

# Cygnnet Autism Support

## Cost benefit analysis and survey of parents, June 2025

This report references the findings and summarises the results of a survey of parents and carers who accessed the Cygnnet Autism Support 4<sup>th</sup> edition core programme during the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025. It also includes a cost benefit analysis carried out on the Cygnnet programme delivered by the Sandwell Family Hub.

### Overview

**The Cygnnet Autism Support core programme** is for parents and carers of children and young people, aged 5-18, who are autistic. The support programme gives parents and carers an opportunity to develop their understanding of autism and consider ways to support their child, while also providing the opportunity to meet other people in a similar position and exchange experiences in an informal but supportive atmosphere. This is also a universal service, available to those with a child on the pathway or have an autisms diagnosis.

The Cygnnet Autism Support Programme 4<sup>th</sup> edition core programme is delivered over seven two-and-a-half-to-three-hour sessions which include:

- Introductory session
- An overview of autism with parent and carer experience
- Thinking & Sensory
- Social Interaction & Communication
- Understanding and supporting behaviour
- Analysing behaviour
- Group choice

We surveyed 239 parents and carers who have completed the 4<sup>th</sup> edition programme in the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 to ask them how it had impacted their understanding of autism and confidence in supporting their children in 17 different areas. **237 parents (99%) demonstrated an improvement in at least one area.**

- 88% of parents felt more confident recognising how their children understand and receive information.
- 85% felt more confident understanding that their children might have difficulties planning ahead and predicting outcomes.
- 85% felt more confident knowing where to go for support either locally or nationally.
- 83% felt more confident understanding that their children might have differences in expressing information.
- 83% felt more confident recognising and understanding why their children might become overwhelmed and/or emotionally distressed.

### Survey results

The results of each question are below:

**Figure 1: Survey Result Table**

Question		Respondents	Respondents mostly confident or completely confident after the programme	Percentage of respondents mostly confident or completely confident after the programme	Respondents improving in confidence at all	Percentage of respondents improving in confidence at all
1	Understanding your child's need for routines and to engage with special interests.	237	223	94%	183	77%
2	Supporting your child's need for routines and to engage with a special interest.	237	214	90%	194	82%
3	Understanding that your child may experience their senses differently.	237	227	96%	190	80%
4	Supporting your child with their sensory experiences.	237	207	87%	194	82%
5	Understanding that your child might have difficulties with social interactions and social situations.	237	226	95%	168	71%
6	Supporting your child with social interactions and social situations.	237	194	82%	191	81%
7	Recognising how your child understands and receives communication.	239	189	79%	210	88%
8	Understanding that your child might have differences in how express communication.	239	211	88%	198	83%
9	Selecting and using resources to support your child's communication. e.g. Visual supports, social stories.	238	193	81%	196	82%
10	Understanding that your child might have difficulties planning ahead and predicting outcomes.	239	214	90%	204	85%

11	Recognising and understanding why your child might become overwhelmed and/ or emotionally distressed.	238	218	92%	197	83%
12	Supporting your child when they are overwhelmed and / or emotionally distressed.	237	202	85%	185	78%
13	Knowing where to go for support either locally or nationally.	239	177	74%	203	85%
14	Recognising your own needs and looking after yourself.	239	162	68%	190	79%
15	Supporting your child with their needs around sleeping.	230	155	67%	150	65%
16	Supporting your child(ren) and helping them to understand and support the needs of their sibling who is autistic.	205	129	63%	148	72%
17	Supporting your children's development around puberty, sexual wellbeing and relationships.	209	98	47%	143	68%

## Cost benefit analysis

A piece of cost benefit analysis of the Sandwell Family Hubs (covering cases closed between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024) was undertaken. 56 users were supported between April and December 2024.

Our calculations suggest that **the Cygnet parenting programme at the Sandwell Family Hubs delivered benefits of around £3.82 for every £1 spent, or £3,030 per course participant, between April and December 2024.** The benefits to the state and the wider economy could extend beyond this, as we have not been able to quantify any improvements associated with the users' children beyond the social services ones specified (i.e. related to their mental health, wellbeing and prospects). We also believe the treatment is likely to provide additional savings for these families in subsequent years.

## Outcomes

Under Cygnet, service users use a self-report questionnaire before and after the course to assess changes in their own confidence in managing different aspects of the relationship with their child. Available responses range from 0 (no confidence) to 5 (completely confident).

56 users were supported between April and December 2024. Improvements were seen across all questions by a magnitude of 1.7 points on average – or by 31% relative to the tool's 5-point scale – and demonstrates the positive impact of the programme on participants.

## Benefits

We adopt a difference-in-difference framework to estimate the impact of the Cygnet service. We assume that this programme will generate benefits due to improvements in **wellbeing**:

We have identified several benefits associated with the use of support services like Cygnet for parents and carers:

- Positive impacts from group support/support from friends.<sup>1</sup>
- Improvements in parenting self-efficacy by taking part in certain support interventions, alongside an improvement in parent-set goals.<sup>2 3</sup>
- Improvements in parenting competency and reducing parenting stress by taking part in support.<sup>4 5</sup>
- Improvement in child outcomes such as understanding of language and severity of autism characteristics because of interventions delivered by parents.<sup>6</sup>

Though limited, there are also specific studies that point to the benefits of the Cygnet programme itself.

- One such study<sup>7</sup> found a statistically significant (at .05 level) positive correlation in the Intervention Group scores between perceived competency and wellbeing and perceived wellbeing and child behaviour. Put differently, the Cygnet intervention was found to boost parent/carer-perceived competency and parent/carer wellbeing relative to a situation where support was absent.

