

## **Oireachtas Autism Committee**

**18<sup>th</sup> April 2023**

### **Opening Statement from Limerick City and County Library**

**Damien Brady, Limerick City and County Librarian**

Good afternoon

My name is Damien Brady and I am responsible for managing Limerick City and County Library service.

Limerick Libraries strives to make our Libraries places of welcome, interest and experience for all our citizens.

The central vision of the current Limerick Libraries Development Plan (2021 – 2025) is to offer attractive welcoming space to enable all members of the community to access knowledge, idea and experiences.

From 2018 we have actively sought to develop Autism and Neuro diverse Friendly library services for both young people and adults in response to the need in the community.

This presentation from Patricia Cusack, Executive Librarian at Watch House Cross Library, Moyross Limerick steps through the development to date of Limerick Libraries Autism Friendly Service.

# Autism Friendly Library



## Presentation to the Joint Committee on Autism

*Damien Brady Limerick City & County Librarian  
Patricia Cusack Executive Librarian  
Watch House Cross Community Library*

# THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

- NATIONAL LIBRARY POLICY:

Our Public Libraries 2022 called on local authorities to:

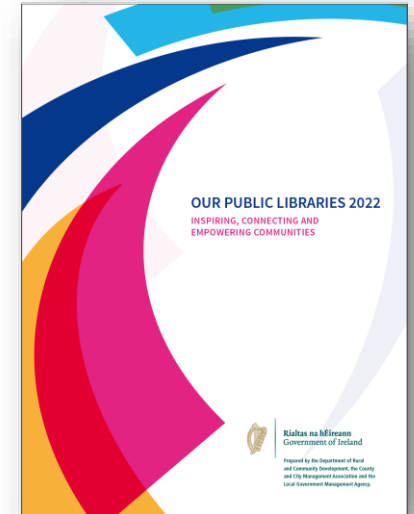
“Focus on improving access, use and visibility of the public library and establishing it as a go to place for a range of sustainable integrated public services”.

- Local Council Policy:

Limerick City & County Council’s Corporate Plan 2019-2024

**Goal 5:** “To promote a socially integrated and healthy Limerick.

**Goal 6:** “Actively engage with our communities”.



# WHY WATCH HOUSE CROSS LIBRARY?

- Watch House Cross Community Library located in Moyross, has been at the heart of the community for almost 16 years and continually strives to meet the changing needs of the community it serves.
- This community spans the northside of Limerick city & the wider hinterland which includes the areas on the border with County Clare.



# THE FIRST STEP ON THE JOURNEY 2018

## **St. Michael's ASD Unit Sexton Street, Limerick**

- ❑ A request to visit the library with their ASD unit
- ❑ Arts and Crafts & Storytime
- ❑ Recognising our shortcomings

