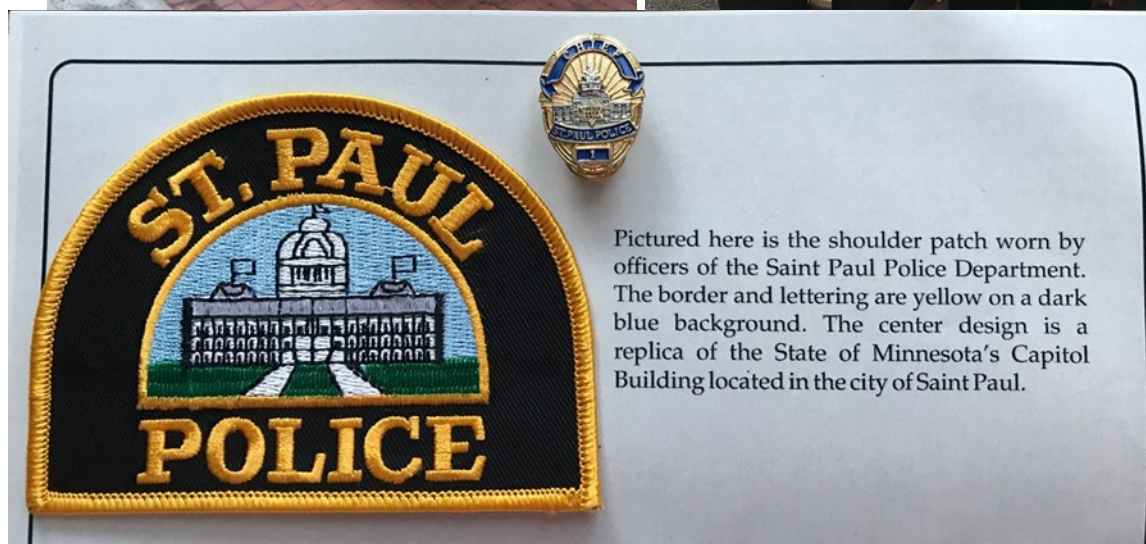
CARE is an award-winning project and since its inception the number of complaints received about officers interactions with autistic people have fallen drastically.



Officer Zink



Meeting Chief Axtell



Pictured here is the shoulder patch worn by officers of the Saint Paul Police Department. The border and lettering are yellow on a dark blue background. The center design is a replica of the State of Minnesota's Capitol Building located in the city of Saint Paul.

AUTISM LAW ENFORCEMENT EDUCATION COALITION

WESTWOOD, MASSACHUSETTS

The Autism Law Enforcement Education Coalition (ALEC) is a venture based at the Arc of South Norfolk in Westwood, Massachusetts. It was founded in 2003 when a group of law enforcement and fire officers approached the District Attorney's office with a proposal to start a training programme on autism for first responders. ALEC is now partly funded by the state and has become a mandatory part of Massachusetts' police training.

Like CARE in Minnesota, ALEC training sessions last 3-4 hours to fit into official training blocks. These sessions count toward the mandatory training hours all officers must complete. All instructors have a link with autism through autistic family members and the inputs are tailored to the department, so firefighters teach firefighters, police teach police and so forth.

ALEC sessions are split into two halves. The first half is an introduction to autism, what it is, exploring some of the potential situations or reactions that first responders might come across. A theoretical introduction, essentially. The second half of the class is more practical, using videos and examples of incidents to demonstrate actions, and to educate officers on how to deal with scenarios they might encounter. The format of the session is similar to the CARE programme in that it is a mix of theory and practical advice given by colleagues who have a working knowledge of autism alongside their professional skills.

Although based in Westwood, ALEC also works very closely with the Boston Police Department. Officer Michelle Maffeo, with the support of her Commissioner, has established an autism education and outreach programme in Boston. She has succeeded in getting every officer in the city trained using an online course she developed herself and has a training programme established in the

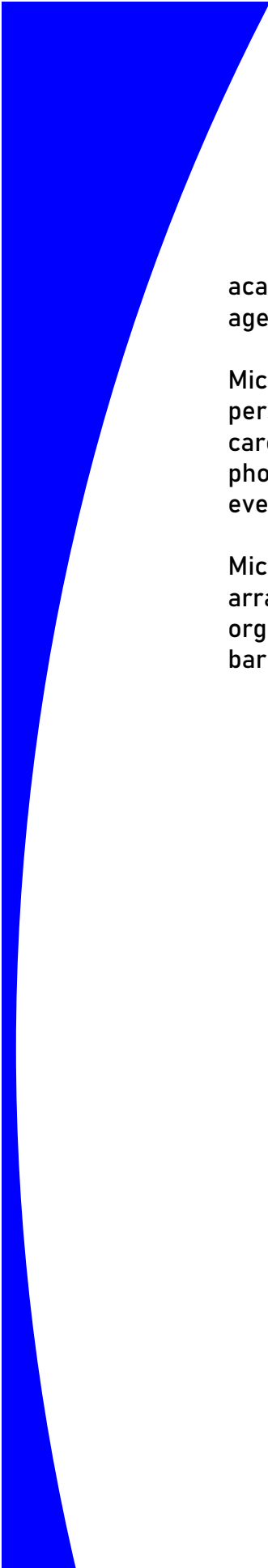
CRISIS INTERVENTION TEAMS

Whilst in Massachusetts I also came across Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT). The concept was developed in Memphis in 1988 as an answer to increasing police involvement in Mental Health incidents or other people in crisis.