The point above, together with the user feedback from the service (see **Figure 2**), suggest it is reasonable to attribute an improvement in parent/carer wellbeing to participation on the programme. We note that in addition there may well be some cost benefits to the state though reduced social care costs by, for example, reducing future interventions. We have not attempted to estimate those.

<sup>1</sup> Drogomyretska K, Fox R, Colbert D. Brief Report: Stress and Perceived Social Support in Parents of Children with ASD. *J Autism Dev Disord*. 2020 Nov;50(11): 4176-4182.

<sup>2</sup> Karst JS, Van Hecke AV, Carson AM, Stevens S, Schohl K, Dolan B. Parent and family outcomes of PEERS: a social skills intervention for adolescents with autism spectrum disorder. *J Autism Dev Disord*. 2015 Mar; 45(3): 752-65.

<sup>3</sup> Stuttard, L., Beresford, B. A., Clarke, S. E., Beecham, J., Todd, S., & Bromley, J. (2014). Riding the Rapids: living with autism or disability - an evaluation of a parenting support intervention for parents of disabled children. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 35(10), 2371-2383.

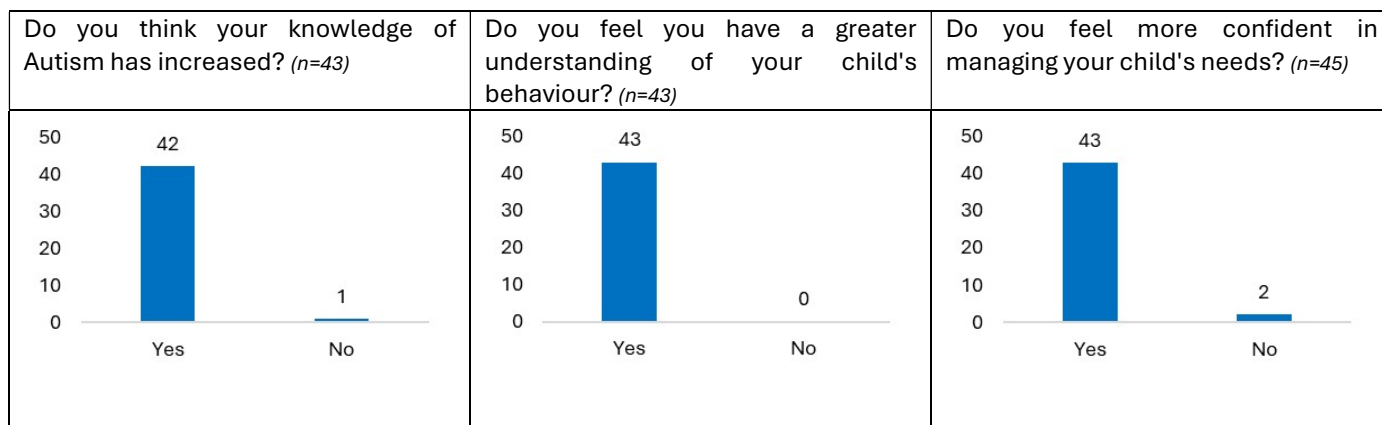
<sup>4</sup> Palmer, M. L., San Jose Caceres, A., Tarver, J. H., Howlin, P. A., Slonims, V., Pellicano, L., & Charman, T (2019). Feasibility study of the National Autistic Society EarlyBird parent support programme. *Autism*, 24(1), 147-159.

<sup>5</sup> Kuravackel, G.M., Ruble, L.A., Reese, R.J. *et al*. COMPASS for Hope: Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Parent Training and Support Program for Children with ASD. *J Autism Dev Disord* **48**, 404-416 (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Oono IP, Honey EJ, McConachie H. Parent-mediated early intervention for young children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2013, Issue 4. Art. No.: CD009774. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD009774.pub2. Accessed 08 January 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Bates, Alison (2018). Cygnet Psycho-educational Intervention Programme for Parents of Children on the Autistic Spectrum: A study exploring changes in the parents' perceived self-efficacy, wellbeing and their children's behaviour. Doctoral thesis (D.Ed.Psy), UCL (University College London).

**Figure 2: End of Programme User Reflections**



**Figure 3: Examples of User Feedback**

*“It has made me understand my son better and helped me see where I was going wrong in raising my voice or feeling stressed, I now stay calm and control the situation. ”*

*“I am able to better support my child and help regulate them. Finding out why they are overwhelmed and then inputting the correct methods to help or if they have a sensory overload. ”*

*“I have more tools and feel more confident. Course was great and leaders was amazing . ”*

*“I now feel that I am not on my own. ”*

*“I can see things before they happen, understand triggers and better understand with communication styles . ”*

*“The programme has given me the tools to help manage my child's needs. I feel a lot more confident. The course has given me the confidence to help and support my child more especially in school. They gave me extra contacts to help me in my child's journey into school. ”*

We therefore have reasonable evidence that participation in the programme led to positive outcomes and that these have led to wellbeing benefits for the course participants.

We have assessed these by assuming that moving from the bottom (0) to the top (5) of the outcomes scale is equivalent to a one-point increase in life satisfaction for one year, which has been assessed by the Treasury to be £14,781. We have scaled this benefit by each individual user's average improvement. So, if a user made an average 1-point improvement across questions, this would translate to a cost saving of £29,564 – 20% of the full scale.

So as not to overstate the benefits we have only included those users who made improvements across at least 75% (i.e. 9 of 12 questions asked: 27 of the 56 participants).



Changing childhoods.  
Changing lives.

Our assumptions also imply that without the intervention, a family would have stayed at the same outcome risk level they were at prior to undergoing the programme.

**Using the above approach, our calculations suggest that the Cygnet programme delivers benefits of around £3.82 for every £1 spent, or £3,030 on average per participant.**