

Police custody suite volunteers undertake valuable autism training

Dorset police custody visitors are the latest 'frontline' group to benefit from specialist training from Autism Unlimited.



Autism aware – The county's Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) and members of the Use of Police Powers and Standards Scrutiny Panel are the latest 'frontline' group to benefit from specialist training from Autism Unlimited.

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs), along with members of the Use of Police Powers and Standards Scrutiny Panel, attended the first of two of training sessions at the charity's headquarters in Parley, Christchurch, where they learned about autism, autistic traits and how to better serve the needs of autistic people.

ICVs are trained volunteers who check that the rights and welfare of people detained in police custody are being observed, by making unannounced visits to custody suites and reporting their findings.

They are appointed as volunteers by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Dorset (OPCC), and along with volunteers from the county's police Scrutiny Panels administered by the OPCC ensure the force's procedures are independently scrutinised and the Force held accountable.

Garry French, deputy chair of the Dorset Independent Custody Visiting Scheme said: "I think we are all finding the Understanding Autism course extremely helpful.

"We have autistic people coming into custody, but they may not share that information.

"Being able to identify autistic traits will better enable us to ensure that people's rights and welfare are properly observed, and that is very important."

Autism can affect the ways individuals communicate with others and engage with the world.

An autistic person may feel overwhelmed when meeting unfamiliar people or, when entering public areas which are loud, busy or new to them - characteristics common in custody suites.

Rachel Goodwin is a former Custody Inspector for Dorset Police, now working as a staff officer for the OPCC.

She said: "I have been lucky to have neuro-diversity training over the years and a close family member is also autistic, so I am aware of the many additional difficulties autistic people might face when coming into custody, like being in handcuffs, the echoey atmosphere, bright lighting and the uncomfortable feel of anti-rip clothing and bedding for example.

"I think the training from Autism Unlimited is both valuable and very welcome, especially for the voluntary sector and I would like to see as many organisations as possible take it up."

Steve Rains is a member of the Use of Police Powers and Standards Scrutiny Panel.

Steve said: "I have an HR background spanning more than 30 years. But I probably don't know as much as I should about autism, so I jumped at the opportunity to have this training.

"It's been excellent and has really made me think."

Claire Causley, Training Manager at Autism Unlimited, said: "The enthusiasm and engagement shown by the ICVs and members of the Scrutiny Panels has been extremely encouraging and it is good to know our expertise will enable them to better identify and communicate the needs of autistic people they meet.

"We would like to hear from other companies and organisations which would benefit from our highly bespoke training."

Other organisations which have already enlisted Autism Unlimited's Understanding Autism training include the local NHS, MoreBus and Lighthouse Poole.

The charity has also launched two other courses which have been designed and built in conjunction with its autistic community: Signalong Foundation and Signalong Essential Vocabulary. For more details, visit the website <https://www.autism-unlimited.org/support/training/> or call 01202 483360 (option 2).

Picture caption: Autism aware – The county's Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) and members of the Use of Police Powers and Standards Scrutiny Panel are the latest 'frontline' group to benefit from specialist training from Autism Unlimited.

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www.autism-unlimited.org

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