It was recognised that placing people in such crises into the criminal justice (CJ) system was not in anyone's best interests. CIT aims to redirect people away from CJ and into support services. It involves partnership working between community groups, health providers, law enforcement and other interested parties.

Police Officers who are CIT trained undergo a 40-hour training curriculum. They are trained to recognise various MH and other conditions and signpost people to the most relevant services.

CIT officers are regular Patrol officers who have volunteered to undergo training. Massachusetts currently has around 20% of its Patrol officers trained. In some areas Departments have chosen to have every Patrol officer take the course, however CIT suggests that it should be voluntary. These officers carry out their 'regular' duties, but their training means they will often be sent to relevant incidents instead of untrained colleagues.



academy. She has branched out to train other law enforcement agencies and even to the local emergency hospitals.

Michelle also established the 'North Star' programme, which is a personal alert for people with autism or Alzheimer's. Parents or caregivers can pre-emptively provide the police with a photograph and personal information which will assist in the event of a person going missing.

Michelle is very active in the Boston community and regularly arranges events and open days for schools and other organisations to make the police more accessible and break down barriers.

AUTISM SAFETY EDUCATION & TRAINING

PORTLAND, MAINE

ASET911 is an education programme established by Matt Brown in Maine in 2003. Matt has been a law enforcement officer since 1992 and as the parent of an autistic son he decided he wanted to give something back to the community, and as such developed ASET, which stands for Autism Safety Education & Training. He



Bedford PD is one of the many to have adopted ASET

now works in conjunction with the Autism Society of Maine (ASM) to deliver the course, which has been delivered to every new class of officers at the Maine Criminal Justice Academy (the sole law enforcement training school in the State) since 2004. In total Matt has trained over 5000 first responders across Maine, the rest of the USA and Canada.



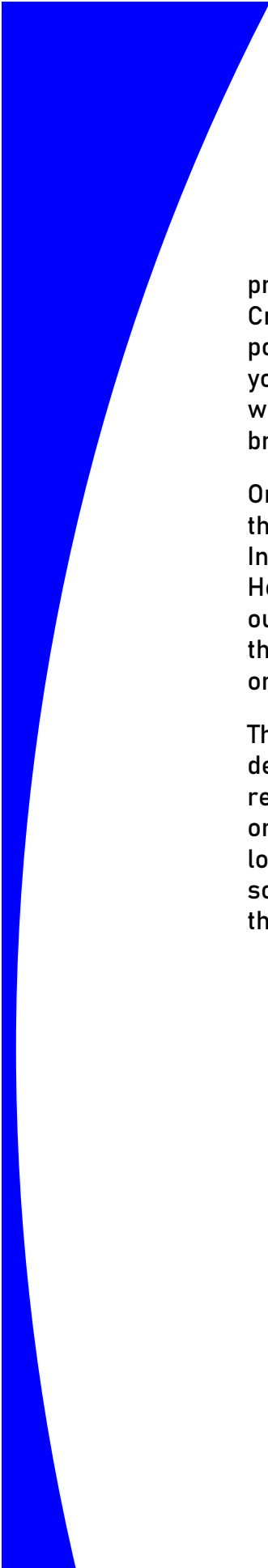
Maine Criminal Justice Academy

The ASET training takes the form of a theoretical introduction to autism, what it is (and isn't) and how it can impact on situations that first responders may find themselves in. The length of the session can be adapted to suit the requirements of the audience. Matt's class is very practical, he weaves scenarios and anecdotes throughout, making it real and relevant. He also, like the other two projects, uses videos of real-life situations as training tools to analyse what could have been done differently.

Matt also had assistance in delivering his class from a young autistic man who had



Capital Clubhouse, Augusta



previously been in trouble with the police and been through the Criminal Justice system. He was able to give his point of view of police actions, and provide an insight into his experiences. This young man worked with Matt throughout, describing what he would have been thinking or feeling during scenarios and bringing vital lived experience to the session.

Once again, Matt encourages community partnerships as part of the prevention message. He works closely with ASM as an Information Specialist giving advice to families and individuals. He encourages officers on the course to get involved in outreach work with organisations in their communities, such as the local Clubhouse (further details of the Clubhouse organisation can be found in the 'Further Information' section).

The success of the training has been such that all of the police departments in the state have been trained and the bulk of the requests Matt now receives are from families looking for advice on police and court procedures post-charge. He is therefore looking to extend the training out to prosecutors, defence solicitors and judges to help aid understanding of autism throughout the criminal justice system.