## **Hope Creche for autistic children St. Lelias Kileely, Limerick**

- ❑ Library Visit
- ❑ Weekly craft sessions

## **Lifelong Learning Festival**

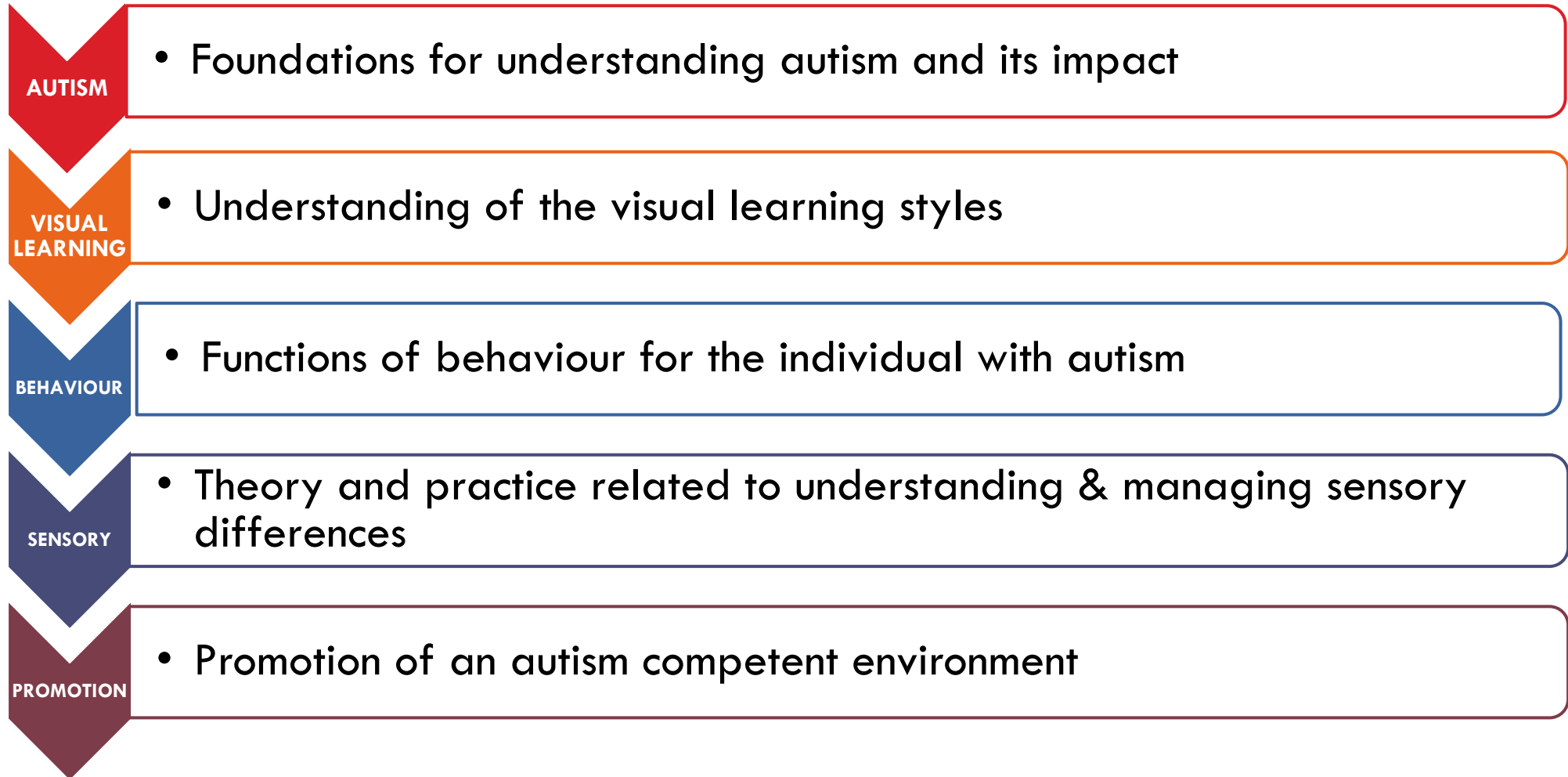
- ❑ Autism friendly craft session

## what we learned....

- Autistic children are visual learners
- We needed a visual schedule for them to follow
- Staff needed to be trained

# TRAINING AND EDUCATION:

Post Graduate Certificate in Autism Studies



# A SOCIAL STORY FOR VISITING THE LIBRARY

## The library has lots of **books**



- The first **Social Story** was written during the Post Grad.
- It was handed out to parents and teachers to help familiarize children before they visited the library.
- It included a visual schedule and flash cards



