

# AT-Autism

20-22 WENLOCK ROAD:

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UNITED KINGDOM

## Evaluation

### **Bridges in Social Understanding**

Follow-up of Singapore cohort

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27 April 2020

### **Bridges in Social Understanding.**

This follow-up study includes the opinions from families of autistic young people and the young people themselves who had undertaken the Bridges in Social Understanding programme in Singapore, averaging duration of 2 to 5 years, between 2002 and 2012. The young people were aged between 6.5 years and 10 years of age when they received the programme. All of them attended mainstream primary schools and had daily contact with neurotypical peers. The children all had a diagnosis of autism and were assessed as academically able. I am grateful to my colleague David Moore for his invaluable assistance with the management of the data and survey and to Dr Judith Gould for her support and feedback on this evaluation.

### **Methodology of this evaluation**

A series of discussions was held with the researcher and the clinicians to clarify the programme and the need for evaluation. A mixed methods approach was chosen as best suited to the specific requirements of this programme and the need to engage people in a follow up study where no baseline data were available. This was agreed as via a survey questionnaire and thematic analysis. A modified Delphi methodology (Clayton 1997) was used to devise the questions. A Delphi survey is an organised way of collecting views and information about a specific issue from people selected for their expertise on a topic. It is conducted across a series of two or more sequential questionnaires known as 'rounds'. The Delphi panels included autistic ex-students, professionals and families. As a participatory research approach, Delphi is useful in distilling and refining questions. The result is that the important questions are asked that cover the most important features of the programme and that they are asked in such a way that is clear and reduces the risk of misunderstanding. The results of the surveys were analysed using a process known as Thematic Analysis, an accepted methodology for assessing qualitative responses to surveys or semi-structured interviews (Braun and Clarke 2006). This is a rigorous process where responses are coded and cross referenced and themes are identified and explored. The use of thematic analysis protects confidentiality of respondents and allows us to explore common themes behind differing descriptions. This approach is compatible with the model proposed by Mesibov and Shea 2011, and the four-stage evaluation framework recommended by Lenton et al 2016.

This research took place between January and March 2020. Following the Delphi process, families and young people were each sent a questionnaire to be completed online and returned in confidence to the researchers within four weeks. A reminder email was sent at the halfway point. Responses for both groups were at an unusually high level. This high response rate adds confidence

to these results and decisions that might be taken as a result of this evaluation, including any changes to the programme.

It is recommended this report is to be used as a basis for discussion to inform future development. Further discussion has taken place on how a revised hypothesis testing model could be used in the future for evaluation. This would follow the PICO\* format and the four-stage evaluation model (Lenton et al 2016)

\*PICO

<b>Population</b>	<b>Who is this programme for /not for?</b>
<b>Intervention</b>	<b>What does the programme entail (curriculum/method)</b>
<b>Comparison</b>	<b>Compared to what? What else is available?</b>
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>What are the predicted outcomes - and how to measure these?</b>

### **Responses**

These results should be seen in context i.e. Singapore.

It is possible that similar results would be obtained elsewhere but this is beyond the scope of this evaluation, which focused on the follow-up of the experience of those young people living in Singapore.

This study was initially to focus on family/parent feedback but was extended to young people. It is our view that this greatly enhances its value.

It is in two parts. Part one concerns parent /guardian responses and part two, responses from young people who had previously undertaken the Bridges Programme. A small number of verbatim examples from the narratives of both groups are included to illustrate their thoughtful and diligent responses.

**Part One. Responses to the confidential questionnaire in respect of Bridges for parents/guardians. February 2020**

There were 34 responses, of a cohort of 38 parents or guardians. This gives a response rate of 89%. In statistical terms, the Delphi methodology in devising the survey questions and high response rate this represents a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 6%. This should be seen as representing a statistically robust finding.

**Q1 Where does your son/daughter live now?**

The majority (85%) stated that their son or daughter lives at home with them, with 3 (9%) 'at college or university. This is tabulated below. This is in line with the norm for Singapore for YP of this age.

<b>Where does your son/daughter now live?</b>			
<b>Answer Choice</b>		<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
1	At home with me	85.3%	29
2	In own accommodation with support	0.0%	0
3	In own accommodation independently	2.9%	1
4	In a residential programme	0.0%	0
5	At college or university (including junior college, or Polytechnic)	8.8%	3
6	Other (please specify):	2.9%	1
		<b>answered</b>	<b>34</b>
		<b>skipped</b>	<b>0</b>

Other places lived: Living with Grandparents.

**Q2 What does your son/daughter do?**

All respondents completed this question, with the option to tick more than one response box. Most respondents ticked one box only. The below table shows the results by respondents. Most respondent's sons/daughters are at school (41%), with a significant number being in full time study at College or University 9 (27%), undertaking National Service 7 (21%) or 'other' 7(21%). 'Other' choices are listed below the table

**What does your son/daughter do? (please tick as many as apply)**

Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	At school	41.2%	14
2	Home-schooled	0.0%	0
3	Part time study at College or University	0.0%	0
4	Full time study at College or University	26.5%	9
5	In full time work (please state at foot of question)	0.0%	0
6	In part time work	2.9%	1
7	In voluntary (unpaid) work	0.0%	0
8	Work experience (e.g. intern)	5.9%	2
9	National Service	20.6%	7
10	Vocational training	0.0%	0
11	Unemployed/Not in study	0.0%	0
12	Other (please specify):	20.6%	7
If in full time work, please state			1
		<b>answered</b>	<b>34</b>
		<b>skipped</b>	<b>0</b>

Where, if in full time work?

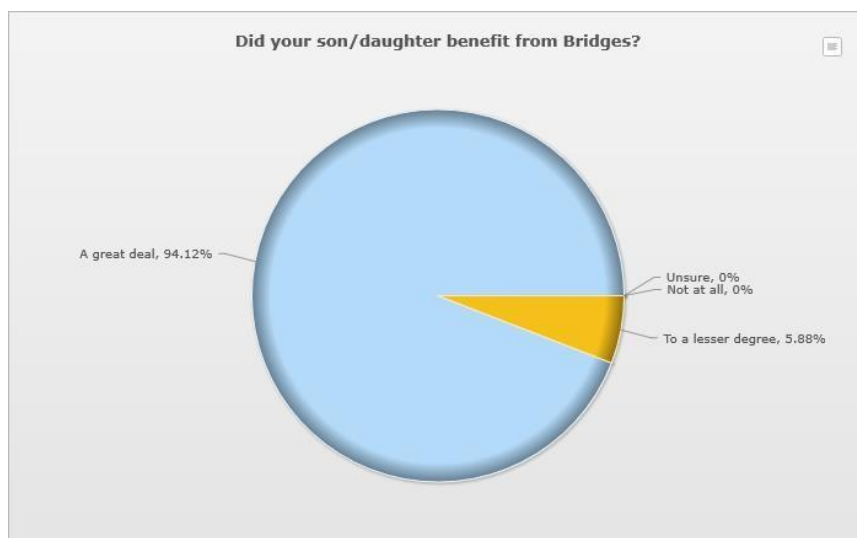
- Singapore University of Technology and designs (Note: this respondent ticked 'full time study in College or University' and qualified it as 'full time work' in the comments).

Other:

- waiting for full time polytechnic course
- Waiting to go for National Service
- Waiting to go for National Service
- about to start polytechnic full-time course 20/04/20
- Mandatory National Service in Singapore
- On temporary break from full time university
- On temporary break from full time university

### Q3 Did your son/daughter benefit from Bridges?

32 (94%), of respondents stated that their son/daughter benefitted from Bridges ‘a great deal’ and the remaining 2 (6%) ‘to a lesser extent’. No one was ‘unsure’ or stated, ‘not at all.’ The result is charted and tabulated (by where the son/daughter lives) below.



