

Too Much Information – Changing public awareness in the UK

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99.5% of people in the UK have heard of autism, yet only 16% of autistic people and their families said the public understands how autism affects their behaviour. In a recent survey, 70% of parents and 79% of autistic people said they felt socially isolated. We also held focus groups, where families told us their world shrinks after a diagnosis of autism; they often felt judged when in their local community, particularly if they or their child were experiencing distress and behaving unusually. Shockingly, 28% of autistic people have been asked to leave a public place.

Focus group testing showed that with a greater understanding of autism, the general public are able to make the connection between distressed behaviour and autism, and this understanding triggers a natural desire to behave with empathy rather than to be judgemental.

In April 2016, The National Autistic Society launched a campaign to change public attitudes and behavior. Primarily using viral content, social media channels and a media partnership with a leading UK newspaper, we made a film featuring a young autistic actor, which reached 56 million views across the globe within the first month and was shown on the BBC and Sky news. This was developed into a virtual reality film which toured public areas such as shopping centres across the UK.

Over a four month period, there was a growth of 26% in awareness of The National Autistic Society among the newspaper readers. Crucially, across the UK there was a 16% shift in public understanding that getting “Too Much Information”, could impact on autistic people’s behaviour.