PART 2

EUROPE

SÖDERTÖRN UNIVERSITY POLICE EDUCATION

SWEDEN

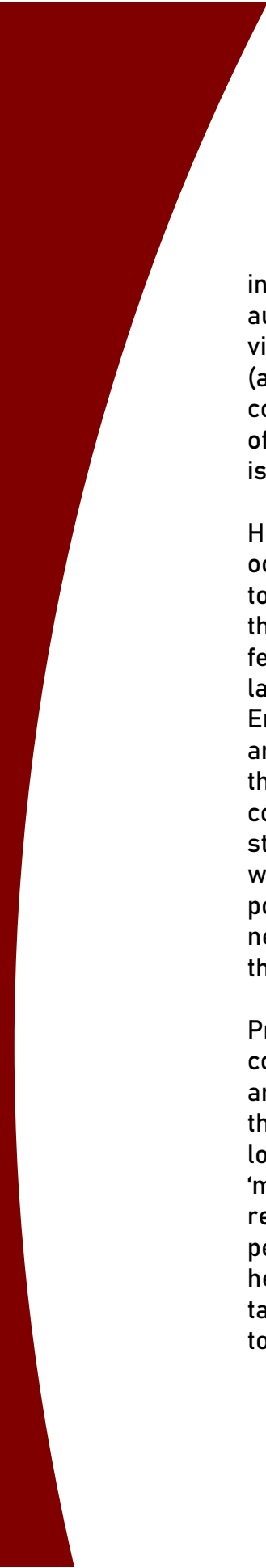
Police officers undergo two years of basic training in Sweden, which is undertaken at one of three training centres across the country. Södertörn, in the southern suburbs of Stockholm, is one of those centres. Although the course takes place in a University, students do not leave with a degree, although this is being considered for future development. The course involves practical and theoretical training and there are roughly 1000



students registered in the Department at Södertörn at any time, spread over five classes. Interestingly, although students must meet the police admission criteria before they are offered a place, students are not police officers and must apply to join the police on completion of the course. It is mandatory, however. You cannot join without completing it. Swedish Universities have no tuition fees for EU students.

Right from the start of their course, students are taught communication skills, de-escalation tactics, conflict management, mental preparedness and, for want of a better word, empathy so that they can then take those skills into every other course that they do over the five semesters. There are other, more specific, courses on recognising and understanding vulnerabilities such as autism or mental health issues, but they are very much founded on the idea that police officers should be considering the bigger picture with everyone they come across, not just those with an obvious vulnerability.

This method is interesting as there has been a debate in the UK amongst some officers, campaigners, and those with an interest about the need for dedicated training on autism for police officers. Some argue that it is not necessary as officers cannot train for every condition or scenario they will come across. Others argue that as a spectrum condition where people are more likely to come



into contact with emergency services dedicated training in autism is vital. The Swedish system takes the former point of view, focussing on a more general awareness of vulnerabilities (albeit with a small amount of specific training on certain conditions such as autism) and looking instead to produce officers with the general skills to recognise that a vulnerability is present and deal with it as best they can in the first instance.

However, whilst in Sweden I met Mats Jansson from the Autism och Aspergerförbundet (Autism & Aspergers Association). He told me that the Swedish government had very recently directed the Police to undertake more specific training on autism as they felt police lacked training in this area, thus moving towards the latter viewpoint. In 2018 there was a high-profile incident where Erik Torell, a man with autism and Down Syndrome, was shot and killed by police in Stockholm, and this has brought focus on the type of training officers receive. Mats was fairly complementary about the Swedish police in general, although stated that they were now having to deal with incidents that they would never have been called to a few years ago—much like police in this country. He did agree with the idea that officers needed more training on specific conditions and mentioned that the Association had been arguing for this for some time.

Probationary officers spend 11 weeks at college in Scotland, in comparison to the two years spent in Sweden (and Denmark and The Netherlands). Aside from the firearms training, most of the subjects covered were similar, however just undertaken in a lot more depth. There appears to be a lot of detail about the 'mechanics' of subjects like communication or conflict resolution aimed at getting students to understand why a person is acting in a certain way – not just in relation to mental health but in other situations too. Officers are also explicitly taught to understand their own actions and reactions and how to control them.

LANDSFORENINGEN AUTISME (AUTISM DENMARK)

DENMARK



Landsforiningen Autisme is the Danish National Autism Association. It was founded in 1962 by a group of parents with autistic children working with professionals in the field. The organisation now campaigns on autism-related issues and brings together autistic people and their families, schools, services, politicians and other interested parties. I met its President, Heidi Thamestrup to discuss the organisation's take on police training and interaction with officers.

It emerged that most of the contact Autism Denmark had from families and autistic people regarding police interaction was with regard to cybercrime. Four years ago they held a conference with Rebecca Ledingham, who is a senior executive with Mastercard and an expert on cyber security. She had previously worked for the National Crime Agency and INTERPOL and had recognised that many of the suspects she was dealing with were on the Spectrum or had autistic traits. While this is anecdotal evidence and not yet well-studied, there was enough of a link for Ledingham to speak out about it, and to instigate further research (Ledingham & Mills, 2015).