### Did your son/daughter benefit from Bridges?

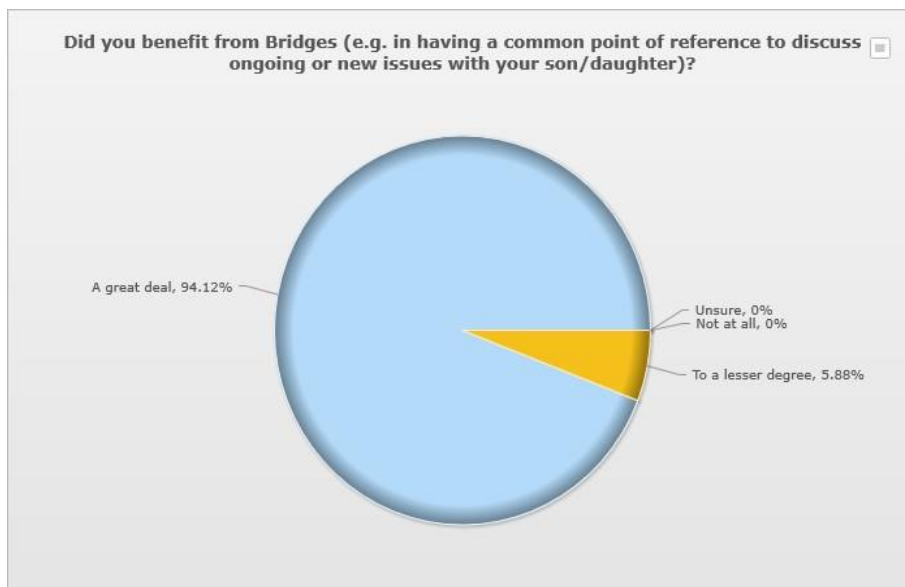
Note: e.g. 27 (84.4%) of those who responded ‘a great deal’ have a son/daughter who live ‘at home with me’, whilst both (2): (100%) of those who responded ‘to a lesser degree’ have a son/daughter who live ‘at home with me’.

	A great deal	To a lesser degree	Unsure	Not at all
<b>At home with me</b>	27 (84.4%)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>In own accommodation with support</b>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>In own accommodation independently</b>	1 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>In a residential programme</b>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>At college or university (including junior college or Polytechnic)</b>	3 (9.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Other</b>	1 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Column Total</b>	<b>32</b> <b>(94.1%)</b>	<b>2</b> <b>(5.9%)</b>	<b>0</b> <b>(0%)</b>	<b>0</b> <b>(0%)</b>

Where the respondent's son/daughter benefited 'to a lesser degree' the son/daughter was 'at school' or 'in full time study at College or University'.

**Q4 Did you benefit from Bridges (e.g. in having a common point of reference to discuss ongoing or new issues with your son/daughter).**

Of note is that the responses to this question exactly mirror the responses to the previous question with 32 (94%), of respondents stating that they benefitted from Bridges 'a great deal' and the remaining 2 (6%) 'to a lesser extent'. No one was 'unsure' or stated 'not at all.' The result is again charted and tabulated (by where the son/daughter lives) below.



*Did you benefit from Bridges?*

*Note: e.g. 27 (84.4%) of those who responded 'a great deal' have a son/daughter who live 'at home with me', whilst both (2): (100%) of those who responded 'to a lesser degree' have a son/daughter who live 'at home with me'.*

	<b>A great deal</b>	<b>To a lesser degree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Not at all</b>
<b>At home with me</b>	27 (84.4%)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>In own accommodation with support</b>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>In own accommodation independently</b>	1 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>In a residential programme</b>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>At college or university (including junior college or Polytechnic)</b>	3 (9.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Other</b>	1 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Column Total</b>	<b>32</b> <b>(94.1%)</b>	<b>2</b> <b>(5.9%)</b>	<b>0</b> <b>(0%)</b>	<b>0</b> <b>(0%)</b>

Where the respondent's son/daughter benefited 'to a lesser degree' the son/daughter was 'at school' or 'in full time study at College or University'.

***Q5 In a few sentences please outline your experience of Bridges.***

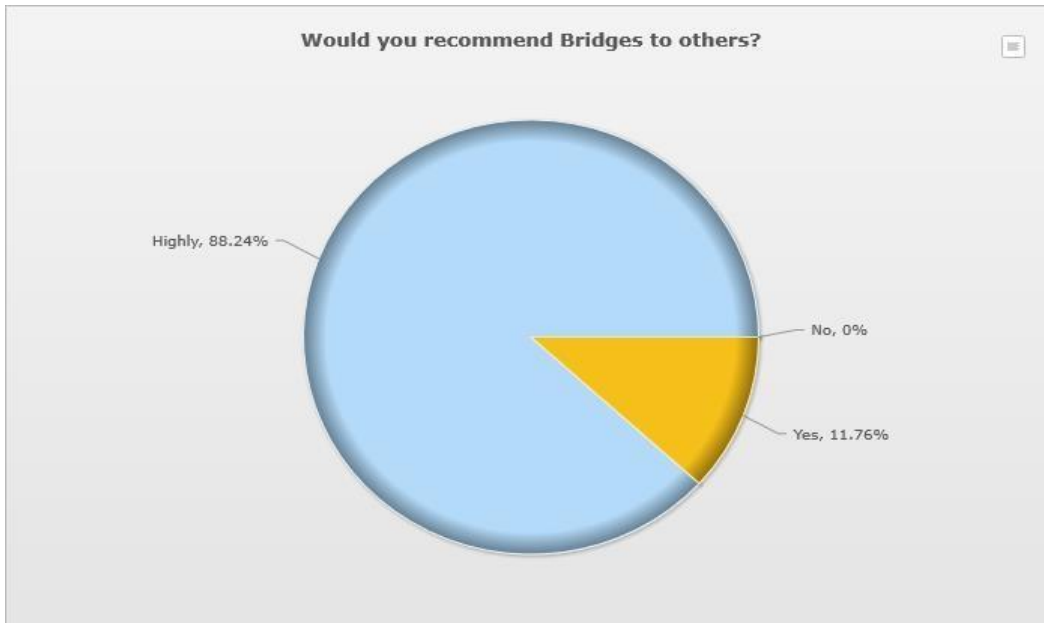
All 34 respondents gave an outline of their experience of Bridges. Thematic analysis in **Appendix 1A**

***Q6 Can you suggest ways the team might improve Bridges?***

33 out of 34 (97%) responded to this question, however 8 of these stated e.g. 'none', 'no suggestions', or 'can't think of any' etc. Thematic analysis is in **Appendix 1B**

***Q7 Would you recommend Bridges to others?*** All 34 respondents state that they would recommend Bridges to others with 30 (88%) stating that they would recommend Bridges to others 'highly', and the remaining 4 (12%) stating 'Yes' they would recommend Bridges to others. The result is charted and tabulated (by where the son/daughter lives) below.





Would you recommend Bridges to others?

Note: e.g. 25 (83.3%) of those who responded 'Highly' have a son/daughter who live 'at home with me', whilst all (4): (100%) of those who responded 'Yes' have a son/daughter who live 'at home with me'.

	Highly	Yes	No
<b>At home with me</b>	25 (83.3%)	4 (100%)	0 (0%)
<b>In own accommodation with support</b>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>In own accommodation independently</b>	1 (3.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>In a residential programme</b>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>At college or university (including junior college or Polytechnic)</b>	3 (10.0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Other</b>	1 (3.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Column Total</b>	<b>30 (88.2%)</b>	<b>4 (11.8%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>

## APPENDIX 1A

Parents/Guardians were asked to outline in a few sentences their *experience of Bridges*

Verbatim examples of comments received from parents/guardians (for illustration).