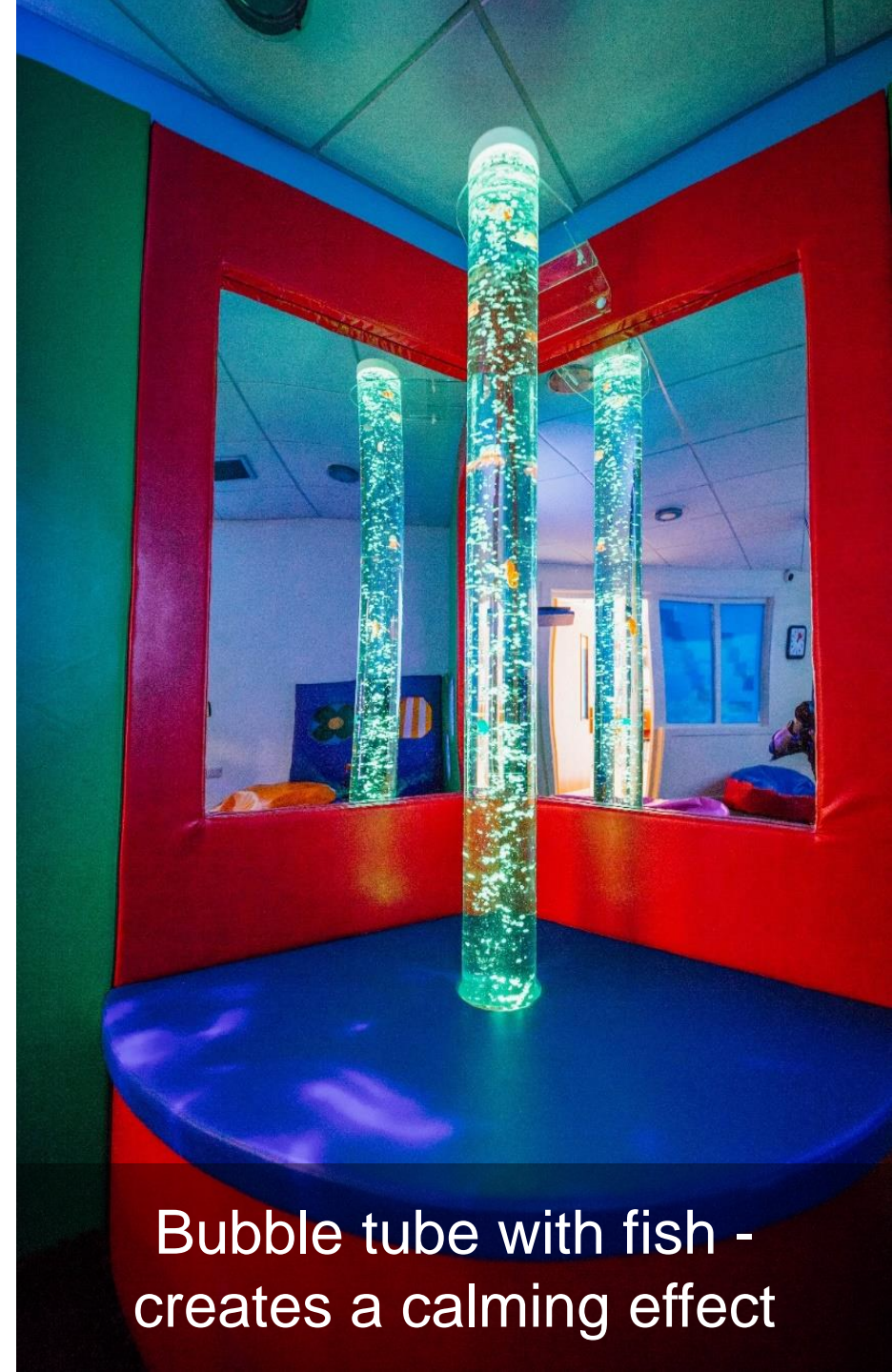
# Sensory Room

- A **Sensory Room** is a specially designed room that can help individuals who are neurodiverse, have learning and development difficulties and those on the Autism spectrum. **Sensory rooms** combine a range of stimuli to aid, develop and engage the senses.
- **Watch House Cross Library Sensory Room** has a range of visual, tactile, auditory and vestibular stimuli. **The Sensory Room** is available for use by parents, guardians and carers of children, teens and adults with Autism, Sensory Impairments, Special Needs and Learning and Development Difficulties.





