



Introduction

Welcome to the next issue in our 'keyworker series', where each month we focus on one of the eight domains of quality of life (QoL) and how you can support them through your weekly keyworker sessions. This issue focuses on **personal development!**

This issue draws on research to explore what supports autistic people to develop and participate meaningfully in adult life.

From page 2 onwards, you can read about some great keyworker practice from school staff across the trust.

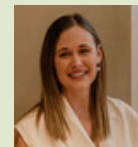
Research Summary - Davies et al (2025) & Morrison et al (2025)

Davies et al. (2025) completed a qualitative study of autistic adults' career journeys, finding that participants defined career success by; feeling useful and able to contribute, using their strengths & interests and being able to be themselves at work.



Jade Davies

Morrison et al. (2025) explored daily living skill support. Autistic participants described skills such as organisation, self-care and planning as tools that enable participation, ways to conserve energy and foundations for accessing education, work and community life. Together, these studies show that personal development for autistic people is about being supported to develop meaningful skills for their future.



Chelsea Morrison

The Reality

1. Skills as Access Tools

Focus on skills that support energy, confidence & participation, helping with engagement in learning and careers.



2. Meaningful Contribution

Explore what contributing means to the pupil and what they value in career pathways.



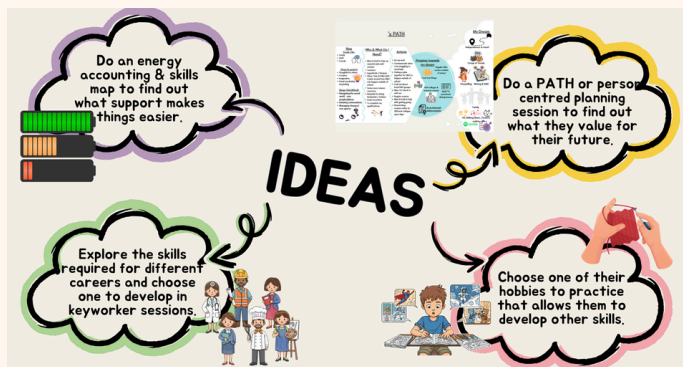
3. Strengths & Interests as Pathways

Personal development grows from what pupils enjoy and do well! Use this as a starting point.



4. Development is Ongoing

Normalise needs changing over time, non-linear pathways and accessing support where needed.



Further Reading & Links

['I did what I could to earn some money and be of use': A qualitative exploration of autistic people's journeys to career success and fulfilment](#)

[Daily living skill support for autistic people through a neurodiversity-affirming practice lens](#)

[LAT Liberty Quality of Life Home](#)

DESCRIPTION

Key worker sessions with year 7 students which address the emotional and physical well being domains of the QoL framework.

These sessions have involved structured stretching routines and breathing exercises towards the end. The stretching routine has provided the opportunity for a wellbeing check in whilst addressing sensory needs. The breathing exercise has been done to support nervous system regulation and emotional regulation. This time has also included the opportunity to rehearse effective coping strategies when calm so that these become usable under stress (Bennett, 2022).

GOALS

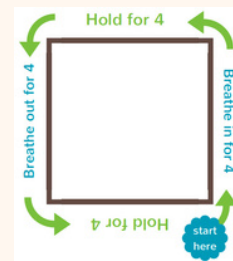
- These sessions were specifically chosen for these students to support their emotional well being during their transition up to secondary school.
- These students transitioned to secondary school in September and expressed anxiety regarding this in summer 2025 and Autumn 2025.
- One student in particular had significantly low attendance last year (around 40%) due to anxieties that she struggled to understand and articulate. She also required a longer period of time to build relationships with staff which created a barrier to accessing earlier support.



PROGRESS / EVIDENCE

Quotes from students:

- “My key worker sessions help me get things out of my system”
- “My favourite thing about my key worker time is being able to debrief”
- “I would rate my key worker sessions a 9/10. My favourite thing about them is the sensory things”



PUPIL OUTCOMES / IMPACT

Engagement slowly increased, from initially doing their own stretches to doing specific stretches and a breathing activity. The students also developed new friendships when peers were introduced and joined he sessions..

KEYWORKER REFLECTION

I can see a visible difference in the students' alertness and readiness to learn before and after the key worker session. It is also the best time to have a catch up with students without distractions.

NEXT STEPS

Continue practicing breathing exercises during sessions. These will then be encouraged to be used during periods of dysregulation. Personalised mini visual to be provided to support breathing.

INTRODUCTION

S joined TVS Hill Brow in September 2025 and shared he has difficulty controlling his anger. Therefore, S has been working on the Zones of Regulation with his keyworker.

ZONES OF REGULATION

Emotions and energy levels are categorised into 4 coloured zones: blue, green, yellow, and red. This creates a common language for recognising and communicating emotions. Though this approach, individuals explore regulation strategies to manage their emotions effectively.