*'Bridges did exactly that - formulated and then enabled each child to build the bridge they needed to navigate life's situations'*

*'Bridges has helped me prepare the disclosure for my child. The social skill training is excellent for both the kids and the parents'*

*'My girl benefitted greatly from the vast content taught to her and what society expected of her; how she should behave. She also made friends whom she keeps in touch with till today and these people do not judge her and accept her for who she is'*

*'Learnt to understand and communicate with our special child better, adopted different ways of teaching for different kids, learnt the skills to be a better parent, strong commitment is required, more effective if working with peers for our kid to understand that she is not alone'*

*'Bridges is always sincere in answering my questions or advise on ways to handle situations.'*

*'Through Bridges, friendships were forged with families having similar experiences and we journeyed and supported each other'*

*'Bridges taught me how to communicate and understand my son much better. The sessions helped my son to be confident and independent'*

*'The team did a marvellous job in transforming my son to what he is today - a fine young gentleman with a great sense of humour and wit. Grateful and indebted beyond words!!!'*

*'I found Bridges to be critical for my child's development as it systematically covered the social issues that he was facing facilitated his understanding and provided age-appropriate strategies to overcome....Materials (lots of graphics and few words) were engaging - the ability for both him and I to recall some of those topics/materials, sometimes after many years, has been extremely useful as it provides us with a common point of reference to discuss new things/issues'*

*'Bridges taught me how to interact with my kids. Gave my kids friends who really understood and not find fault with them'*

*'Bridges really helped my son relate to people better, even though he still had a lot to figure out after learning from Bridges. He drew a lot of links, tips on how to make and keep friends, and a lot of good memories from those years of going to attend Bridges. I don't think he would be where he is today, without Bridges'*

*'While he is now thinking in future terms of counselling troubled teens, we think his experience at Bridges certainly helped to foster this concern for others'*

*'Topics such as bullying covered in lesson is essential as our kid tend to have higher chance of being bullied due to awkward social behavior....In addition, the group learning (with other*

*parents), helps to build a support network among the parents and the kids. The parents and kids continue to keep in touch after the lessons ended'*

*'Without them, my son would not be as independent as he is now. I am thankful for Bridges'*

*'I feel there is a large unfulfilled gap in services for older teens and young adults, some of whom still grapple with social issues which also affect their mental health'*

*'It gave the children a great learning experience. It teaches the parents to view the kids from another perspective. The materials are easy to use'*

*'Most importantly, the one thing that stood out from Bridges advise was to prioritise spending our time/energy during her growing years to build the child's confidence over academic achievement'*

*'One the very best organised, professional, most disciplined and yet most pleasant and kind services/experiences we encountered in our crazy journey of raising a special needs child'*

*'Superb. Gave son the tools and social parameters he badly needed -Excellent syllabus that was well executed -Great help for me as a parent new then to ASD?'*

*'It has been really gratifying to see how my daughter progressed as time passed, and was able to utilize the skills she learned to slowly and steadily improve her social situation in school and with her peers'*

## **Thematic analysis of parental responses**

**The majority responded (95%). A thematic analysis identified the following themes.**

### **1. Therapeutic relationship**

Parents valued the support and willingness of clinicians to share approaches and skills and that they got to know them and the young person in the long term. They did not feel judged and valued the good-humoured, direct communication of clinicians, who also served as role models for application.

### **2. Participation and partnership**

Parents greatly valued the opportunity to participate in sessions and that from the start were seen as equal partners and not excluded from any aspect of the process (see skills development and response from young people).

### **3. Structure**

Parents reported that the structured approach enabled them to apply the curriculum across a range of social situations and provided scaffolding needed that allowed the young person to better generalise curriculum content.

#### **4. Skills development**

There was a strong emphasis on this aspect with parents reporting high levels of satisfaction that the skills learnt were able to be applied across contexts. Parents commonly reported that they learnt from the example of the clinicians and the explanations of why approaches were being used and that they could apply these outside the formal sessions. They valued the shared approaches and the opportunity to observe and participate in sessions. Some issues raised about the need for skills to keep abreast of contemporary need, for example social media and the current educational context.

#### **5. Agency/sense of self in the young person**

Parents reported that the young person became more aware of who they were as a person and developed confidence and assertiveness through the support of the group and clinicians. It was felt important that this part of the curriculum should begin early to underpin subsequent learning.

#### **6. Affiliation**

Parents reported that their son or daughter had greatly benefited from being part of a group and that the long-term nature of this had enhanced confidence and self-esteem as well as providing opportunities to apply skills learnt.

#### **7. Support**

Parents reported how supportive the clinicians were and derived confidence from their skills and knowledge.

#### **APPENDIX 1B Can you suggest ways the team might improve Bridges?**

**Parents/guardians were asked to summarise how Bridges could be improved. A majority responded (95%). Of these, 40% could not identify ways the programme could be improved.**

**Verbatim examples of comments received from parents/guardians (for illustration).**

*'1) By remaining in Singapore 2) by providing second, third fourth level Bridges i.e. post 10-year-old to 13, then from 14-18, then 18-beyond'*

*'Hmmm... I think that perhaps some emphasis on self-reflection might do the kids good'*

*'Can't think of any at the moment'*

*'I can't think of any more ways as what they did worked so well for X and my family. The clinic sessions with the parent's presence are ideal'*

*'My son has been in mainstream schools and just completed his International Baccalaureate Diploma. He is currently seeing a psychologist fortnightly mainly for maintenance which has*

*been very helpful. I believe that without the foundational skills he learnt at Bridges, he would have fared much worse throughout his school years.*

*'Have an extension of the curriculum so that there is a continuous dialogue and support for these young man and women. There should also be an e-help desk whereby they can share experiences, struggles and learn from each other as well as support each other'*

*'If time permits, some parents might benefit from some parent workshops to build up their understanding of the ASD world of their children'*

*'It would be great if the curriculum could somehow be extended to older children teens & young adults. Particularly with regards to conversations and other social/work interactions'*

*'1) By remaining in Singapore 2) by providing second, third fourth level bridges ie post 10-year-old to 13, then from 14-18, then 18-beyond'*

*'Hmmm... I think that perhaps some emphasis on self-reflection might do the kids good'*

*'Can't think of any at the moment'*

*'I can't think of any more ways as what they did worked so well for X and my family. The clinic sessions with the parent's presence are ideal'*

*'My son has been in mainstream schools and just completed his International Baccalaureate Diploma. He is currently seeing a psychologist fortnightly mainly for maintenance which has been very helpful. I believe that without the foundational skills he learnt at Bridges, he would have fared much worse throughout his school years.*

*'Have an extension of the curriculum so that there is a continuous dialogue and support for these young man and women. There should also be an e-help desk whereby they can share experiences, struggles and learn from each other as well as support each other'*

*'If time permits, some parents might benefit from some parent workshops to build up their understanding of the ASD world of their children'*

*'None whatsoever'*

*'It would be great if the curriculum could somehow be extended to older children teens & young adults. Particularly with regards to conversations and other social/work interactions'*

*'I feel that for children at young age, some extra social gathering and games could be organised with professional observation may be of good help'*

*'To include social media portion as part of the learning e.g. social media bullying, inappropriate content on web'*

*'some extra social gathering and games could be organised with professional observation may be of good help'*

*'To include social media portion as part of the learning e.g. social media bullying, inappropriate content on web'*

**The following thematic analysis of other responses is as follows.**

### **1. Agency/sense of self**

Parents reported that their young person benefited from opportunities for self-reflection and perhaps this could be increased to develop agency and sense of self. Additionally, that the young person could deal more effectively with feedback and criticism if this aspect was developed and that real-world settings would require more nuanced, autonomous and spontaneous application of skills. Getting the young person to 'think for him/her self' was a common and consistent theme.

### **2. Administration**

Parents valued the supportive documentation and comprehensive nature of the curriculum and documents but questioned whether some parents found the content of these intimidating, emphasising the importance of working closely with clinicians to prevent misunderstanding or lead to an over-focus on those items more easily understood, such as the 'skills' elements.

Parents also queried whether therapist time should be spent on routine administration and suggested an administrator should be appointed to deal with this.

### **3. Curriculum**

Regular feedback on how the curriculum was being applied across a range of settings to generate ideas and involvement of non-autistic young people in some groups to increase mutual understanding. Specifically teach skills and expand the time for self-reflection and make this a foundation skill. Develop curriculum to take account of wider age range and of the need for understanding IT, social media and non-face-to-face interactions. Continuing support was also a concern for some parents. Parents also reported a need for a separate curriculum for parents or for parent groups with the opportunity to work with other parents and clinicians on wider aspects related to autism or the programme, without the young people being present.

