



The impact of SCF funding

Case studies from schools and colleges

“These projects have literally changed pupils’ lives. They have helped them gain confidence and hope after a terrible lockdown experience of isolation and panic about the work they had missed.”

Specialist teacher, community college

“On behalf of the SEND team and the pupils, a huge thank you. This has had such a positive impact on our pupils. I am delighted to see them growing in confidence in coming to school even on tricky days.”

SENDCo, secondary school

This document illustrates the impact of SCF funding on autistic young people, their families and on schools/colleges. It uses short case studies to show how schools and colleges have addressed different issues.

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Supporting mental health and well-being

Involving students to create a safe space

Following the second lockdown there has been an extreme rise in levels of anxiety and stress for many autistic students. Students have designed and created a sensory room, somewhere safe where they can de-escalate. As a result, students are more self-confident, able to stay in school longer.

Discovering the calming benefits garden furniture

An SCF-funded double garden swing has become the school chat bench. When students are feeling worried or dysregulated they sit on the swing. The movement is soothing and calming, and with no direct eye contact needed, they open up and talk to staff

Building strategies for managing anxiety

Introducing a sensory room with individual pods tackled the high anxiety many autistic students felt post-lockdown. There has been a significant impact on pupil wellbeing allowing staff to really build relationships with autistic pupils. This has meant they could build strategies for use in the room such as breathing exercises, body scans and strategies to help reframe negative thoughts. This is already impacting positively on attendance, with the potential for a much bigger impact over time as pupils use the space increasingly effectively.

Structured use of sensory rooms to improve emotional regulation

Expanding and structuring the use of sensory room provision helped make more of an impact. The existing space was modified into an intervention space for managing students' anxiety, and two sensory calming pods - fully stocked with a range of materials that students use to self-regulate. Each pod has mood lighting, rocking chairs, cushions, special lighting, weighted blankets, stress cushions and lots of individual materials for specific students. The sensory pods are timetabled for autistic students throughout the day to allow them a safe space to go and regulate - in turn helping them to return to lessons. Within each hour of the day 20 minutes are kept free in one pod in case there is an unexpected need for a quiet space following dysregulation. The pods have formed an essential part of the school routine for many students, allowing regular rest breaks to prevent sensory overload.

The impact?

- A drastic reduction in the number of behaviour incidents for students using the pods, with the internal seclusion rate decreasing by over 65%.
- Emotional outbursts have become almost non-existent, which has a drastic impact on the learning environment and the well-being of all students who feel more safe.
- Because students using the pods when overwhelmed are able to regulate more effectively and this has resulted in less learning time being lost. Previously up to 2 hours was with a student, now they can be regulated and back to learning within 30 minutes.
- The wider impact of this is increased capacity for providing support for more students, and so it is not just the autistic students who have benefitted.

Communication and sensory boxes

By providing each member of staff with their own 'communication and sensory box', SCF funding has empowered staff to effectively support autistic students. Each box contains several tools to help the sensory or emotional communication needs of autistic students. There is also clear guidance on who individual tools are appropriate for, and suggestions for how to use them.

Helping students return to learning and catch up

Creative use of a sensory room to help access to learning

As GCSE exams approached Dean, Y11, couldn't manage being in a classroom let alone an exam room. SCF funded a sensory room, a safe space to relax. Dean has completed his Mock exams in the safe space, and is now also joining some mainstream classes as well, using the sensory room after each lesson in order to re-regulate.

Tutoring with academic and social benefits

Lockdown has increased anxiety in autistic students and many have lost valuable learning time, so SCF funded additional specialist time for 1:1 tutoring. The academic progress has been great, but with additional benefits. The focused contact with staff boosted confidence and enhanced social communication. Students now approach and speak to teachers in the corridor.

Ellen found it difficult to return to school after lockdown. With SCF-funded singing lessons and then visits to the local college music department, Ellen is now back at school studying so she can get the grades to go to college and study music! She is like a different person.

Supporting remote learning - via a robot!

Three autistic students with high levels of anxiety were helped to join in lessons by using a distance learning avatar which allowed a virtual presence in class for students based a distance away - first at home and then in a learning centre. SCF funded the college to hire an AV1 robot for 9 months, giving students the ability to see, hear and talk to their classmates as if they were there, all through a secure app in their phone or tablet. This has enabled the students to access their subjects and still feel part of the community, and the staff to continue to teach whilst supporting students who were not present in their lessons.

Using technology to re-engage students with learning

The students used SCF-funded ipads to record their work without having to manually write. After a long time of home learning using on-line devices, the students have needed these devices to support the transition back to schools and gradually get used to face to face learning. Unable to use daily home-school books, staff have used a class dojo app to communicate with parents. As a result parent-school communication and relations are stronger.

Developing expertise in school or college staff

Spreading expertise in autism through video-ed training

Often only one or two members of staff hold expertise in supporting autistic students. SCF funding has been used to commission a local educational psychologist to create a training video on understanding autism. The recorded training has been used flexibly by the whole SEND team over a period of time meaning that more people got involved. The training will also be disseminated to teaching staff within the school to ensure a widespread understanding and knowledge on how to support autistic students.

Staff development means pupils feel supported

Training funded by SCF has given staff in schools across one trust the confidence to know how best to support autistic pupils who have developed sudden onset tics - a UK-wide phenomenon and triggered by lockdowns. The pupils have felt supported and were encouraged that teachers had undertaken training just because they wanted to know how to help.