Autism Denmark is often contacted for support for individuals and families post-charge, and has therefore embarked on an effort to prevent incidents from occurring. An example of this

is working with a film group to develop a programme based on Social Stories. They had also been involved in a bid to gain funding for a year-long police training programme, however this was unsuccessful. The programme would have taken place on seven days spread across the year, with a view to allowing participants to take away learning and build on it, rather



than spending seven solid days in a classroom learning theory.

As stated in the Introduction to this report, the focus of my Fellowship has been on how first responders interact with autistic people when dealing with incidents. This aspect is a development on this, and asks questions about how officers deal with issues such as statement-taking or interviewing, which extends to best-practice for victims and witnesses too. It also ties in with Matt Brown's experience in Maine, where he was being asked to intervene further along the Criminal Justice 'chain' for people who had been charged with crimes, and was therefore looking to educate lawyers and judges. For Autism Denmark, this is a much bigger issue than the interactions autistic people have with frontline police officers and is food for thought for ourselves in Scotland.

ADAPT

NETHERLANDS

ADAPT is the Dutch Police's staff association for officers and staff with autism, AD(H)D and Dyslexia. It was founded in 2016 when they held a 'coming-out' day for autistic officers and staff (and those with AD(H)D/Dyslexia) and those with family members on the spectrum which was attended by over 150 employees from across the country. The organisation is similar to the NPAA, albeit the Netherlands has a single police force rather than the UK's 48.

ADAPT provides support and advice to members on their conditions and on related working matters. It is funded by the Police and office-bearers are given time to devote to their activities. They hold regular meetings across the country which can be used to raise specific issues, or just as a general social meet-up. If required, ADAPT will advocate on behalf of members to line managers or the wider organisation if issues are raised.

Marlies Heida-Bakker is a forensic officer with the Police and a member of ADAPT. She is openly autistic, having declared her condition when she joined the organisation ten years ago. She was very complementary about the Police's reaction to the disclosure, stating that they merely asked her

AUTISM EMBASSY

Whilst visiting the Netherlands I also met Diederik Weve. Diederik works for Shell and is involved with PAS Nederland (Dutch Autism group) who provided assistance to ADAPT for their coming-out day. He was diagnosed as autistic at 52, and decided he wanted to be open about his autism and to emphasise the benefits it could bring as well as some of the problems. Supported by Shell's Disability Network, Diederik began offering autism education workshops for Shell employees and to date has trained around 1400-1500 colleagues worldwide.

This work led him to establish the Autism Embassy concept in partnership with a government project. He worked with the project leader and came up with the concept of having openly autistic employees working as 'Ambassadors' within their organisations. The idea is that autistic employees, with a strong track record of work and who wish to be open about their diagnosis, are supported to act as role models, as 'myth-busters' to promote positive attitudes towards autism. This also introduces an element of normality into having autistic people in the workplace.

20 Ambassadors have been trained to date.

“what do you need?”. Some colleagues were slightly harder to convince of the merits of employing an autistic person, but they have been won over by her work, which has resulted in a recent promotion. ADAPT has been a big support for Marlies in the workplace. The community that has been built gave her a sense of recognition and acknowledgement as an autistic person – that she was valued by her peers and the organisation and not alone.


The Police in the Netherlands also provide training days for their staff on welfare issues such as mental health, stress and resilience. During their most recent training day there were lessons on nutrition, sleep, reducing stress, recognising what was happening to your body in certain (stressful) situations and



controlling it. Very much along the lines of what the students were being taught at the Police College at Södertörn in fact. This course lasted three days and was compulsory for all staff.

Marlies had been reluctant to go on the course. Like all of us

she is busy, and she did not think it would be worthwhile. Instead she found it to be a revelation. There are things that autistic people do not always automatically recognise or know, that others take for granted, and she said that the course taught her lots of these things – like recognising her feelings of stress, coping with them, and most of all, choosing not to be stressed. Now stress is not experienced only by autistic people by any means, however there is an argument that the baseline is a bit higher because of the intrinsic stress of being autistic in a world not designed for you – particularly the world of work. So knowing how to deal with it is very important. And the recognition that other people are also feeling stress and anxiety (or pain, or cold, or any of the myriad of feelings) can actually be a bit of a revelation! This might sound odd, but some autistic people have problems identifying *how* they are



feeling, and might not know that others are feeling the same way. Giving every staff member the tools to cope with the stresses of work is important, however it's particularly important for neurodiverse staff who have a different base-point and who are working in environments that do not always suit their needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Instructors should have personal experience of both autism and of policing.

There were two key aspects of the Instructors in the three US projects I visited. Firstly, they all had personal experience of having a close family member on the autism spectrum. While this is a good start, I would go a step further than this and recommend that training should have direct input from autistic people themselves, both in the creation and delivery of sessions. Both the CARE and ASET programmes involved autistic people in their delivery, and were better for it.