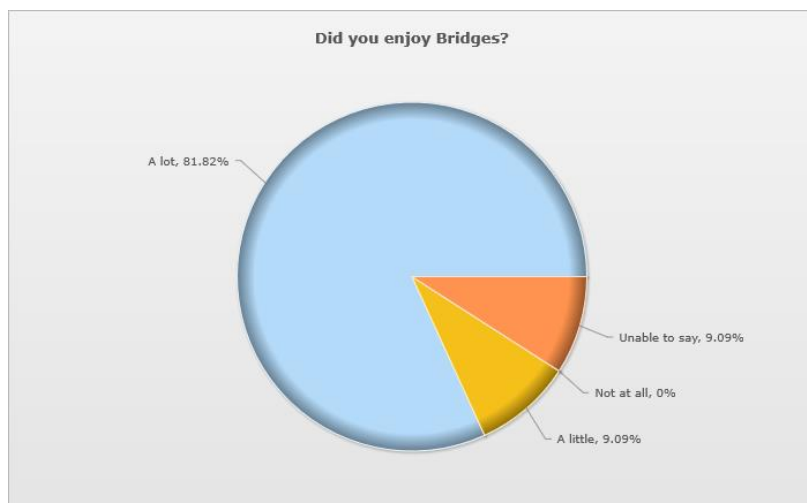
**Part two. Responses to the confidential questionnaire in respect of Bridges for the young person. February 2020**

**Responses**

Of a cohort of 18 young people 13 (72%) responded. Two of these completed only the first question, both ‘Yes, clearly’ remembering taking part in Bridges. The remaining 11 (61%) completed the survey. This gives a margin of error of 15-19% and a confidence level of 95%. This should be seen as representing a statistically sound finding.

**Q1 Did you enjoy Bridges?**

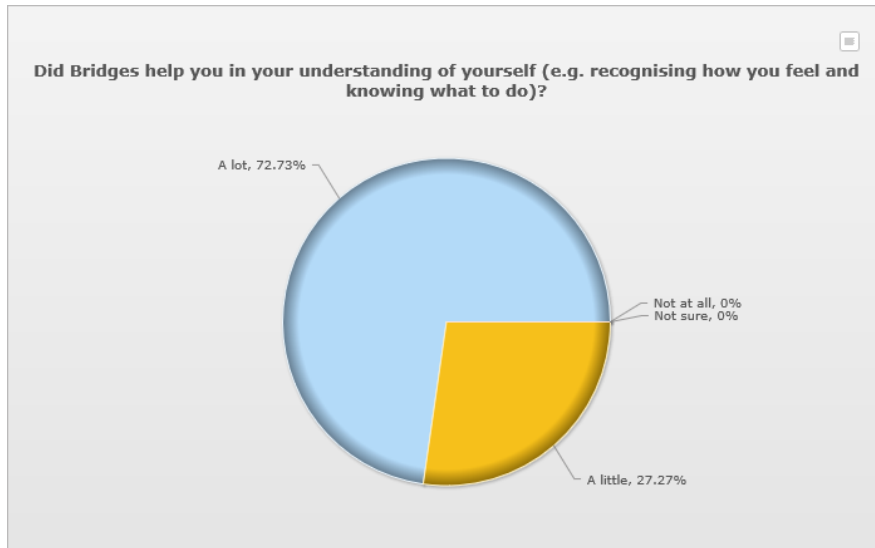
9 (82%) respondents stated they enjoyed Bridges ‘a lot’, all of whom remember taking part in Bridges clearly. 1 (9%) enjoyed Bridges ‘a little’ and 1 was ‘unable to say’. Both of these ‘sort of’ remember Bridges



		Did you enjoy Bridges?					
Do you remember taking part in Bridges?		A lot	A little	Not at all	Unable to say	Row Totals	
	YES, CLEARLY	9 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	9 81.8%	
	SORT OF	0 0%	1 100%	0 0%	1 100%	2 18.2%	
	NO	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	
Column Total		9 81.8%	1 9.1%	0 0%	1 9.1%	11 100%	

**Q2 Did Bridges help you in your understanding of yourself (e.g. recognising how you feel and knowing what to do)?**

8 (73%) of respondents felt Bridges helped in their understanding of themselves 'A Lot' and the remaining 3 (27%) 'A Little'. No respondents felt Bridges did not help in their understanding of themselves. The results are tabulated below.

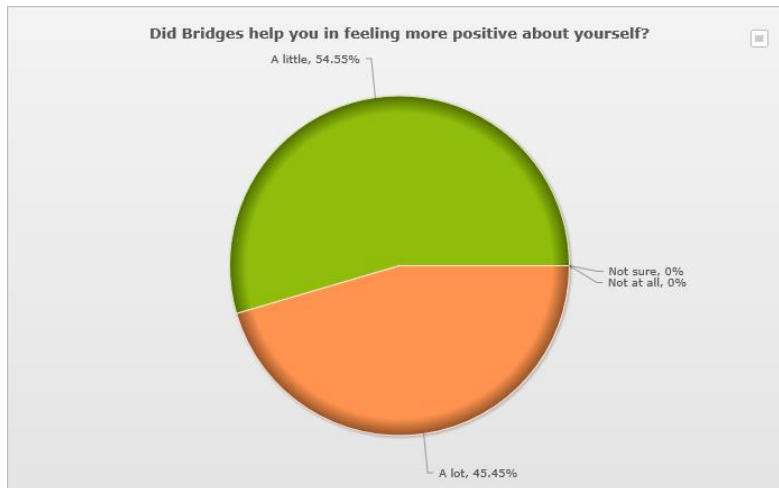


		Did Bridges help you in your understanding of yourself (e.g. recognising how you feel and knowing what to do)?				
Do you remember taking part in Bridges?		A lot	A little	Not at all	Not sure	Row Totals
	YES, CLEARLY	7 87.5%	2 66.7%	0 0%	0 0%	9 81.8%
	SORT OF	1 12.5%	1 33.3%	0 0%	0 0%	2 18.2%
	NO	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Column Total		8 72.7%	3 27.3%	0 0%	0 0%	11 100%



**Q3 Did Bridges help you in feeling more positive about yourself?**

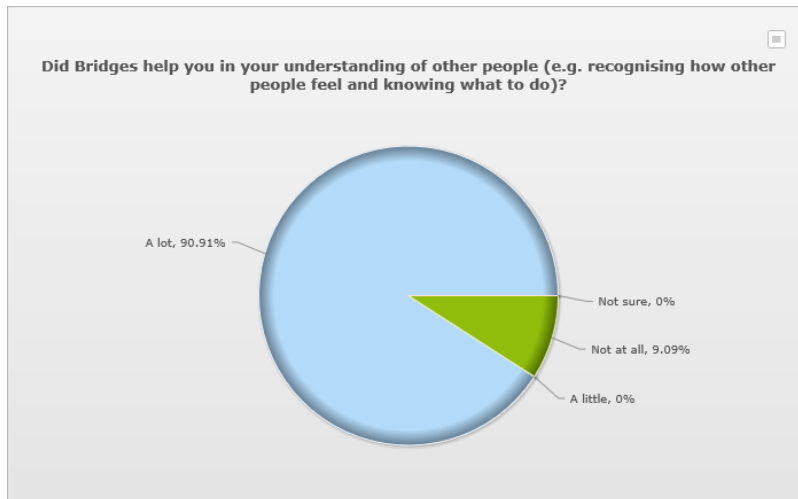
6 (55%) respondents felt that Bridges helped them in feeling more positive about themselves ‘A Little’ (2 of whom ‘sort of’ remember taking part in Bridges), and 5 (45%) felt Bridges has helped them ‘A Lot’ in this respect.. No one felt Bridges didn’t help at all or were ‘not sure’.



