Work Options for Autistic Job Seekers
Introducing......

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- Christina Earl, Senior Operations Manager, Employment & Communities, Surrey Choices

- Justine McManus, Disability Employment Adviser for Surrey Cluster, Guildford Job Centre
Aims of the session

• 1 hour to explore what the options are for autistic job seekers:
  • Generally
  • Specific to Surrey

• 30 mins panel session for questions, sharing case studies, signposting.
AS Mentoring

- Support adult with ASCs to explore work goals, find and retain work – social inclusion through work.
- Set up 2013, following change in services that could be delivered by NAS
- Started with one member of staff covering London
- 2019: 27 mentors; 150+ clients – London, Surrey/Hants, Birmingham, Bristol, Dorset, remote support.
- Operate as a not for profit. Seek to find a funding stream for clients; some clients self fund.
Some sobering statistics

• Only **16% of autistic adults are in full time work**; Unchanged in 10 years

• Another **16% in part time work** – overall employment rate of 32%

• Three-quarters of those unemployed want to work

• 4 in 10 autistic people working part-time feel **under-employed**

• Many autistic workers feel they are in **low-skilled work**

• Autistic graduates have the **highest unemployment rate amongst all graduates** – 22%

• ‘**Hidden unemployed**’ – many autistic job seekers are not claiming job seeking benefits

Barriers to work for autistic job seekers

• **Confidence** - Most common reason for not being in work or looking for work is lack of confidence (23% of job survey respondents in NAS Survey, 2016)

• **Recruitment process** – geared around communication

• **Finding the right role** - “Square holes for square pegs”¹

• **Lack of work experience**

• **Understanding of autism** – and understanding how it impacts in the workplace – employer and prospective employee

¹ Business Disability Forum Report: Current practice in employment and autism
So what are the options?

• Education: Stay in education for as long as possible??? Further Education; Higher Education

• Work
  • Work preparation: Supported internships; work experience; work placements

  • Employment: with autism ‘understanding’ employers, autism specific placement programmes; apprenticeships

  • Self employment (e.g. ASC graduates)
Pathways to employment

- Full time paid employment
- Part time paid employment
- Short term paid role (temporary)
- Work Placement – usually unpaid; PT or FT
- Work Experience – unpaid; PT or FT
- Volunteering

Expectations
Autistic workers usually need a "Communication Bridge"
What support is available

• Pre-employment support
  • explicit teaching – work prep; social skills for workplace;
  • Experience of the workplace: work shadowing; work experience; placements; internships

• Job searching/careers guidance and advice

• Navigating the recruitment process – guidance on reasonable adjustments; support at interview; disclosing a diagnosis; work trials

• In work support – reasonable adjustments at work; autism awareness training; specialist workplace support
Reasonable Adjustments

- Equality Act (2010)

To make Reasonable Adjustments, in order to remove/ minimize the barriers/ disadvantages faced by individual disabled employees.

- For autistic people adjustments are often very minor but not always obvious either to employer or employee - e.g. change of desk position, change of working hours to avoid rush-hour travel, wearing noise-cancelling headphones at work, reserving a favourite hot lunch at the canteen(!)
Who can support?

- AS Mentoring
- (Autism Success Formula)
- Independent Mentors
- Autism Forward
- NAS
- Ambitious About Autism
- Disability Employment Advisers
- Access to Work
- Specialist Support: Remploy; Kennedy Scott
- Surrey Choices Employability
- ESRA
- Richmond Fellowship
- SLLP
- Disability Employment Advisers
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- Surrey Choices Employability
- ESRA
- Richmond Fellowship
- SLLP
- Autism Charities
- Autism Specialist Providers
- DWP
- Supported Employment Providers
- AS Mentoring
- (Autism Success Formula)
- Independent Mentors
Case Studies

Georgina: Age 39
- Left Uni at 20 as too anxious to continue with IT degree.
- Spent 16 years as self-employed part-time gardener, after other casual jobs.
- Started pre-employment mentoring support: worked on confidence, finding focus; exploring pathways back into IT.
- Successfully applied for 24 mth IT Software Developer apprenticeship, reasonable adjustments at interview.
- Specialist mentoring workplace support (outside of work) funded by Access to Work; accessing psychological therapies, funded by employer following Occupational Health assessment.

Frank: Age 20
- Left school with 4 GCSEs (not English).
- Family friend found him warehouse work. Not suited to environment; wasn’t able to focus in role; always late – facing disciplinary process.
- Mentoring support to explore skills, autism impact.
- Work shadow day organised to visualise the role; supported direct approach to employers.
- Found paid employment as Trainee Groundsman. Workplace support funded by Access to Work.
- Now part qualified tree surgeon undertaking specialist courses with adjustments.
- Working and studying independently as equipped with self advocacy skills.
Further resources

Business Disability Forum: autism and employment guide
http://www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/mediamanager/public/261/Square%20Pages_Final_GF.PDF

Equality Act 2010

Access to Work
https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work

Autism Forward Trust: charity which provides funding for employment mentors
http://www.autismforward.org.uk/