



Hearing Accepting Valuing Every Neurotype

INFORMATION SESSION



Agenda

What is HAVEN?

How was HAVEN developed?

What are HAVEN groups?

How can I access training?

Recent research

Networking and collaboration

What is HAVEN?

HAVEN aims to create safe, accepting groups for neurodivergent students.

The groups aim to provide opportunities for students to:

- Have positive social experiences at school
- Feel accepted and valued, build confidence in communication and engagement.
- Opportunities to meet peers with similar interests or that they can identify with.

Replacing traditional 'social skills / friendships group'
Interventions



How was it developed?

Initial Pilot: coproduction with...

- Speech and Language Therapists,
- Educational Psychologist,
- Occupational Therapy
- Researchers at University of Manchester
- Autistic young adults

Revised version:

- Feedback from Neurodivergent young people aged 11-15
- Feedback from experienced, trained facilitators



Research Project

Collaboration / Coproduction with University of Manchester



ARC-GM NIHR Funding for initial Feasibility and Acceptability Project

Plans for application for wider scale research grant



A New Approach



Moving away from historical approaches.



Seeks to provide the 'best-fit' environment (sensory, social and environmental considerations)



Connecting neurodivergent students together



Valuing and celebrating difference



Importance of shared interests and experiences.

What do the groups look like?



Small group (max 6 students)

Facilitated by Trained Facilitator (HAVEN™ trained)

Interest-based / student-led activities

‘Safe-space to be myself’ (rather than ‘coaching’ NT social skills)

Neurodivergent-friendly environment

Regular times – timetabled

Consistent and loose structure



How can I be trained / deliver groups?

Groups can be delivered in Mainstream Secondary Education Settings by any trained member of staff.

Training:

- Delivered by HAVEN Project Leads (Specialist Speech and Language Therapists)
- 1 day training session – offered to GM Mainstream Secondary Schools staff
- Member of Senior Leadership Team + staff to run sessions (up to 3 places per setting)
- Facilitators expected to deliver a cycle of a HAVEN group within 9 months
- Facilitators to attend supervision session (online) following a cycle of groups to gain full accreditation.

Supervision (online) offered 6 monthly to all trained facilitators

Content of the 1 Day Training Session

1. Introduction to neuroaffirmative practice
2. Research on social connections
3. Initial research on HAVEN
4. Setting up groups
5. Facilitating groups

All staff have an action plan that they fill in throughout the training.

GM Roll out



200+ staff have attended 1 day training from 20+ secondary schools in Manchester



Pilot in Manchester Primary schools through the PINS project



GM Roll out started in January 2026



Best outcomes when embedded in a whole school approach (e.g. Neurodiversity on schools / other neuro-affirmative initiatives)



Two studies of acceptability:

Aims:

- Study One: to explore **student** (N= 15) experiences and impact of attending a HAVEN group
- Study Two: to explore **facilitators** (N = 11) experiences and perspectives of attending the training session, and running of HAVEN groups

Methods:

- Semi Structured Interview procedure
- Options to respond verbally or in writing/typing

Analysis:

- Neurodiverse research team
- Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: HAVEN brings real-life benefits to most

I have built social connections and made friends

"I feel like being in this group has made me rethink a few friendships of mine outside of it. Since... the people in this group, I can just get along with really well."

I feel more accepted and socially confident

"I like the group because I get to be myself in that group"

"Social anxieties lessened a bit ... Outside the group too...just generally talking to people got easier"

I enjoy and value the sessions

"It's good because we can share common interests."

Haven helps me to regulate at school

*"It's not stressful like most lessons"... "They're relaxing, and they help me get to safe space of mind."
"I want to come in on a Thursday"*

Varied reporting of benefits

*Interviewer: Ok, have you noticed any benefits from coming to the baking group?
Student: I don't know*

Theme 2:

Groups must reflect my needs & preferences

I value the social dynamics of the group

"it was more of a private space, where- just people who are, like, more like me other than everyone else"