		Did Bridges help you in feeling more positive about yourself?				
Do you remember taking part in Bridges?		Not sure	Not at all	A little	A lot	Row Totals
	YES, CLEARLY	0 0%	0 0%	4 66.7%	5 100%	9 81.8%
	SORT OF	0 0%	0 0%	2 33.3%	0 0%	2 18.2%
	NO	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Column Total		0 0%	0 0%	6 54.5%	5 45.5%	11 100%

**Q4 Did Bridges help you in your understanding of other people (e.g. recognising how other people feel and knowing what to do)?**

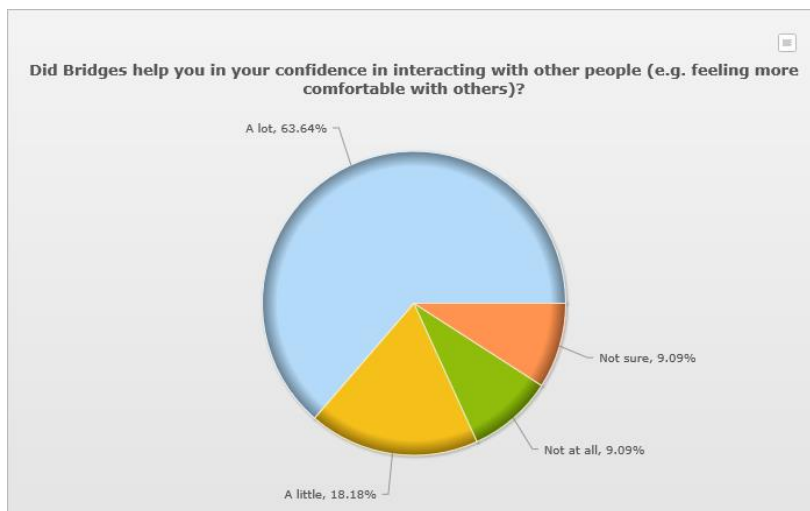
10 (91%) felt that Bridges did help them 'A lot' in their understanding of other people, the remaining 1 person (9%) feeling their understanding was 'not at all' helped.



		Did Bridges help you in your understanding of other people (e.g. recognising how other people feel and knowing what to do)?				
Do you remember taking part in Bridges?		A lot	A little	Not at all	Not sure	Row Totals
	YES, CLEARLY	8 80%	0 0%	1 100%	0 0%	9 81.8%
	SORT OF	2 20%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 18.2%
	NO	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
	Column Total	10 90.9%	0 0%	1 9.1%	0 0%	11 100%

**Q5 Did Bridges help you in your confidence in interacting with other people (e.g. feeling more comfortable with others)?**

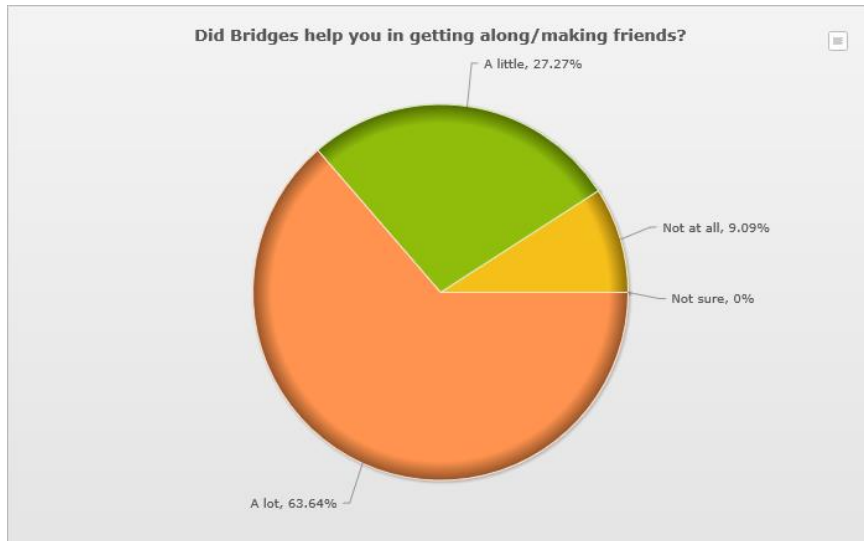
7 (64%) of respondents felt their confidence in interacting with other people was helped 'A Lot' by Bridges, with a further 2 (18%) feeling their confidence was helped 'A Little' and one respondent (9%), (who remembered clearly taking part in Bridges) feeling their confidence in this respect was 'not at all' helped. The remaining respondent (10%) was 'Not Sure'.



Did Bridges help you in your confidence in interacting with other people (e.g. feeling more comfortable with others)?						
Do you remember taking part in Bridges?		A lot	A little	Not at all	Not sure	Row Totals
YES, CLEARLY	YES, CLEARLY	7 100%	1 50%	1 100%	0 0%	9 81.8%
	SORT OF	0 0%	1 50%	0 0%	1 100%	2 18.2%
	NO	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Column Total		7 63.6%	2 18.2%	1 9.1%	1 9.1%	11 100%

**Q6 Did Bridges help you in getting along/making friends?**

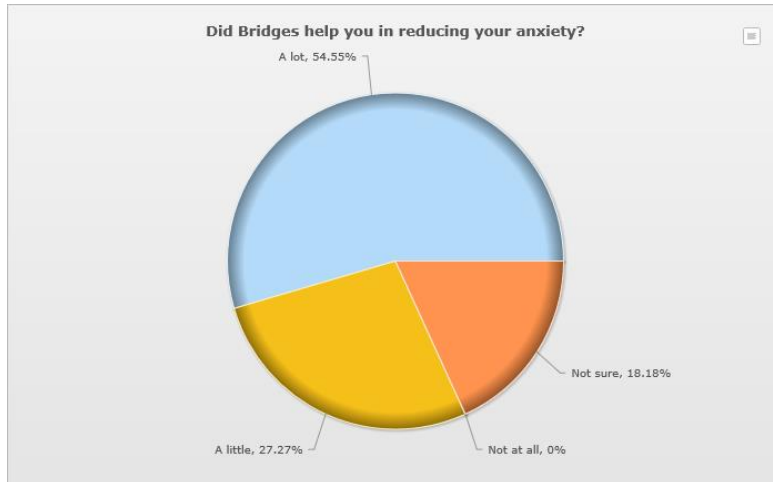
7 (64%) of respondents felt that Bridges helped them getting along/making friends 'A Lot' and a further 3 (27%) 'A Little'. Only 1 respondent felt that Bridges didn't help the 'At All' in this respect.



		Did Bridges help you in getting along/making friends?				
Do you remember taking part in Bridges?		Not sure	Not at all	A little	A lot	Row Totals
	YES, CLEARLY	0 0%	1 100%	2 66.7%	6 85.7%	9 81.8%
	SORT OF	0 0%	0 0%	1 33.3%	1 14.3%	2 18.2%
	NO	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
	Column Total	0 0%	1 9.1%	3 27.3%	7 63.6%	11 100%

**Q7 Did Bridges help you in reducing your anxiety?**

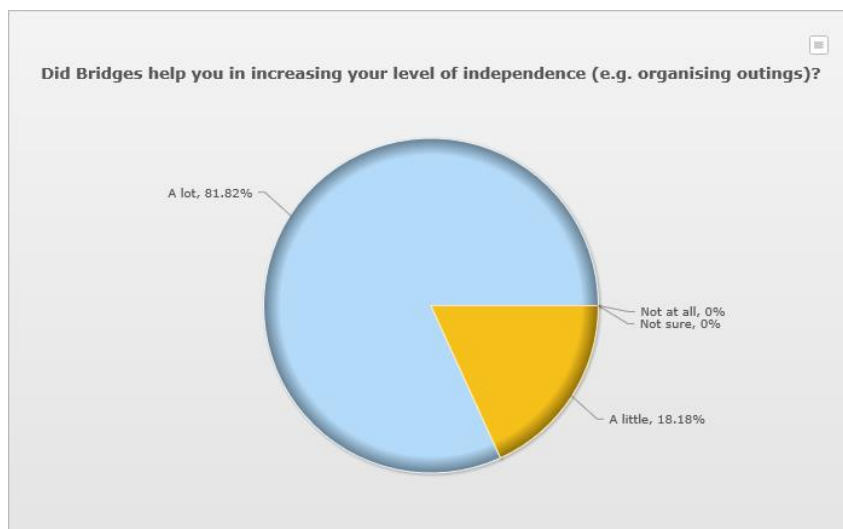
6 (55%) of respondents stated that Bridges helped them in reducing their anxiety 'A Lot' and 3 (27%) 'A Little', whilst 2 (18%) were 'Not Sure'. No one felt that Bridges had 'Not at all' helped in reducing their anxiety.