NEWLETTER LINK

In the Yellow Zone, silly
 I look: walking, laughing a lot, can either be quiet or loud, making jokes, happy/ excited
 I feel: heart beating fast, out of breath, moving around a lot
 I act: laughing, telling jokes

S has explored many topics through his Zones of Regulation sessions to foster his self-understanding, such as his triggers, how he looks in each zone, and regulation strategies that work for him.

Strategies have been practised together when calm.

S enjoyed clips from his favourite show, identifying characters' feelings, their causes, and possible regulation strategies.

PROGRESS / EVIDENCE

PUPIL VOICE

S recently shared with his keyworker that he very much **enjoys** their sessions together and that he feels a lot more **happy** and **confident** and that he feels his **self-esteem is a lot higher**. He also said he **“loves life”** and told his keyworker that **“we do make each other laugh”**.

SOME OF THE TARGETS ACHIEVED

- I am able to identify what my facial expression and body language is like when I am in the different zones.
- I can identify that my thoughts and behaviours are linked.
- I am able to identify some things that might help me get back to the green zone.
- I can identify expected situations for the different zones.

KEYWORKER REFLECTION

He's made a lot of progress in recognising when he needs a proactive break and communicating that with staff.

NEXT STEPS

- Remember to use his breathing strategy in lessons when he feels stuck.
- Remind himself to listen to his inner coach and tell himself he can do this.
- Complete the final three sessions in the Zones of Regulation curriculum (stop and use a tool, tracking my tools, stop opt and go).



DESCRIPTION

This case study reviews the application of the 'Zones of Regulation' framework to support understanding and management of emotions during the school day within a member of staff's keyworker sessions. Within sessions the keyworker adapted the principles outlined in week 3 of the Research to Reality newsletter to support an 8 year old autistic pupil to implement strategies to support their emotional regulation and overall wellbeing.



GOALS

The sessions were working towards helping a pupil recognise and name their emotions and bodily sensations so they could regulate their nervous system safely. This aimed to increase their readiness for learning and support social interaction.

The young pupil presents with communication differences, including Gestalt Language Processing, and limited prior experience of structured education. They have sensory sensitivities and benefit from visual, story based, and relationship led approaches to support regulation and emotional understanding.



PROGRESS / EVIDENCE

1. Foster self-understanding

The pupil was supported to recognise emotions alongside bodily sensations (e.g. feeling wriggly, buzzing, or fizzy), helping them identify when they were moving outside the green zone. This increased awareness and supported earlier regulation.

2. Develop communication

Low pressure communication methods such as visual supports, storytelling, and familiar language patterns were used. Over time, this enabled the pupil to clearly communicate basic feelings such as being sad or angry during moments of dysregulation.

3. Create toolkits

Emotion regulation strategies, including movement and sensory input, were practised when calm and in the green zone so they could be accessed when becoming dysregulated. This was demonstrated when the pupil independently used and asked for sensory equipment and movement to return to a regulated state following sensory overload.

4. Model regulation

Adults consistently modelled zones based language by naming zones, emotions, wondering aloud about choices for activities, and practising strategies together. This co-regulation supported the pupil to learn strategies and apply them beyond structured sessions.

5. Balance interests with purpose

Personal interests were used e.g. familiar music and stories intentionally to support emotional understanding and learning to ensure engagement remained purposeful and contributed to improved emotional regulation.

6. Reflect

Reflection was embedded both during sessions and after real life incidents once the pupil returned to a regulated state. This supported growing emotional awareness and the ability to make sense of previous experiences over time.



The Reality

1. Foster Self-understanding
Recognising triggers, bodily sensations, feelings and their window of tolerance.

2. Develop communication
Identifying low pressure ways to communicate & express how they feel.

3. Create Toolkits
What helps? Strategies must be rehearsed when calm to be usable under stress (Bennett, 2022) - practice together.

4. Model
Be a role model - explain what you do & why. This helps transfer skills across contexts.

5. Balance Interests with Purpose
While interests are powerful tools, be mindful they don't reinforce avoidance/escape.

6. Reflect
What worked? What needs to be practiced? Self-reflection increases emotional awareness & confidence over time (Cooper et al, 2022).

PUPIL OUTCOMES / IMPACT

Before the intervention, the pupil could identify happy or sad from facial expressions in sessions. Through the use of visual supports, and familiar fairytale scenarios (e.g. acting out Goldilocks with cut out characters), the pupil is now learning to recognise and understand a wider range of emotions such as silly, excited, and annoyed, both in sessions and across the school day.

KEYWORKER REFLECTION

The keyworker reflected on practice through continuous observation of the pupil's behaviour and physiological state across the school day. The keyworker felt collaboration with specialists, and post incident analyses ensured support remained relational, flexible, and attuned to the pupil's needs with the main focus being relationship building and supporting them to feel safe.

NEXT STEPS

Continue developing emotional vocabulary linked to bodily sensations and triggers while supporting recognition of early signs of dysregulation by supporting understanding of cause and effect. The pupil will also practise independent use of strategies, and generalise these skills across different contexts to strengthen self regulation and resilience.