The second factor was that all of the Instructors were also experienced Law Enforcement professionals and could make sessions 'real' for police officers. As former or serving officers, they had credibility with their colleagues. They had been in the situations they were talking about, they understood police procedure and the threats faced by officers every day. Each of the three projects prefaced their inputs with the caveat that nothing that the audience were about to hear should override their officer safety training. That message is utterly vital.

To replicate this in the UK, every force in the UK is represented in the NPAA. Every force has officers and staff who have autistic family members, or who are autistic themselves. Forces should look for volunteers to get involved in designing and delivering any training sessions they were looking to roll out. If forces favour online training, it is vital that people with autism and their

families/carers have an input into the content and that it is not just a collection of dry facts. While the three projects I visited were aimed at First Responders this principle also holds for other types of training and areas of policing - where Detectives might learn how best to interview an autistic witness or suspect, for example.

Training is far more effective if it includes the community.

All three of the US projects had a community element. Every CARE input involves an evening class for families in the area to come along and learn about the police, and about how they can work best with them. The belief here is that the more families know about how the police respond to calls, the more they can help themselves. As Dawn Brasch of AuSM points out, if individuals or families are calling police to deal with a crisis, they - the people who know this person best - are calling someone with absolutely no knowledge of the person (or probably autism) to come and solve the problem. Then they wonder why there are issues!

The community aspect of this training involves building relationships. At its heart it is about the police knowing and understanding their communities better, and about people knowing their police. The major obstacle in the way of this is the loss of localism in policing and the associated funding issues, albeit across Police Scotland there has certainly been a move back towards what would traditionally have been known as

RECOMMENDATIONS

community policing in recent times.

I would encourage local policing teams to develop relationships with individuals, families, schools and other organisations in their areas. Learning about individuals and issues that might occur before they happen, sharing information and putting plans in place is the best form of prevention. This might be something as simple as putting a marker on an address so when the resident calls police officers have access to information that would help before they reach the scene. These relationships also help inform community expectations of police actions.

This cooperation also reinforces the point made above about involving autistic people and their families in training. Involving the community opens the door to better, more relevant training – it's not just a one-way-street of police delivering information, the community should be given the opportunity to provide feedback and get involved, helping to shape the education they want delivered. This is highlighted in the conversation I had with Heidi Thamestrup in Denmark. All of the US projects are aimed at First Responders, however in Denmark this training is not relevant as the problem is different. The police will not know this unless they ask, and examine the types of scenarios officers are dealing with most often. Involving the community in training means that its more likely the most relevant, useful training will be delivered.

Consideration should be given to extending Initial Training courses, and providing further opportunity for Continuous Professional Development for more experienced officers

Currently, new police officers attend the Scottish Police College for an eleven-week basic course before starting in their Divisions. Some Divisions thereafter provide more localised training before the officers start 'on the street' (for example Edinburgh Division gives two more weeks to learn local procedures and IT systems). This Initial course has been cut down over the years – it was 15 weeks in 2008, for example.

As stated, in Sweden the course is two years. Jesper Alvarsson, a Psychology lecturer on the Police Education course at Södertörn, speculated as to whether or not recruits required two-years of theoretical education and whether it could be shortened. When I visited the Huddinge Police in Stockholm, I asked Inspector Reine Berglund his opinion on this. He was absolutely adamant that it was required. His reason was that Policing was an extremely complex job, and therefore officers required to be trained properly. This attitude was widely shared amongst his colleagues.

The Swedish course spends a lot of time building resilience in its students and encouraging them to deal with incidents in a calm, measured way. It's the first thing they learn and it is used as a foundation for the rest of the course. Whilst I believe that Scottish officers in the main also approach incidents in this way (as a comparison, it is not always

RECOMMENDATIONS

the automatic way that incidents are dealt with in the USA, hence the three autism training projects having to essentially teach officers *how* to approach people) it is implicit, the Scottish course does not delve into the mechanics of why and how people react the way they do in certain situations. For me, the curriculum on the Swedish course would have been very useful in understanding the psychology, both my own and the people I was dealing with, and this might well help officers deal with the traumatic situations they are placed into too.

In addition to a lengthy Initial Course, Sweden also requires that officers participate in two mandatory three-day training blocks per year. These can cover anything from learning new legislation to practical counter-terrorism exercises and anything in between. This is in addition to yearly firearms/safety recertification. In Scotland we have a single day Officer Safety Training session which is compulsory, and we must complete an online First Aid course before we attend. There are no other compulsory training days, and when training courses are mandated they are delivered through an online learning platform.

From the above, the conclusions about the training time available to Scottish officers are stark. Where is the time to fit in supplemental training on autism or other subjects? In my opinion, training in Scotland should be restructured to include a longer Initial Training course, and subsequent compulsory training days across the year for all officers.

These could be a mixture of national and local content to make them as relevant as possible – the things officers need to know in Skye can be quite different to what's required in Glasgow, for example. Of course, the argument against this is again about funding, and about the removal of already stretched policing resources in order to facilitate training. Police Scotland's Chief Constable has, however, recently pledged to focus on providing staff development opportunities and training is an important part of this.