		Did Bridges help you in reducing your anxiety?					
Do you remember taking part in Bridges?		A lot	A little	Not at all	Not sure	Row Totals	
	YES, CLEARLY	5 83.3%	2 66.7%	0 0%	2 100%	9 81.8%	
	SORT OF	1 16.7%	1 33.3%	0 0%	0 0%	2 18.2%	
	NO	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	
Column Total	6 54.5%	3 27.3%	0 0%	2 18.2%	11 100%		

**Q8 Did Bridges help you in increasing your level of independence (e.g. organising outings)?**

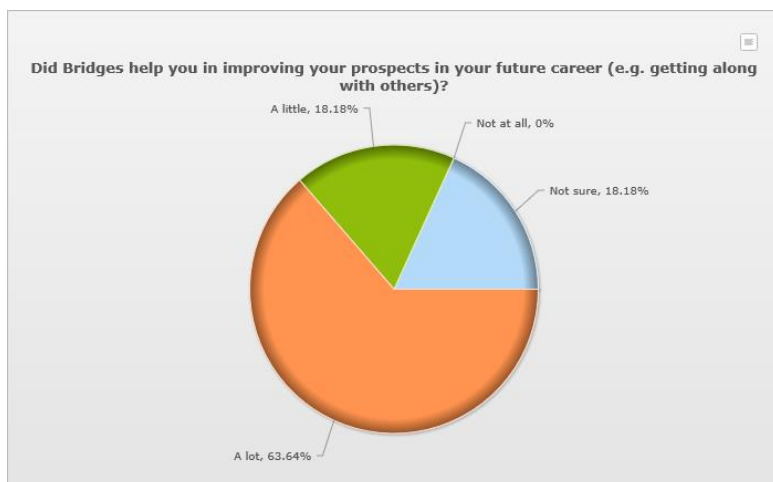
9 (82%) respondents felt their level of independence was increased 'A Lot' by Bridges and the remaining 2 (18%) felt their independence was increased 'A Little'. No respondents felt that Bridges did 'Not At All' increase their independence.



		Did Bridges help you in increasing your level of independence (e.g. organising outings)?				
Do you remember taking part in Bridges?		A lot	A little	Not at all	Not sure	Row Totals
	YES, CLEARLY	7 77.8%	2 100%	0 0%	0 0%	9 81.8%
	SORT OF	2 22.2%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 18.2%
	NO	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
	Column Total	9 81.8%	2 18.2%	0 0%	0 0%	11 100%

**Q9 Did Bridges help you in improving your prospects in your future career (e.g. getting along with others)?**

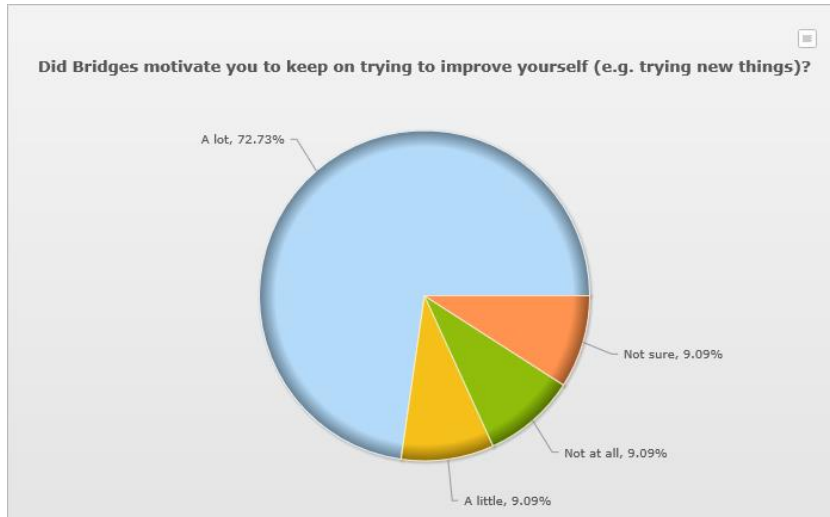
7 (64%) felt that Bridges helped in improving their prospects in their future career 'A Lot' whilst a further 2 (18%) felt it helped 'A Little'. 2 (18%) were 'Not Sure'.



		Did Bridges help you in improving your prospects in your future career (e.g. getting along with others)?					
Do you remember taking part in Bridges?		Not sure	Not at all	A little	A lot	Row Totals	
	YES, CLEARLY	2 100%	0 0%	0 0%	7 100%	9 81.8%	
	SORT OF	0 0%	0 0%	2 100%	0 0%	2 18.2%	
	NO	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	
	Column Total	2 18.2%	0 0%	2 18.2%	7 63.6%	11 100%	

**Q10 Did Bridges motivate you to keep on trying to improve yourself (e.g. trying new things)?**

8 (73%) of respondents felt Bridges motivated them to keep on trying to improve themselves 'A Lot' and a further 1 (9%) 'A Little'. 1 (9%) felt Bridges motivated them 'Not At All' in this respect and 1 (9%) was 'Not Sure'.

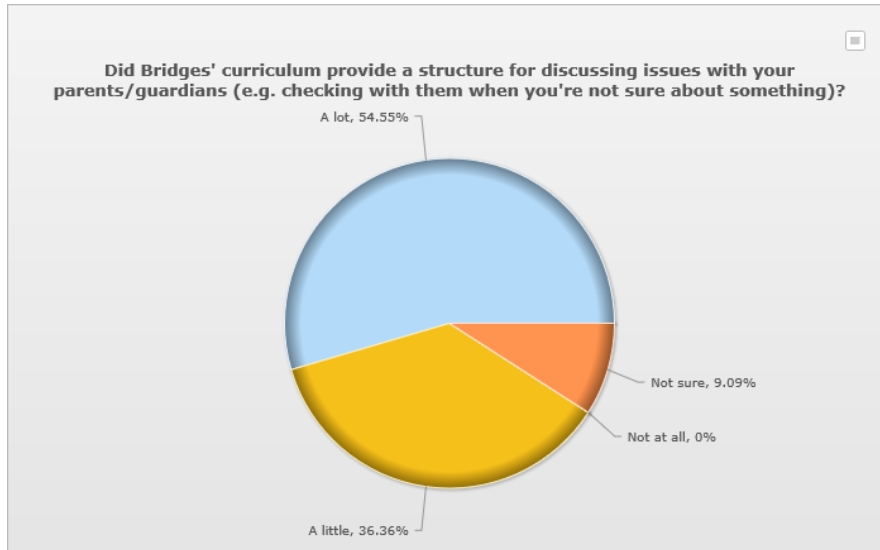


		Did Bridges motivate you to keep on trying to improve yourself (e.g. trying new things)?				
Do you remember taking part in Bridges?		A lot	A little	Not at all	Not sure	Row Totals
	YES, CLEARLY	7 87.5%	0 0%	1 100%	1 100%	9 81.8%
	SORT OF	1 12.5%	1 100%	0 0%	0 0%	2 18.2%
	NO	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Column Total		8 72.7%	1 9.1%	1 9.1%	1 9.1%	11 100%



**Q11 Did the Bridges curriculum provide a structure for discussing issues with your parent/guardians (e.g. checking with them when you're not sure about something)?**