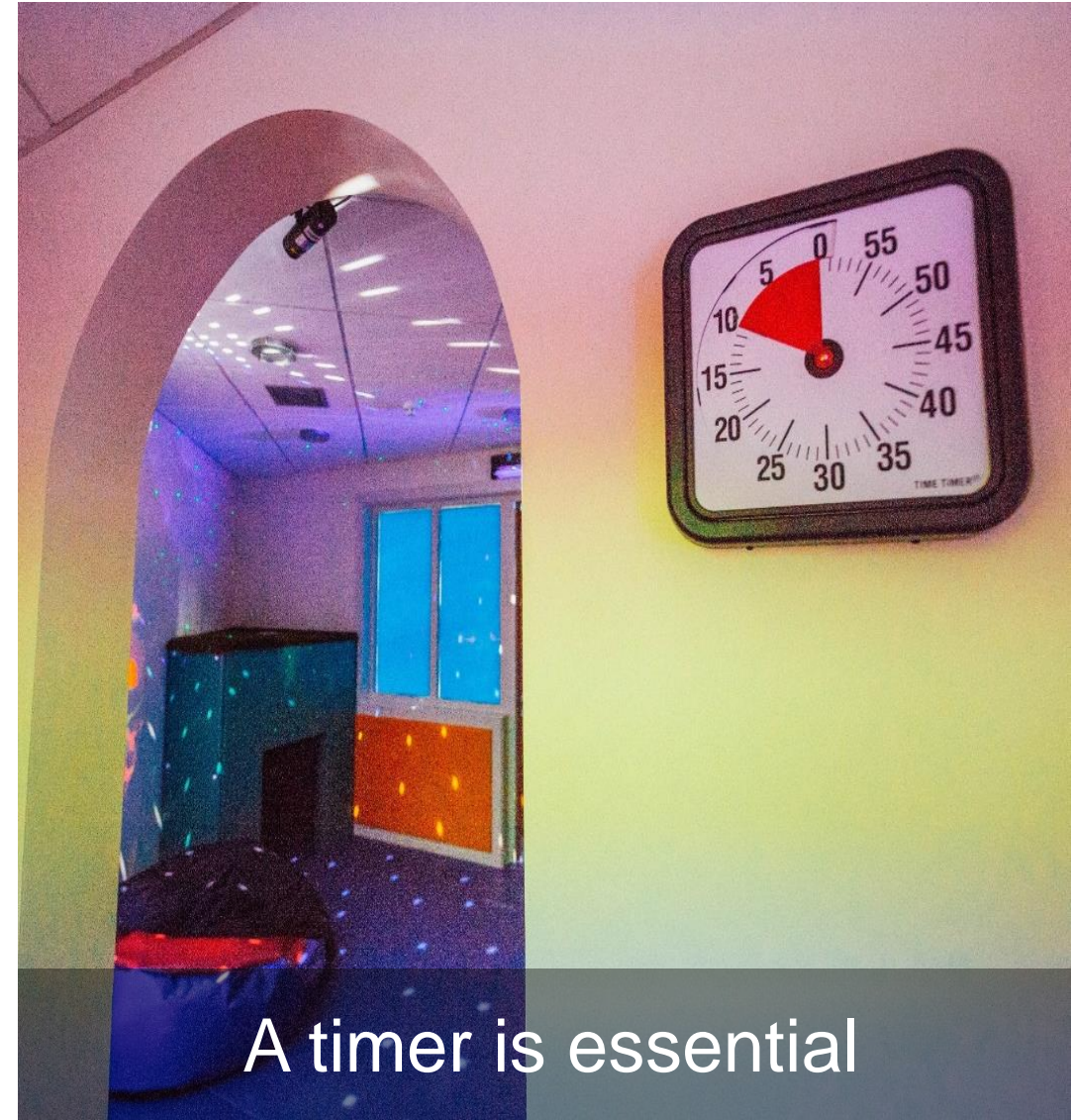
The main space: grass floor, sensory DVD with mellow music, bean bags