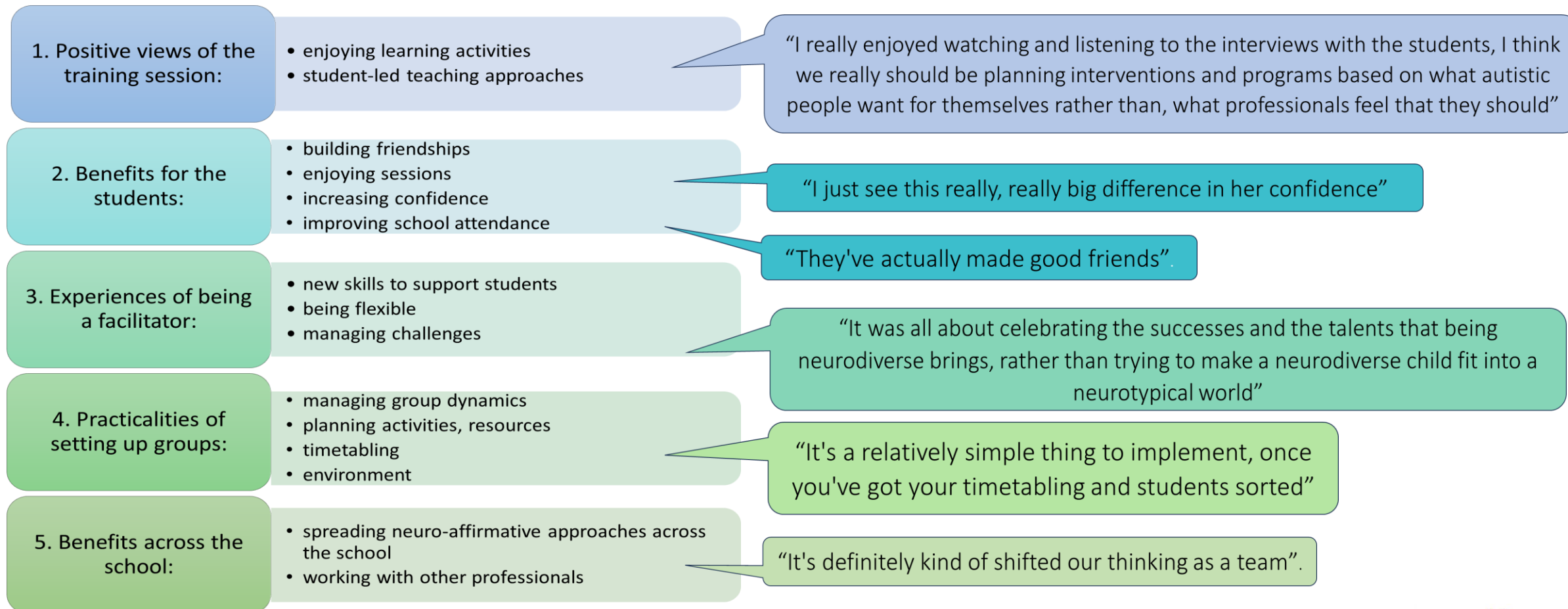
The environment and organisation is neurodivergent- friendly

"it was quiet, that- that's the main thing."

Conflicting academic pressures

"Sometimes you might end up missing a lesson, or missing some of my work, but I would say it's a fair trade off"

Impact: Facilitator's perspective



Manchester	45
Trafford	9
Salford	15
Tameside	9
Stockport	3
Oldham	2
Rochdale	2
Bolton	5
Wigan	8
Bury	9

Current GM roll out

MHST

We are collaborating with MHST across GM to train practitioners to support schools in delivering HAVEN

We have trained Trafford, Manchester and Salford MHST

Trainees accessing the LDA or EWP IAPT course have also had training on HAVEN



Student feedback

“ It was chill and calm, it has helped me to meet more people”

“ The group made me enjoy more time with other people and to be myself”.

"I like the group because they are different people, it has helped me to become more comfortable with people”.

"I feel the group is basically amazing; it has helped me because I fidget a lot”.

"I feel like the group accepts me; it has helped me with my moods”

"I feel like the group is kind and respectful, it has helped me to calm down”.

Feedback

Feedback

Facilitator feedback

I wanted to share that I ran our first HAVEN session yesterday with a group of young ladies, we have decided to do creative activities with them and will be changing what we do each week.

The session was absolutely brilliant; I've never seen them interact with other students so openly and none of them felt the need to mask. It genuinely made me feel quite emotional to see their raw interactions and several members of staff from different departments commented on how lovely the intervention was when they walked past or asked to take a look.

I've attached a photo of the clay figures that were made, please feel free to use my voice and the photo in any future training sessions. It felt really freeing to just let them be who they are and to have evidence from yourselves to back the case for this.



Feedback

Facilitator feedback

Furthermore, the group of students with ADHD appears to have reached a turning point. They have begun to recognise that each individual has different needs, triggers and coping mechanisms.

Moving forward, if this group continues to build and practice coping strategies together, it will provide them with valuable tools they can use both within the group and in the wider school environment.

Observing and supporting this group has helped me realise that providing a calm, supportive space where students can develop coping strategies may be an effective approach for helping other students with ADHD. These strategies can then be transferred into their everyday school experiences

Further developments

1. Train the trainer model being piloted in Manchester with Community Speech and Language Therapy Colleagues
2. Further pilot of HAVEN for Primary Schools being trialed in Manchester
3. GM Secondary Schools Roll out will continue from September 2026-July 2027
4. Regular Supervision slots will be offered to trained facilitators
5. Funding application will be submitted for a research grant to continue to build the evidence base for the intervention



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