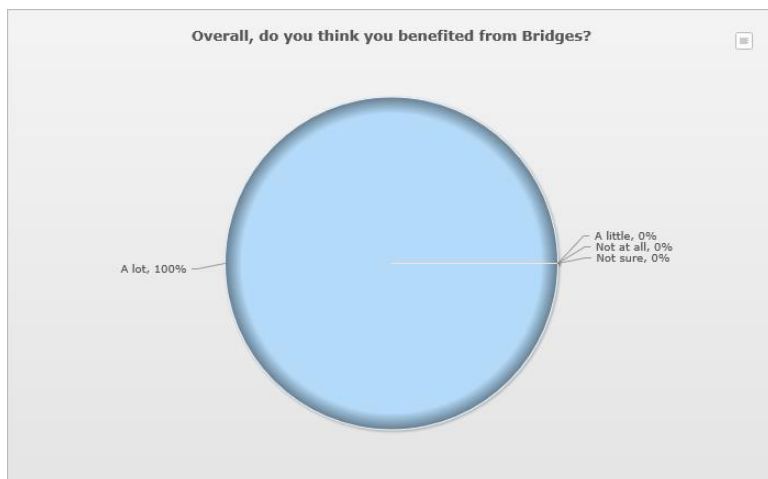
6 (55%) felt that Bridges provided a structure for discussing issues with their parent/guardian 'A Lot' and a further 4 (36%) 'A Little'. The remaining 1 (9%) was 'Not Sure'.



Did Bridges' curriculum provide a structure for discussing issues with your parents/guardians (e.g. checking with them when you're not sure about something)?						
Do you remember taking part in Bridges?		A lot	A little	Not at all	Not sure	Row Totals
YES, CLEARLY	YES, CLEARLY	5 83.3%	3 75%	0 0%	1 100%	9 81.8%
	SORT OF	1 16.7%	1 25%	0 0%	0 0%	2 18.2%
	NO	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Column Total		6 54.5%	4 36.4%	0 0%	1 9.1%	11 100%

**Q12 Overall, do you think you benefitted from Bridges?**

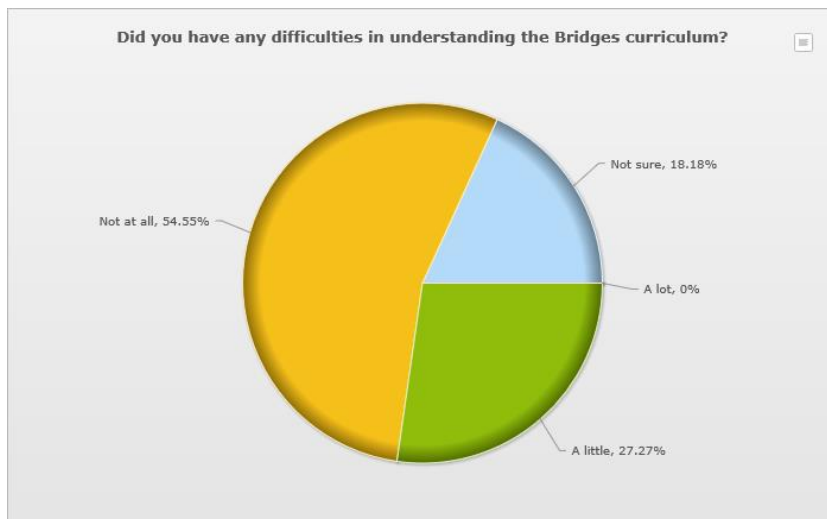
All 11 (100%) respondents felt that they benefitted from Bridges 'A Lot'.



		Overall, do you think you benefitted from Bridges?				
Do you remember taking part in Bridges?		A lot	A little	Not at all	Not sure	Row Totals
YES, CLEARLY	YES, CLEARLY	9 81.8%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	9 81.8%
	SORT OF	2 18.2%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 18.2%
	NO	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Column Total		11 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	11 100%

**Q13 Did you have any difficulties in understanding the Bridges curriculum?**

6 (55%) respondents felt they did 'Not At All' have any difficulties in understanding the Bridges curriculum, with a further 3 (27%) feeling they had 'A Little' difficulty understanding the curriculum. The remaining 2 (18%) were 'Not Sure'.



		Did you have any difficulties in understanding the Bridges curriculum?					
Do you remember taking part in Bridges?		Not sure	Not at all	A little	A lot	Row Totals	
	YES, CLEARLY	1 50%	6 100%	2 66.7%	0 0%	9 81.8%	
SORT OF	1 50%	0 0%	1 33.3%	0 0%	2 18.2%		
NO	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%		
Column Total	2 18.2%	6 54.5%	3 27.3%	0 0%	11 100%		

Where respondents did have some difficulties in understanding the Bridges curriculum, the following examples were given.

- The visual aids given to us
- while I do remember my bridges lessons, it took me some more years for my brain to process what was taught. So there was still a period in my life where I could not integrate with my peers despite being given the knowledge and skill-sets.
- I had no idea what was going on half the time. I just know it was kind of fun. I was able to understand what was being taught but it wasn't until a few years later when it really hit me as to how to apply what I'd learnt properly.
- Think the class was quite clear, I thought during that time it was a little hard because it was different for me to understand the programme

## Supplementary questions

### APPENDIX 2A

Young people were asked 'what was the most important thing that Bridges helped you with'.

**11 responded.**

The young people provided full and clear responses to the question. They had clearly given much thought to this.

#### Verbatim examples of comments received from young people (for illustration).

*'Being able to know that I am not alone and that there are people who believe in me and know that I will be able to function on my own in the future'*

*'A Safe Haven. Being in a group and participating in planned activities enables a secure and comfortable zone to 'try' and experiment with handling social situations and 'techniques'.*

*'Helping me to become more assertive as a person'.*

*'Being around other people who were going through similar confusions, we could work together to make a difference to ourselves'.*

*'Help make new and close friends with the individuals surrounding us.'*

*'I was able to interact and engage with people in the same boat so to speak and make friends that I can still contact today'*

*'Reading people'*

*'Understanding how social interactions worked'*

*'Making friends'*

*'I think what Bridges has done for me is that it has made me realise that I am unique person. To view and understand people in another manner may sometimes be challenging but what Bridges has done is to overcome this barrier, through patience and an understanding heart. Bridges has definitely affected my life, I feel that I am more confident and that I can actually make true friends, people that I know can count on with relationships with a tight bond'*

*'Bridges has helped understand myself as an individual, by recognizing my own strengths and weaknesses and how to use it to solve any problems that I have faced or yet to face'*

## **A thematic analysis of responses is provided below**

### **1. Agency, self -understanding**

Young people commonly reported that developing their self-awareness and being in control of their future had been most important to them. Understanding more about self and how autism/Asperger affects thoughts and feelings. Being able to think and speak for self, without being told what to do by others: How to make choices and to be assertive: Feeling confident as a result of the foundations of self-awareness: Understanding own feelings and thoughts and strengths and weaknesses.

This was also reported under 'improvements' where more time for 'self-reflection' was highlighted.

### **2. Affiliation**

Young people reported the programme helped them in knowing how to be with other people. They greatly valued being part of a peer group over time, which offered a safe place to explore their identity and experiment with solutions; where they were accepted and not judged, and which provided a positive narrative and framework for their future. They also valued the opportunity to make (or choose not to make) friends. The relationship with the clinicians was also reported as important in that they were seen by the young people as supportive, accessible and friendly, yet consistent and trusted to give honest feedback.

### **3. Skills**

Young people reported that they found the 'technical' understanding of social situations and how social skills could be applied was helpful to them. This helped them with problem-solving, their confidence and overcoming anxiety and in making friends.