Whilst I would advocate an increase in training opportunities for all officers across all areas, not just in autism, this is also perhaps an argument for the implementation of the CIT model described above, where volunteers undertake training to become specialists (this could be done for a range of subjects). Then you have a few officers per locality who are experts on a topic, and can perhaps pass some learning on to their colleagues on a more informal level.

Training should be tailored to suit different policing roles.

As stated previously, this study has focussed for the most part on First Responders and working with autistic people on first contact with the police or emergency services. However there is also the question of further contact. Do those investigating (cyber) crimes understand autism? How best do you interview autistic witnesses or victims? How do you gauge an autistic suspect's

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intentions when it comes to proving mens rea (guilty mind)? This is not an argument that autistic people do not or cannot commit crime. However understanding a person's motivation is an important element of proving guilt, and it's an area where autistic people can have problems.

Training therefore needs to be tailored to suit the different roles officers undertake. This could be anything from a first responder role, to custody officers, to detectives investigating serious crime. If the two-part model of the US projects is followed, the first part of the session, the foundations of understanding the autistic spectrum are the same, however the second part of the input would be varied depending on the audience. I am aware of some work that is being done in this area, both in Scotland and in other parts of the UK, with NPAA members developing training in their own particular areas of expertise, for example. The NPAA has gathered much of this in a database which Force Co-ordinators have access to and can utilise when required. In England & Wales the College of Policing (CoP) oversees national training, therefore rather than re-inventing the wheel CoP could utilise this ready-made bank of expertise as a foundation to develop training materials. NPAA co-ordinators and members are able and willing to help with the implementation of training across their respective forces. This also covers the first point made about having autistic people involved in the design and delivery of training programmes.

Increased autism awareness will help staff as well as the public.

"Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of your clients"

Richard Branson

There are many, many autistic and other neurodiverse police officers and staff across the UK. The NPAA has 1000 members, and whilst some of these are family members or professionally-interested, a great deal are people with autism who work in the service. I have no doubt that there are many more who are not members, and more still who are autistic and do not know it.

Providing education on autism should be done with the intention of making life easier for neurodiverse colleagues as well as autistic members of the public. Someone who is comfortable in their workplace, feels supported by their employer and colleagues and who is confident that they can bring their whole self to work will be a huge asset to the organisation – and this goes for everyone, not just autistic and neurodiverse people. Unfortunately, Police culture can often favour 'sameness' particularly around promotion processes or job interviews. In my opinion, educating officers on autism and other diversities would help break down barriers, helping people see their colleagues with differences as equal not less, and encouraging diversity within policing. Diederik Weve's Autism Embassy concept is particularly pertinent here. Autism is often described as a set of deficits – what people cannot

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do instead of what they can. Showcasing the positives (and more importantly, being allowed and encouraged to showcase them) is a big step in acceptance – as Marlies Heida-Bakker has demonstrated in her career. A greater understanding of autism for line managers and supervisors would lead to improvements in the working environment not only for autistic and other neurodiverse employees, but for everyone, which in turn benefits the organisation.

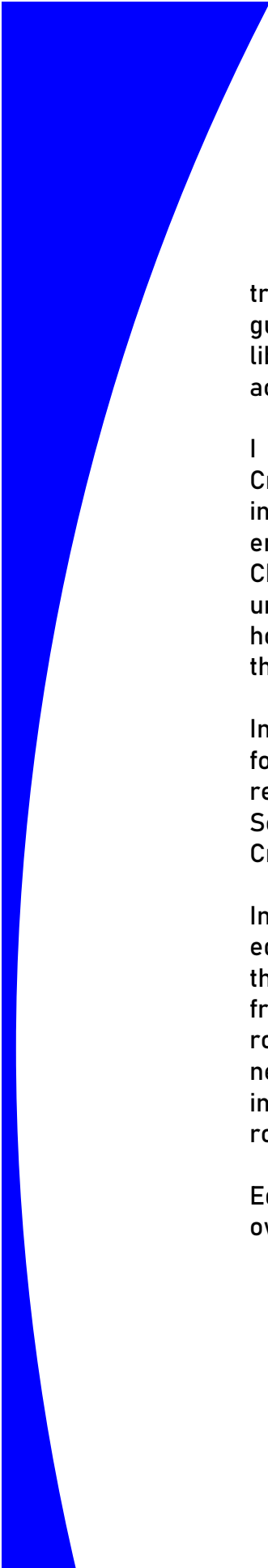


CONCLUSION

As stated in the Introduction, I started this Fellowship journey thinking of how best to educate First Responders on autism and dealing with incidents involving autistic people. I thought of this as a 'stand alone' issue. During my travels the scope of my question widened as I realised that there was a much broader theme that was intrinsically linked. Training First Responders and communities helps mitigate problems and prevent incidents happening in the first place. It protects both autistic people and police officers. It builds relationships and might prevent an autistic person entering the criminal justice system unnecessarily. It would also help autistic police officers and staff be more accepted in their places of work, and to contribute fully to their roles.