Bubble tube with fish - creates a calming effect



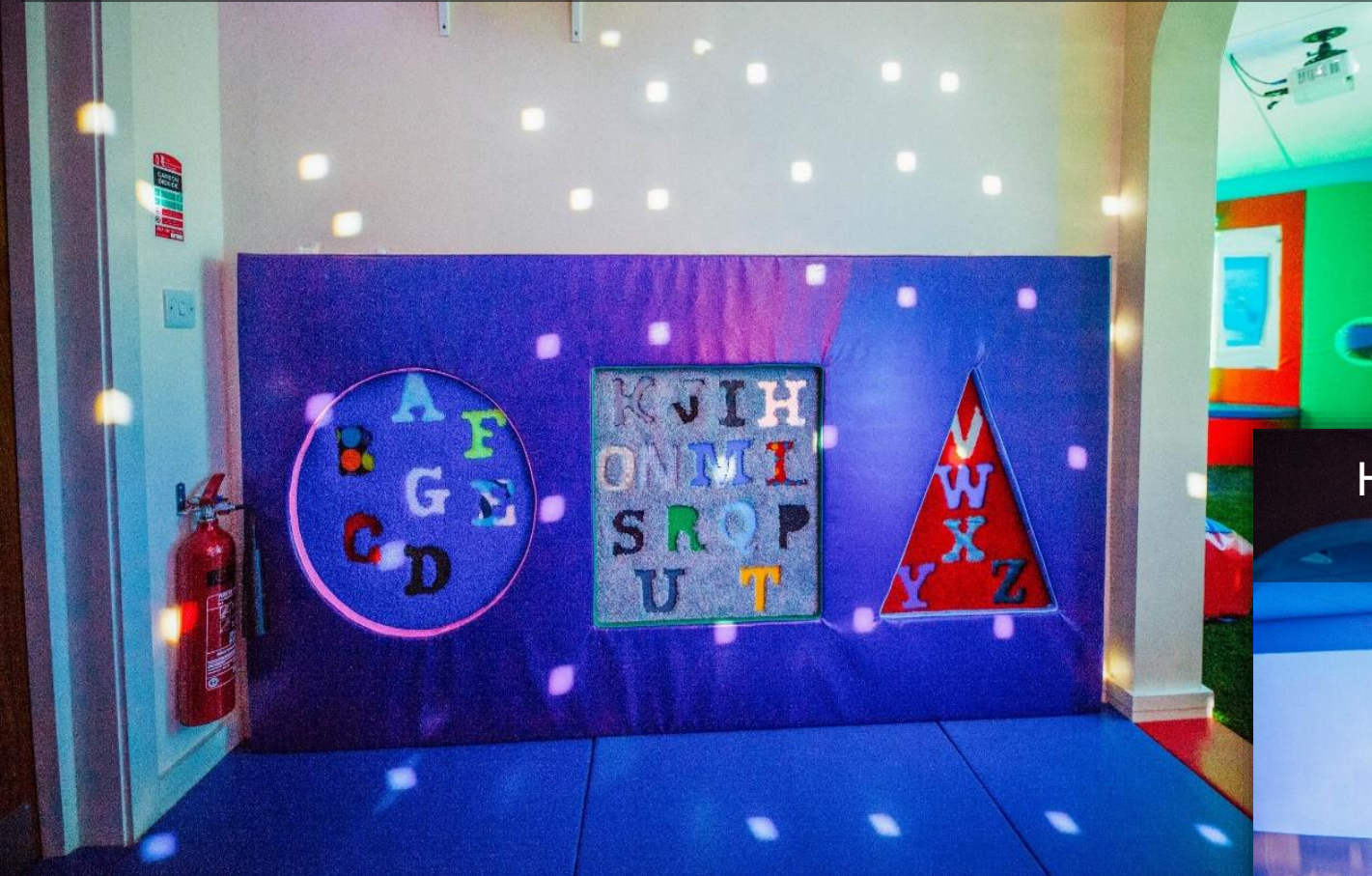
# Infinity tunnels and textured wall panels



A timer is essential



Alphabet Wall:  
each letter has a different tactile feel



Hidden dark den (lit up for photographic purposes)  
where a child can have their own calming space







With nearly 50% of users being adults a new sensory couch was added to aid comfort and ability to stand up easily

# FACTS

- Sensory Room is open since 3/9/19
- 30 minute session per booking
- Approx. 170 bookings per month
- 50% of users are adults from the Brothers of Charity and Rehab, Daughters of Avista.
- Users from all parts of Limerick City & County & beyond. (Tipperary & Clare)
- Local schools are using the room on a weekly basis
- Only the child/teen/adult with sensory need, not siblings

# FUNDING

- Limerick Regeneration SIF: €10,000
  - Dormant Accounts : €15,000
  - Library funding: €10,000
- TOTAL: €35,000