## **APPENDIX 2B**

**Young people were asked 'what was the most enjoyable thing about Bridges?'**

**Verbatim examples of comments received from young people (for illustration).**

*'C and M (therapists) have been highly instrumental in bringing out qualities of myself I would never have imagined to be: increased confidence, maturity in thought and behaviour, decisiveness and better communication with people. They have always approached uncomfortable situations with ease and progressively allow us time to reflect and participate actively within our own comfort level'*

*'The simple way it was taught made it easy to understand and apply at the time'*

*'the positive interactions we had between teacher and student, there was never any occasion where the teachers gave up teaching for the day. They always attempted to strengthen*

*social skills in the class by allowing us to play games with one another. That was very nice to do especially with the Wii'*

*'Playing games and chit chatting with the other members, also acting out certain sequences'*

*'Hanging out with people I'd gotten to know'*

*'The people who were in my group that I grew up with and now that we're supporting each other'*

*'Having a safe environment to learn'*

*'I think then the most enjoyable thing about Bridges is the people that we grow together with, these are friends that we do not reject but come to humble ourselves and enjoy the beautiful moments together'*

*'I mostly enjoyed the time I have spent with my friends in the same class as me as it has helped me develop close bonds with them that have become irreplaceable.'*

#### **A thematic analysis of responses is provided below**

##### **1. Affiliation**

Young people reported they particularly enjoyed being with others sharing a common bond and that this took time to develop. For many this was a novel experience. Learning as part of a group also allowed friendships to develop and interests to be shared and fun to be had, such as in games. This consolidated learning and made the sessions much more enjoyable. Young people naturally felt this could be developed further!

##### **2. Agency/Self-awareness.**

Young people reported that the clinicians had helped them to better understand themselves and their thoughts, qualities and strengths and to take charge of their own behaviour and their responses to others. This had reduced their anxiety. Feeling confident as a result of a more solid understanding of self was viewed as important.

##### **3. Therapeutic relationship**

Young people reported that they valued the friendliness and directness of the clinicians. They greatly enjoyed the opportunity to reflect on their own perceptions and responses and appreciated the way the clinicians helped them with this, without judging or imposing. A common theme related to their wish to place a greater emphasis on this part of the programme (self-reflection) both in techniques and the time allowed for it to take place.

#### **4. Curriculum**

Young people they enjoyed the structure of the curriculum and how it enabled them to apply and test their skills in the format of the programme (safe test) and wider afield.

#### **APPENDIX 2C**

#### **Young people were asked to describe the least enjoyable thing about Bridges**

Verbatim examples of comments received from young people (for illustration).

*'nowadays there is social media, which was not something discussed during my time at Bridges'*

*'I don't believe we were introduced to interacting with different genders. Being able to interact with more than one gender could have allowed us to practice social skills more effectively, especially with understanding A different perspective rather than a single one'*

*'Lesson time, and having to describe your less than pleasant experiences'*

*'Having to leave'*

*'Having to wake up early to go to Bridges'*

*'Can't quite say that I had a bad experience during my time in Bridges other than the one time I was told that I was told that I would have to leave Bridges, that would have been unfortunate'*

*'Parents sitting in the same class as the children. This made me feel a bit anxious when I was still in class as there was pressure from my parents making sure that I had learnt something in every class'*

#### **A thematic analysis of responses is provided below**

**Thematic responses relate to a single theme of curriculum.**

#### **1. Curriculum**

Some young people reported that some aspects of the curriculum were not as enjoyable as they did not consider it so relevant to them. It should be noted that this is a reflection of older students looking back and that the early stages of the curriculum are designed to be in line with developmental profiles of the learner. It also supports one of the main pillars of the programme in that it should begin as early as possible in the primary years, recognising that the social challenges of most of the children will not come until later. Making parents and professionals aware of the importance of laying the foundations for social learning early by developing self-awareness and

agency and building on these through the sustained and sequential nature of the curriculum is emphasised in the programme literature.

Young people also commented on omissions, for example social media, morality and sexuality. Morality in terms of understanding personal and societal norms and sexuality in the strict sense i.e. understanding what it is to be a man or woman and the different expressions of gender and multiple explanations around sexual orientation and roles. This would include the recognition of their own sexuality.

These comments should be seen in the context of the time. Social media was in its relative infancy and other issues on morality and sexuality were emerging. That said, the feedback from the young people is extremely helpful and will assist in the development of new and additional modules where these are indicated at an appropriate level related to the context and boundaries of the programme.

Some young people struggled with having to express negative emotions in the group although recognised the need for emotional recognition and management. A common theme emerged regarding the presence of parents in sessions. This was commonly seen by young people as problematic in terms of allowing them to 'be themselves' and in some instances they appear to have found this quite inhibiting, adding pressure and anxiety provoking. This is an important point for discussion as there is conflict between what parents found helpful and the views of a number of the young people. However, it is delivered, a way of communicating content with families and young people should be found that accommodates the needs of both.

## **APPENDIX 2D**

### **Young people were asked what could be done by Bridges staff to improve the curriculum?**

Examples of comments received from young people.

*'No. I would not have thought of a better place to learn about myself'*

*'Make sure to regularly update it in order to keep up with the current time'*

*'do not be afraid to talk about mental conditions, some students may end up facing these emotions yet are confused greatly by how they are feeling. Explaining these emotions may help them find closure and seek the help they need'*

*'incorporate more feedback from youth to find out what issues they face'*

**A thematic analysis of responses is provided below**

**Thematic responses relate to a single theme of curriculum.**



Students reported general satisfaction and most feedback was to maintain the current direction. There were some suggested changes which are summarised below

### **1. Curriculum.**

Review content regularly to ensure up to date and taking account of real issues faced by autistic young people in the current climate. That the Bridges curriculum be reviewed to consider additional aspects raised by parents and young people.

Earlier intervention should focus on development of self-awareness and agency. This is recognised by the programme as key to laying the foundation for social learning, which even though they may take time to come to fruition, are recognised as key to successful social learning.

Communication with parents was another issue that young people felt could be addressed to ensure that parents and young people are on the 'same page'. Many of the proposed changes go to the development of agency. Young people making their own decisions but secure that they are based on good self-awareness and with the necessary skills to carry them out.

## **APPENDIX 2E**

### **Any other comments**

Additional comments were received from four young people.

They relate to the themes of affiliation and age appropriateness.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

1. The results of this evaluation would indicate that the Bridges programme is effective in providing a specialist programme of social support for those autistic children of good academic ability.
2. Family/Parental and young person satisfaction is rated as very high.
3. The results would support the importance of self-awareness and agency to be the cornerstone of any programme of this nature. Often autism programmes are based on compliance and do not provide the autistic learner with opportunities to develop self-awareness or autonomy. Frequently these programmes inhibit or impair the development of such skills and the learner becomes dependent on others for cues on how to behave in any given situation, i.e. lacking agency. This can become a source of anxiety and low self-esteem for the learner and prevents the emergence of critical thinking skills. The Bridges methodology recognises and manages this well.

4. The Bridges narrative recognises the underlying cognitive difficulties commonly found in autism but does not accept these are fixed. Moreover, the clinicians recognise that enabling autistic learners to understand their own and unique way of thinking and learning should underpin social learning. Given the support to understand, at the critical time context, and the skills to exercise self-determination the autistic learner will cope with life's challenges on a similar basis to neurotypical individuals. Bridges would appear to offer a naturalistic model of scaffolding whereby the learner can be flexible and self-critical.
5. The current Coronavirus crisis would indicate an acceleration of the online version of the programme. In many ways this could offer new opportunities to bring this programme to a wider audience and discussion should take place on how awareness can be increased. Naturally any revision will need to protect those features that are important and valued, for example, one of the strengths of the programme is its length, which gives stability to the learner and allows the scaffolding and development of agency to emerge in a safe place, but there is no reason why, given modern technology, this should not happen.
6. Further consideration should also be given as to how this programme fits in with other compatible approaches for this group of young people which occur later, in particular, mentoring and life coaching.
7. There is generally a high level of consensus of view between family/parent and young person on the performance and content of the Bridges programme. A review, taking account of the feedback contained in this report and to explore competing or conflicting views is recommended.
8. It is recommended that this report be used to discuss future development of the Bridges programme.

Richard Mills

David Moore

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