I also realised that you cannot address the question of training on autism without addressing the bigger question of police training in general. In my opinion current basic training (and CPD) is insufficient, and this therefore damages the opportunity for expansion and further learning, particularly in adding sessions that might be viewed by some as luxuries or not essential. Ironically, the only way to make leaders see that these sessions aren't luxuries is through education... or more likely by things going wrong, as was the case in the USA. The other way of course is by demonstrating both the benefits of prevention that training might bring, and also the benefits that autistic employees bring to their workplaces. I applaud the Autism Embassy concept, and would like to see it implemented in my force, however people will only stick their heads above the parapet if they feel they will be supported, and unfortunately that is not always the case.

The next steps for this project are to circulate this report amongst officers and staff across the country, particularly those who can influence training decisions in their forces. I would look to develop a template for training courses based on the projects I visited, however I must reiterate the point made above that it is imperative that training is done/led by those with experience. I am not a CID officer, for example, and would not necessarily know the information that would be most useful to officers working in that area. I would therefore recommend that departments looking for



training contact their force NPAA representative to look for guidance and suitable contacts. Co-ordinators have access to a library of reference material and also to a network of colleagues across the UK who can assist where necessary.

I would also like to see training taken up by other parts of the Criminal Justice system, particularly solicitors and those working in prisons. In Scotland, sectors of the CJ system are trying to encourage understanding of the impact of issues such as Adverse Childhood Experiences on people within the system. A better understanding of autism and other neurodiverse conditions and how they impact individuals would also surely be of assistance in this respect.

In the Introduction to this report I referenced the Scottish Strategy for Autism, and given its development and the existence of relevant Outcomes and Priorities I will look to share it with the Scottish Government Autism Policy Team and the Parliamentary Cross-Party Group on Autism.

In answer to the question, then, about what best practice in educating police officers in autism awareness looks like, I believe that the way forward is to give officers an understanding of autism from autistic people themselves, then to tailor learning to make it role-specific. People with experience of both autism and policing need to be involved. Autism is such a vast spectrum that it is impossible to learn every facet, and policing has a huge number of roles, hence role-specific education is imperative.

Educating officers helps forces to look after the public and their own staff, there are no losers.

APPENDIX A

THE VITALS APP

Website link to the Vitals App

<http://www.thevitalsapp.com>

The Vitals App was founded in 2017 in St Paul Minnesota in an effort to use technology to assist vulnerable people and first responders in dealing with incidents, particularly people in crisis.

Research carried out by Vitals showed that one of the biggest problems faced by vulnerable people and their families was getting information to first responders to enable them to deal properly and safely with the incident at hand. Responders also felt a lack of information on the person they were dealing with hindered their efforts to resolve situations safely.



From this, the Vitals App was born. Individuals or their families/carers can download an app and complete a profile detailing information they would want a police officer or other responder to know should they encounter the person. This could be anything from explaining that the person doesn't use spoken language, to an emergency contact number, to a recorded message from a family member and everything in between. People can add as much or as little information as they want. Once the profile is complete, the individual carries a small 'beacon' (this comes in many forms, from keyrings to the individual's own mobile phone) around with them.

At the same time, first responders have their own version of the app which can be downloaded to their mobile devices. This app will notify them whenever they get within 80ft of a beacon, and will display that person's profile for the officer to read. That officer therefore has a huge head start in dealing with the person thanks to the information provided by the app. They know the person's name, their diagnoses, what will calm them down or where to get help from – whatever that person would want the police to know about them on initial contact.

No information is stored on the officer's device. Once the beacon is more than 80ft away the profile will disappear, so there are no data issues. There's also nothing to say that an officer must interact with someone whose profile pops up on their device. Individuals get to decide how much information they include on their profiles so they are in control of what officers see about them. Recently Vitals have developed the App further to include a warning signal should a person leave a defined area—useful for children or elderly people who may wander.

There a lot of examples of how the App is used on their website, and also an overview of the departments who are now using it.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

National Police Autism Association

<http://www.npaa.org.uk>

Twitter: @npaa_uk

Cop Autism Response Education – St Paul, Minnesota

Website link to CARE info

<https://youtu.be/we7PwDIkBNw>

Contact: Officer Rob Zink

Cop Autism Response Education

c/o St Paul Police Department, Western District

SPPD-Autism@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Autism Law Enforcement Education Coalition – Westwood, Massachusetts

<http://www.arcsouthnorfolk.org/alec>

Contact: Bill Cannata

c/o The ARC of South Norfolk

Westwood, Massachusetts

BCannata@arcsouthnorfolk.org

Autism Safety Education & Training – Portland, Maine

<http://aset911.com/>

Contact: Matt Brown

c/o Autism Society of Maine

matt@aset911.com

Crisis Intervention Team

University of Memphis CIT Center

<http://www.cit.memphis.edu/aboutCIT.php>

CIT International

<http://www.citinternational.org/>

Clubhouse International

Clubhouses are projects which support people with mental illness and other conditions to access social support, education and training based on their individual needs and timeframes.

