



**Lincolnshire Partnership**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Lincolnshire's Virtual Autism Hub



*Supporting people to live well in their communities*

# Virtual Autism Hub: Our Purpose

To enhance the non-clinical community support available to autistic people of all ages and their parent/carers.

Our funding comes from Lincolnshire ICB (Integrated Care Board, previously called CCG) whose job is to plan services & allocate the NHS budget i.e. commission services



## Our Origins

- Lack of support available to the majority of autistic adults & parent/carers who have low-level needs
- Lots of people on waiting list of diagnosis, needs might increase while waiting
- Little information & advice available after diagnosis aside from a few unfunded, overstretched, volunteer-led support groups
- So sometimes problems get worse & family enters crisis unnecessarily
- Our services goes beyond statutory requirements
- Model co-produced with local autism community e.g. community members gave a strong steer that diagnosis shouldn't be needed to access Virtual Autism Hub



# What it can feel like...

Yes, your child's autistic.  
Here's a leaflet. Now off  
you go...



## Why a 'virtual' hub?

- Why not just open a hub building in Lincoln?
- The single hub model used by metropolitan areas (Grimsby, Nottingham) is inappropriate
- 4<sup>th</sup> largest & most sparsely populated county
- Only 1 in 5 live in or around Lincoln
- If we had our own hub that would undermine local support groups having or wanting their own base in towns across the county



# Transport is difficult

For example, someone in Holbeach town attending an appointment in Lincoln:

Many (most) autistics can't drive, many reliant on public transport find it impossible or stressful

The fastest public transport can take 4½ hours each way!

The screenshot shows the Rome2Rio website interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs for 'Transport', 'Hotels', 'Trip Planner', and 'Cars'. The search bar shows the origin as 'Holbeach, England' and the destination as 'Lincoln, England'. Below the search bar, there are two main options:

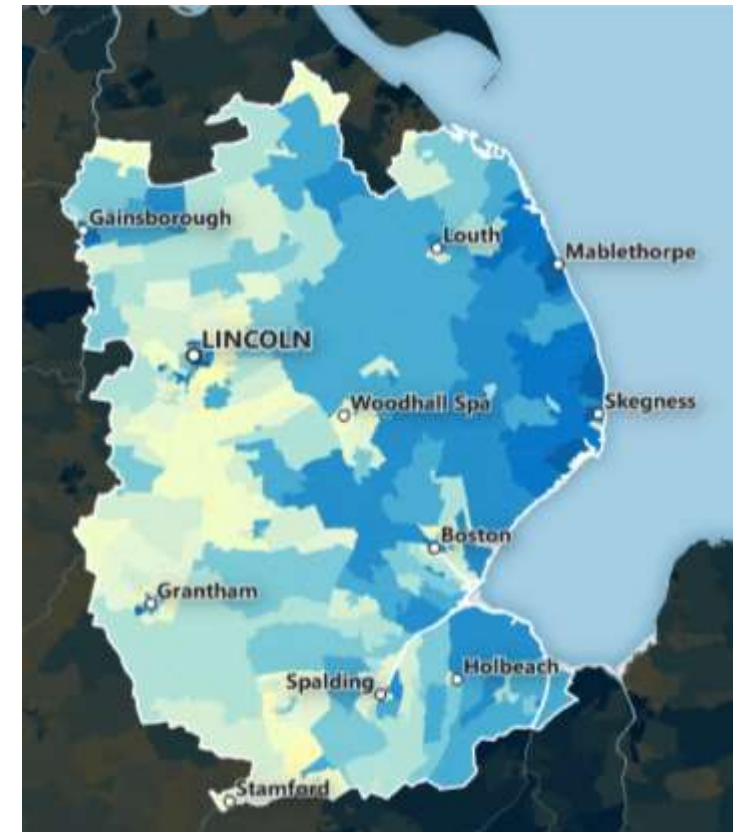
- Option 1:** A car icon, a duration of '52min', and a price range of '£90-110'. It is labeled 'CHEAPEST' and 'Drive 43 miles'.
- Option 2:** A bus icon, a duration of '52min', and a price range of '£12-17'.

Below these are 'MORE OPTIONS' including a bus and train icon, 'Line 37 bus, train', a duration of '4h 28min', and a price range of '£29-95'. To the right of the text is a map showing the route from Holbeach to Lincoln, with various towns and landmarks labeled.



## Our issues are different

- Rural deprivation, especially along the coastline (blue bits are deprived)
- Employment is seasonal
- Thousands live in static caravans
- Suicide associated with rural deprivation
- Different population age structure: high median age, high % aged 75+
- Demographics & issues of (undiagnosed) autistic population are different



## Our offer: Specialist Autism Navigators

We're just getting started and management was recruited in September 2023. Our first service is Specialist Autism Navigators:

- 2 whole time equivalents (4 part-time staff)
- Several have lived experience as parents and professional experience working in SEND
- 'Soft' opening to enquiries January 2024





# Specialist Navigators: Empowering People

- Will provide info & advice about statutory services & voluntary sector support
- Practical help e.g. accompany people to initial meetings, assist them to fill in forms
- Service for autistic adults & parent/carers of autistics of all ages
- Open door policy, no referral needed
- Step in, step out support as needed. Can return to service with future issues.



## Ways to access support from the Specialist Autism Navigators



Face-to-face support across the county, in a place that suits the person



Support over video calls or on the phone



New website and printed info



## Availability

- A Specialist Autism Navigator will be on duty Mon-Fri 9am-5pm
- Available for appointments if needed weekday evenings & Saturday

## Limits to the service

- Support for parent/carers & autistic adults only, not professionals
- Not a clinical, emergency or crisis service
- Can't 'case hold'



# Grant Scheme for Community Groups

- Opened to registration December 2023
- Over £100,000 to distribute in Spring 2024
- Grants for existing groups & those wanting to set up a new support group
- Prioritise autism-specific, volunteer-led groups run by ppl with lived experience
- Intensive grant writing support available to groups with lived experience, as this has previously been a barrier preventing groups accessing money
- Will fund independent consultants to help groups who need to develop their safeguarding, governance or finances



# Grant Process

Based on current SHINE process, which is different from previous autism funding:

1. Registration phase incl. info about group & policies
2. Registration approved (may require external support)
3. Application phase with form giving project info
4. Approval by external panel of experts



## Grants to run Post-Diagnostic courses

- Parent/carers have long been requesting this information and support
- Funding available to pilot courses across county of post-diagnosis support for parents of CYP based on psycho-education incl: what is autism, sensory issues, communication, emotions and emotional regulation, support from the education system. Also give participants an informal network of peer support
- Funding also available for post-diagnostic courses for older CYP themselves
- Course may be provided online or in person
- We already have a post-diagnostic course for autistic adults run by LPFT, plus a session about autism run by an autistic professional through our Recovery College



## Lead Roles

Appointed the following part-time lived experience roles:

- Parent/carer lead
- Autistic adult lead
- Autistic CYP lead

They will network with support organisations & individuals across the county to understand current issues and represent their cohort's views within the hub's steering group



## Contact details:

[lpft.virtualautismhublincs@nhs.net](mailto:lpft.virtualautismhublincs@nhs.net)

01522 458588

(phone messages are monitored less frequently than e-mail inbox)

Virtual Autism Hub  
LPFT  
Unit 3, Trust HQ  
St George's Site  
Long Leys Road  
Lincoln LN1 1FS