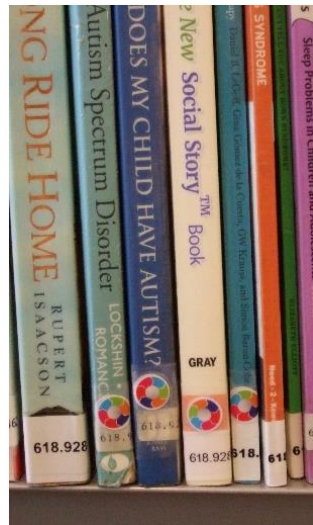
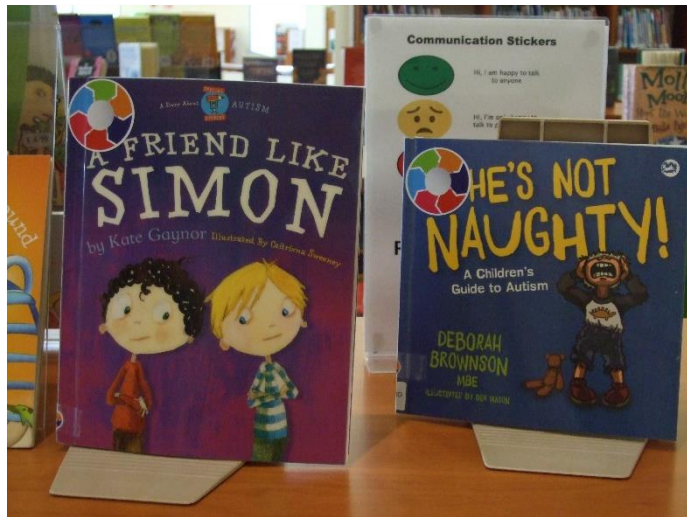
- *Installation of Sensory room at Watch House Cross Library*
- *Visual Schedules*
- *Relaxed performances*
- *Staff training*
- *“Autism and Visiting the Library” booklet*



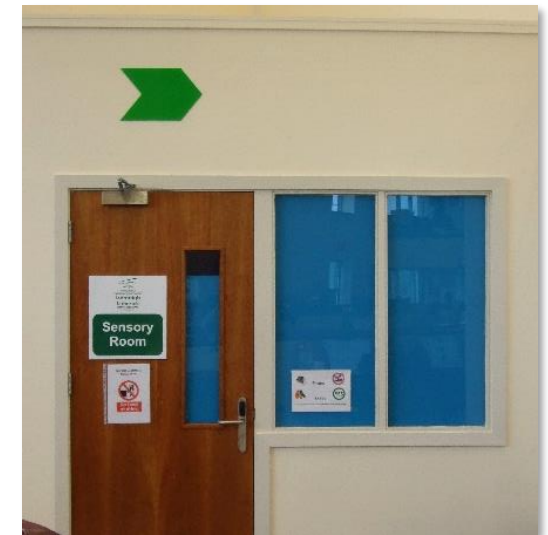


# AUTISM LOGO BRANDING AND VISUAL SCHEDULE

## BRANDING



## VISUAL SCHEDULE





# TRAINING



Fiona Ferris Deputy CEO of AsIAM  
providing training to staff of Limerick City & County Library Service

- Online training (AsIAM, 6 staff trained to date)
- Training day in WHC for all staff of Limerick City & County Library Service
- Attend National training events
- Encourage additional staff to undertake MIC Post Grad

# RELAXED EVENTS



Arran Towers BFG performance  
WHC Library, December 2019

- **Relaxed Performances** are specifically designed to welcome people who will benefit from a more **relaxed** environment including people with an Autism Spectrum Condition, diverse sensory and communication challenges, or a learning disability.
- Relaxed Performances are held in library branches throughout the city and county, including Kilmallock, Rathkeale, Newcastle West, Abbeyfeale.



# NATIONAL AWARD WINNING PROGRAMME

- Watch House Cross Community Library won “*Best Library in Ireland*” at Chambers Ireland Awards November 2019, for its Autism Programme.
- Watch House Cross shortlisted for “*All Ireland Community and Council Award, Best Disability Access & Inclusion Initiative 2020*”



Mayor Michael Sheahan and library staff with the Chambers Ireland Award, November 2019

# POST COVID-19

- Following easing of restrictions a soft reopening of the sensory room was possible.
- Usage numbers are now back to pre-covid levels.
- In March there were 70 bookings with a total of 185 users. The numbers reflect the need in the community



Sensory Toys



# Further Developments

- Sensory Pod installed at Abbeyfeale Library (2021)
- Suite of sensory toys now available in library branches (2022)
- Sensory space introduced at Newcastle West Library (2022)



# FUTURE PLANS

- Continue to develop our Autism Friendly Library Services
- Continue to work with autism advocacy agencies
- Encourage and support library staff to engage with training and education to ensure that we can develop our autism friendly library service
- Continue to innovate to ensure our libraries are places of welcome and experiences for all our citizens



Tovertafel 'Magic Table'

# Thank You