<https://clubhouse-intl.org/>

Autism Embassy

Information about the Dutch Autism Embassy project can be found here

<http://www.diederikweve.nl/columns/nas-the-autism-embassy/>

Fellowship Blog

My blog about my Fellowship travels and observations can be found at:

<https://clairemasterton.home.blog>

Contact:

Email: claire.masterton@gmail.com

Twitter: @clairo_13

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Daniël Gellvoet;

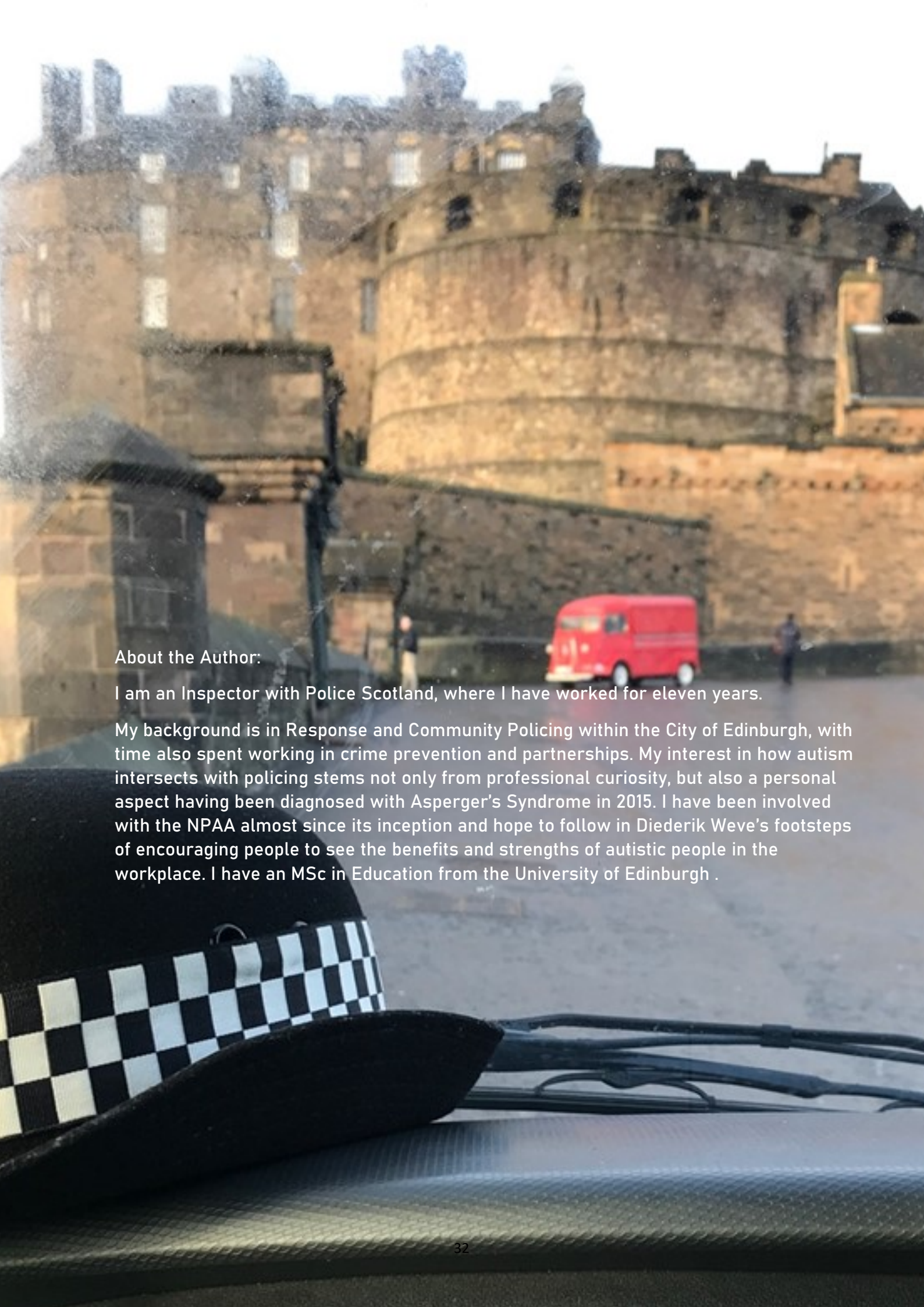
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About the Author:

I am an Inspector with Police Scotland, where I have worked for eleven years.

My background is in Response and Community Policing within the City of Edinburgh, with time also spent working in crime prevention and partnerships. My interest in how autism intersects with policing stems not only from professional curiosity, but also a personal aspect having been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome in 2015. I have been involved with the NPAA almost since its inception and hope to follow in Diederik Weve's footsteps of encouraging people to see the benefits and strengths of autistic people in the workplace. I have an MSc in Education from the University of Edinburgh .

Every day you may make progress.

Every step may be fruitful.

Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path.

You know you will never get to the end of the journey.

But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb.

Winston Churchill