

Programme Update

 January 2026 | Issue 1

Welcome to our first public update

Kent and Medway Mental Health Trust (KMMH) is committed to improving healthcare for Autistic people and people with learning disabilities. This newsletter shares what we're doing and how we're making progress.

Our Learning Disability and Autism (LDaA) Programme brings together clinical staff, managers, and – crucially – people with lived experience to transform how we deliver care. We want to move away from only responding to crises, towards providing proactive, community-based support that helps people stay well.

What is the LDaA Delivery Group?

The Delivery Group meets monthly to coordinate our improvement work across the Trust. It includes senior leaders from all our clinical areas (called directorates), specialists in areas like business intelligence and workforce development, and Autistic people and people with a learning disability.

The group exists to turn national policy into local action. Rather than treating guidance documents as abstract requirements, we focus on practical changes that will make a real difference to the people we support.

Our work is organised into three connected workstreams:

Workstream 1: Immediate Need (67 requirements)

Crisis care, inpatient services, reducing restrictive practices, and supporting transitions

Workstream 2: Health Inequality (110 requirements)

Assessment, diagnosis, physical health monitoring, employment support, and tackling outcome disparities

Workstream 3: Reasonable Adjustments (155 requirements)

Communication adaptations, sensory needs, autism-informed frameworks (e.g., SPACE & SPELL), and digital flagging

 **Key insight:** *The largest group of requirements (155) relates to reasonable adjustments. This validates our programme logic: **if we invest in getting the basics right, we should see fewer crises.***

Our work in numbers



393

Policy requirements identified



155

Reasonable adjustment focus



3,840

Staff trained so far



40

LD nurses at KMMH

Lived experience at the heart of our work

We believe that Autistic people and people with learning disabilities should lead conversations about their own care – not simply be consulted afterwards. That's why we're building lived experience leadership into our Delivery Group.

 This month, we welcomed **Tim Chapman** to the group. Tim is Autistic and experiences ADHD, and works as a lived experience leader delivering the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training across Kent and Medway. He's also Co-chair of the Kent and Medway Learning Disability and Autism Strategic Delivery Board.

Tim shared his perspective on delivering training to NHS staff, including using music and personal stories to create genuine connection. He noted that while most sessions are positive, some can be challenging – a reminder that changing attitudes takes sustained effort.

 Tim plays guitar and sings a song he wrote about his experiences as an Autistic person – a unique and powerful way to help staff understand.

We're working to ensure future meetings include both an Autistic person and a person with a learning disability, so different perspectives can inform our decisions.

What we discussed this month

Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training

This training, named after Oliver McGowan whose death highlighted failures in NHS care, is delivered by people with lived experience through [BrightPath](#) in Kent and Medway, contracted by [bemix](#) in partnership with [Aucademy CIC](#) and [Kent Autistic Trust](#).

 3,840 staff trained since April (8% of Kent & Medway health workforce)

 KMMH target: 30% of workforce by April 2026

 System-wide expected to reach 16% by end of financial year

 **Tim's feedback:** *"My job is to make an emotional connection and make the slides real. It's about helping staff understand how these issues have affected me as an Autistic person."*

Learning Disability Nursing – a workforce in need

We face a significant challenge: no university in the South East of England currently offers a learning disability nursing degree. This means we cannot replace specialist nurses as they retire.

 KMMH discovered we have 40 LD nurses – previously thought to be only 9-10

 Forecast: no LD nursing courses in England by 2028

 At current rates, only ~30 LD nurses will remain in UK employment by 2080

 **A regional event on 17 February** will bring together nurses and leaders to discuss solutions. Meanwhile, the population of people with learning disabilities continues to grow.

Better data for better care

Our Business Intelligence team is developing a new dashboard for NHS colleagues that will show, at a glance, which patients have been identified as Autistic or having a learning disability.

 Three clear buttons: Autism, Learning Disability, or both

 Live data showing flagged patients across all teams

 Links to patient records for quick access

 Expected in testing by 27 January 2026

This will help clinical teams ensure they're providing appropriate support and reasonable adjustments from the start of someone's care.

Understanding harmful stimming vs self-harm

We're exploring important research into the difference between self-harm and "harmful stimming" – when movements that usually help Autistic people regulate their emotions become injurious.

 **Why it matters:** Clinical staff may misinterpret harmful stimming as deliberate self-harm, leading to inappropriate responses. Understanding this distinction – informed by Autistic adults' own experiences – could transform inpatient care.

Research colleagues are interested, and funding may be available for this under-researched area.

Accessible information for everyone

Our Communications team now has the capability to produce Easy Read documents, using simple language and symbols.

 **This isn't just for people with learning disabilities** – accessible information benefits anyone who finds complex documents difficult to navigate, including people who are unwell, stressed, or who speak English as a second language.

 Easy Read capability now live in Communications

 PhotoSymbols licence acquired for visual materials

 Patient literature being prioritised for conversion

Looking ahead

 February workshops: Co-production sessions with Autistic people and people with learning disabilities to prioritise which requirements to tackle first. Lived experts will lead this process.

 Children's services: NELFT's children's services will join KMMH as our sixth directorate. We'll hear about neurodevelopmental services for children and young people at our February meeting.

 Down Syndrome Strategy: We're coordinating a system-wide response to the government's consultation, working with partner trusts across Kent and Medway.

 CPD development: Canterbury Christ Church University is developing postgraduate modules for staff working with Autistic people and people with learning disabilities.



"Our goal is simple: we want Autistic people and people with learning disabilities to receive the same quality of healthcare as everyone else. That means building services that understand and accommodate different needs – not expecting people to fit into systems that weren't designed for them."

– Dr Chloe Farahar, LDaA Programme Manager



Get involved

We want to hear from you. Whether you're an Autistic person, someone with a learning disability, a family member, carer, or anyone interested in improving NHS services, your perspective matters.

 Visit: www.neuroconnecthub.co.uk/

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 **Contact us:** KMMH.Idaprogramme@nhs.net

 *If you'd like this newsletter in a different format (such as Easy Read, large print, or audio), please let us know.*

 Kent and Medway Mental Health NHS Trust

Working together for better mental health and learning disability services 