

# **Reaching Autism Families Together (RAFT):** **An Autism Specific Early Intervention** **Research Model in Practice**

**2015-2020**

Funded by the Big Lottery

# **RAFT – the origins**

## **Diagnostic Scoping Study (1998)**

**A Study to investigate the provision of diagnostic services for people with ASD in NI: University of Ulster & Autism NI**

### **Recommendations:**

- Need for an Early Intervention Service**
- Need to establish a practice that was holistic**
- Need for local research to inspire local solutions based on local expertise**
- Need for practical guidance and home based support**
- Promotion of communication and social interaction with children**
- Multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working**

# RAFT – the origins

## Outcomes:

- The development of regional cross agency partnerships
- Early intervention therapists employed in Northern Ireland for the first time
- The KEYHOLE® Early Intervention Project in ASD.

# RAFT – the origins

The KEYHOLE® Early Intervention Project in ASD- based on structured teaching and the use of visual strategies:

- Training for Early Years staff
  - Professionals working with pre-school children with Autism in an Early Years setting
- ACCESS Parent Support workshops
  - Facilitated peer group discussion over 6-week period
- Rainbow Resource Kit
  - Unique set of booklets on play, social and sensory issues
  - Activities/Jigs
  - DIY materials to empower parents
- Home visiting
  - Individualised programmes tailored to each child addressing specific learning outcomes
  - (Specialist Training for the home visiting team)

# RESEARCH

**The KEYHOLE® Early Intervention Project in ASD- Home based intervention research:**

- **35 families, 15-18 home visits over a 9-month period**

**Findings:**

- **Significant improvements in children's communication and related functioning**
- **Increase in parental ratings of improvements for the child**

**(McConkey et al, 2010)**

# RESEARCH

## **The KEYHOLE® Early Intervention Project in ASD - Home based intervention research:**

- **29 families, 6-week home intervention**
- **Rainbow Resource Kit: practical resources and information for families to use with the child**

## **Findings:**

- **Improved play skills**
- **Reduced parental stress**

**(McConkey et al, 2009)**

# Reaching Autism Families Together: RAFT

Elements of The KEYHOLE® Early Intervention Project in ASD  
 Creation of RAFT

Key elements of RAFT :

- Home based early intervention programme for up to 6 weeks
- Training sessions for parents and family members
- Support groups for families
- Siblings workshops

# RAFT

## Profile of service users:

- Children with Autism aged 12 and under
- 77% boys, 23% girls
- Average age 7 years

## RAFT team:

- Project Coordinator
- 3 Early Intervention Officers
- Administration Officer







# Feelings Thermometer

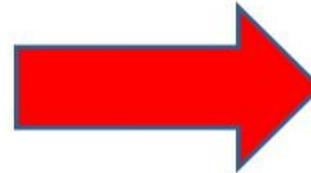


## 3. Stressed

Hot

Angry

I can't cope!



## What can I do?

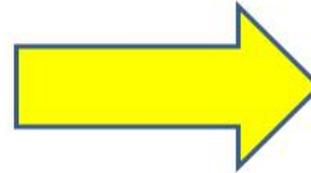
Ask for help

Take deep breaths

## 2. Upset

Hyper

Annoyed



Take a break

Squeeze a toy

Hug Mum and Dad

## 1. Happy

I feel calm and relaxed

I feel good



High Five!

Play and be happy

# My Mum

**'My mum loves me very, very much. My mum looks after me and cares for me 24:7.**

**Sometimes I get angry with my mum but my mum never stops loving me. No matter what age I am my mum will still love me, even when I am grown up and have children too.**

**No matter how many people my mum loves she will always love me best!**

I  MUM

# RAFT: Statistics

- **110 families supported each year**
- **2435 home visits completed to date**
- **3000 bespoke visuals created, average 6 per child**
- **80 training sessions delivered in community venues**
- **3 Support Groups established**
- **60 siblings supported through bespoke workshops**

# **RAFT: Project evaluation and outcomes:**

- **87% of families cooperated well during the project**
- **77% felt the duration of the intervention was “just right”**
- **94% of parents very satisfied with the outcomes**
- **90% of parents felt that their child’s quality of life had improved**
- **91% of parents felt their child had benefited from the intervention**
  - **Calmer, less anxious, better communication, more independent.**
- **84% improvement in overall wellbeing for families**
- **Project works within all socio-economic areas**

# RAFT: Project evaluation and outcomes

## Changes in children:

	Never was a problem	Was a problem- getting better since project
Problem with following instructions	4 5%	57 67%
Difficulty with change	4 5%	46 56%
Problems with play	32 38%	31 37%
Problem with going to be sleeping	31 37%	30 35%
Difficulty in relating to other children	7 8%	27 32%
Unusual response to something new	26 31%	26 31%
Extreme fear and nervousness	41 48%	23 27%
Unusual reaction to pleasant situations	46 54%	13 15%
Unusual interest in toys or objects	52 62%	11 13%
Unusual response to cold/heat etc	59 71%	4 5%
Unusual posture	65 77%	3 4%
Difficulty in imitating	61 74%	2 2%

# RAFT

A RAFT parent:

**“As parents we just need to be shown the tools to help our children. To have the RAFT team bring forward experiences and knowledge has benefited my child greatly. As a family unit we feel more involved with our child and less of a failure. Having been through so many avenues and having so little available specifically for ASD, Autism NI is really MILES AHEAD of what we have been offered before.”**