Training TAs to run social skills groups

With lockdown negatively impacting on the socialisation of autistic students and on their relationships with others, SCF funded social skills training for all teaching assistants. Staff now feel more confident delivering these sessions across year groups. Students have opened up with each other, formed connections and have begun to apply what they have learnt in the workshops independently in class.

Training for college staff to help students access learning

With SCF funding, a local Learner Services team produced training materials for teachers. These helped them to identify autistic behaviours, to understand them and then plan strategies and techniques which differentiated teaching and learning. Alongside this, resources have been shared on the college intranet to help reinforce the training, answer questions and practically work through ideas. This has given ASC learners full access to learning.

Specialist interventions

Concerns dealt with before becoming problems

During lockdown, many interventions stopped. SCF funded specialists to deliver group interventions to improve interaction. Relationships between students and staff have improved so much that concerns are shared more easily and can be addressed quickly.

Counselling have students a voice

Recognising the heightened levels of anxiety and loneliness, all ASC students were offered counselling sessions by experts who were brought in using SCF funding. Students have valued the time to talk. It also enabled staff to monitor and evaluate mental health and well-being. 82% of the students who took part showed improved attendance from term 1 to the start of term 3.

Empowering students

Autistic students sharing their experience of lockdown to help others

Autistic students produced a film about their experiences of lockdown. This has really helped students new to college make a positive transition, and has given existing students new experiences: a sense of *empowerment* through being part of enhancing future students' experience of starting at college, great *teamwork* through the shared experience.

The benefits of involving students in co-design

SCF funding created two sensory areas - one inside, and one garden area. Led by a trained ASC champion, the peer support group took leadership of the development making decisions on colour, resources, furniture and the ordering of plants.

Not only has this given students a sense of ownership it's also developed their confidence in communicating with each other - and with staff around school. They have spoken with:

- the caretaker to discuss colour options, communicating their preferences
- the teacher on a construction course to commission steps, walkways and raised beds from the construction students.
- other students to get their opinions

The initiative has developed relationships between students, their peers and other staff - an unexpected benefit of the funding. Encouragingly, it has supported some students in KS3 in making their options choices as they now feel more comfortable with staff in school.

Changing the way things happen in schools and colleges

A commitment to sustain SCF-funded mentoring to increase attendance

Autistic learners were struggling to re-engage with college post-lockdown. SCF funded mentors who ran social communication and therapy groups. This helped autistic students to attend college when they would otherwise have felt overloaded. Mentors encourage students to access a safe space at social times and as result there is an increasingly vibrant community of engaged ASC students. The college is convinced that the absence rate would be much higher without access to these enhanced facilities. It is now hoping to recruit in order to maintain the level of service this funding has provided.

Promoting inclusion and increasing well-being through accessible resources

Students' sensory needs meant they frequently disengaged with classroom learning. SCF funded the purchase of an easily accessible resource box (a treasure chest) full of learning tools such as wobble cushions, chair bands, timers and writing slopes. Staff could see how much autistic students benefited from accessing these resources to aid learning - it has led to staff having much more awareness of students' sensory needs. As a result, teachers have become more flexible and responsive in the way they teach, leading to increased well-being of autistic students.

The school also bought new equipment to meet the needs of the most sensory-seeking autistic students. Before school, students select equipment to help with sensory integration. It is now common in the school to see students whizzing around on scooter boards, doing exercises involving peanut balls or stretching inside tubes. The focus has been on encouraging students to take responsibility for choosing the right exercise for them and so preparing themselves for the day ahead.

The school sees SCF funding as having had a vast impact on the whole school community with increased awareness of sensory needs from both staff and students.

Re-thinking practice in school

Many autistic students spent lockdown playing computer games and found it hard to break away from this to return to school. Using SCF funding to take students on outdoor education days has helped re-establish positive routines. Though reluctant at first, all students attended, took part, and enjoyed sessions.

Since the programme, the pupils (from across seven different classes) still speak to each other and some meet up to continue their new friendships. Relationships and interactions have improved, and some students have discovered previously hidden leadership skills. Attendance in school has dramatically improved.

Staff describe one student as 'coming alive'. The student writes:

"It helped me personally bond with a few of my peers. Attending the programme was an exciting way to get to know the people around me and make new friends. I am excited for other outside clubs. I'm now interested in joining the Army Cadets this year and I think it has made me even more excited for it."

As a result of the success of the programme, staff have reconsidered some elements of practice in school and what it means to feel safe. Previously, they considered a safe space to be somewhere away from others, with a focus on looking inwards, instead of outwards. They are also incorporating outdoor activities in their behaviour management provision.

"We want to thank you for giving us the opportunity to explore different ways to support our pupils with ASC to experience adventure, enjoy interacting with others and feel differently about school."

Working with families

Enhancing school:parent relationships

Building strong, reciprocal relationships with families has been key during the pandemic. SCF funded training for two staff to run the National Autistic Society's *Teen Life* programme - a six-session programme for parents/carers of autistic teenagers. This has helped parents to think about different ways of communicating with their children, giving them ideas of how to change how they manage situations. Funding also supported the school to host online meetings with new parents and other family members - meaning conversations weren't rushed.

Returning to school: step-by-step

Using SCF funding to fund staff to go to students' homes and work with families has really made a difference. It has meant staff could dig deeper and identify barriers to learning and then plan a step-by-step approach for a return to education. There has been astounding progress for some young people - they are out of their bedrooms, leaving the house, putting on their uniform, coming to the carpark and then gradually coming back into school, back into lessons and entering the learning environment once more.