



EASY READ REPORT

# What We Learned from the Discovery Programme

March 2025





## What Is This Report About?

- This report is about the **Discovery Programme**.
- The Discovery Programme is a **support group** for Autistic adults.
- It is run by **Autistic professionals**.
- The programme **helps people understand** themselves and **feel good** about being Autistic.
- In 2024 and 2025, Thriving Autistic got funding from **Rethink Ireland** and the **Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth**. This money gave **136 people** free tickets to Discovery.
- This report shows what worked well and how it **helped Autistic adults** across the globe.



## Who We Are

- Thriving Autistic runs the Discovery Programme.
- We are a group of **Autistic professionals** who help other Autistic people.
- We work globally across many countries, like **Ireland**, the **UK**, the **USA**, and **Canada**.
- Our work includes **therapy, coaching, speaking up for people's rights** (this is called advocacy), and training others to **support Autistic people** in kind and respectful ways. This **neuro-affirming approach** means understanding and accepting Autistic people without trying to change who they are.





# What Is the Discovery Programme?

- It is a **6-week group support programme**.
- It includes **Live workshops every week**.
  - People could join in ways that work for them.
  - For example, people could join by talking, typing in the chat, and using their camera if they wanted to.
- People could watch **videos and resources** and read at their own speed, before or after the workshops.
- **An online community forum** was offered as a private place to connect and share with others.
- People could meet privately with Autistic professionals in **one-to-one sessions**.
- People could get **help with writing letters for support**. For example, letters for work, doctors or healthcare, education or school.

# How We Did the Evaluation

- We wanted to find out if the programme worked.
- We asked people who joined the programme to fill in a survey and to talk in interviews.
  - To fill in a survey (45 people)
  - To talk in interviews (11 people)
- The team doing the research were all people whose brains work differently from what is considered typical, such as Autistic people, people with ADHD, dyslexia, or other differences.
- We offered flexible ways to answer.



# What We Found

## 1. Autistic-Led Support Is Powerful

- People felt safe and understood.
- They liked that the facilitators were Autistic too. This helped them feel safe and understood. It created a space where people shared similar experiences.

**100** out of 100 people were **happy with the programme.**



# What We Found

## 2. Better Understanding and Self-Advocacy

- People learned what internalised ableism means (feeling bad for being different).
- They learned how to ask for what they need.
- They felt more confident about their needs, and proud of their Autistic identity.



# What We Found

## 3. Feeling Better and More Connected

- People said they felt:
  - Better about themselves (this means their wellbeing improved).
  - More sure about who they are as Autistic people.
  - More connected to other Autistic people.

**73** out of every  
100 people  
said their **wellbeing** got better.

**82** out of every  
100 people felt  
**more positive** about being Autistic.



# What We Found

## 4. Taking Part in the World

- People said the group helped them in the following ways:
  - People were more able to make friends and connect with others.
  - They felt less alone.
  - They were able to join in more at work, at home, or in the community.

## 5. Help with Everyday Life

- People said the programme helped with:
  - Relationships with friends, family, partners or other important people in their lives
  - Work and job support
  - Explaining or telling people what they need at home, in education or school, or with healthcare or doctors
  - They felt more able to share their views and say what they need in ways that suited them.



## ■ One-to-One and Advocacy Support

**65** people  
talked to a coach or therapist  
in private sessions

**119** people got help with advocacy  
(this means someone helped them say  
what they wanted or write letters to get support).

People talked about work, where they live (this is called housing), school or education, and their health.





## What People Suggested

- People had great ideas for the future of the Discovery Programme:
  - Make the sessions longer or offer more options.
  - Talk more about ADHD, burnout, and relationships.
  - Make the website easier to use.
  - Offer small groups and breakout rooms.
  - Give more ongoing support after the programme.

## What We Will Do Next

- Train more new facilitators every year.
- Create more courses on topics like relationships and parenting.
- Build mentorship programmes.
- Partner with education and workplace settings, and healthcare providers to help pay for Discovery.



# Sharing Through Film

- Two animated short films were made:
  - **“Discovering You're Autistic”** – about finding your Autistic identity and connecting with others
  - **“Lightbulb Moments: Being Autistic”** – about learning and growth of Autistic experiences that often get missed

## Final Thoughts

- The Discovery Programme works.
- It helps Autistic people **feel better** about who they are.
- It helps people **express their needs and connect** with others.
- We will keep **growing and improving**.

Our heartfelt thanks to Rethink Ireland and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, who helped fund the programme, the films and this research.

