



Synergy

# The **Synergy** Programme

developing **local capacity, practice** and **expertise**

## What is The Synergy Programme?

- Synergy began in Greece in 2013 as a partnership between AT-Autism and the Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation, Piraeus. This was in response to children excluded from Greek schools by reason of 'challenging behaviour'. Some of these children were autistic, some were refugees, some with intellectual disabilities some with mental health needs.
- The main focus of Synergy is on the mind-set and stress of teacher (worker) or parent – not the behaviour of the child. This helps to develop self-awareness and empathy for how the child experiences the world. It begins to change narrative, culture and the nature of the relationship. Synergy is now used by workers in a number of disciplines, including people with intellectual disabilities, refugees, homeless people and autistic children and adults. There is an ongoing evaluation by the Universities of Athens and the Peloponnese.
- Synergy is about building local capacity and is currently operating in several countries, including Greece, Australia and the UK.

## What are the **main aims** of Synergy?

### **Synergy aims to:**

- Build capacity through short, intensive CPD accredited training which aids fidelity and makes the programme sustainable and economically viable. It is the intention to make each Synergy programme self-reliant. This is supported by a network of local mentors.
- Change the way the worker thinks about behaviours that challenge and offer practical strategies based on ethical approaches. Focus on biased or harmful mind-sets, thereby developing self-awareness and reducing stress. This in turn will change harmful narratives and cultures around vulnerable individuals and relationships.
- Encourage a deeper understanding through skilled listening and reflection. To make 'conscious' good practice 'unconscious' through rehearsal, reflection and doing. Reductionist, punitive or unethical approaches that focus on 'changing' child behaviour are rejected.

## How does Synergy **work**?

- Synergy seeks to develop ethical and practical strategies for changing worker thinking, beliefs and behaviour. Instinctive, biased or impulsive responses are replaced by those, which are rational, calm and planned. In essence it is a philosophy for life.
- Synergy recognises the importance of being 'present' and listening. Role models promote a positive culture, challenge unethical practice, harmful narratives and reduce stress.

### **The Synergy programme comprises**

1. One 90 minute seminar to explain overall aims.  
This can be to a whole school or organisation (optional)
2. One six-hour intensive practice workshop delivered by experienced mentors or the AT-Autism team (CPD)
3. One six-hour mentor workshop delivered by experienced mentors or the AT-Autism team (CPD)
4. Mentor support by experienced mentors or the AT-Autism team as requested.
5. Further bespoke courses; are available and mentors have access to the **AT-Autism Synergy Mentor Network** at all times. There is an annual conference.

## What is the **theoretical basis** of Synergy?

- **Synergy has its roots in Greek philosophy:**  
Respect, tolerance, self-awareness and knowing one's own limitations, allied to established psychological, physiological and sociological theory.
- **Psychological context:**  
Emphasis on understanding self. Bias, false assumptions and narratives are examined and challenged. Recognition of the importance of role-models in human services. Empowerment through reflective practice, and developing agency – not merely 'giving advice'. Teaching skills for listening, planning and problem-solving.
- **Physiological context:**  
An understanding of stress mechanisms and how stress impacts our behaviour. This includes strategies for stress reduction.
- **Sociological context:**  
*Verstehen* (deep understanding of the person and culture) involves the rejection of superficial approaches that contribute to negative or harmful stereotypes, cultures and narratives which impact policies and relationships. *Verstehen* is important in developing empathy. Being in touch with the lived experience of the person and their story.

## More **information**

There is an annual **Synergy** conference where all partners are invited to attend and contribute. In addition annual **Synergy** practice seminars are organised locally.

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