

ProACT and Autism Inclusive

Adults with autism supported employment project

ProAct is a small organisation comprising of a trainer and a consultant who support a range of organisations including residential care services and local charities.

Autism Inclusive is a voluntary community organisation. It was founded by a group of adults with autism in response to their experiences of support services, which they found to be failing people affected by autism and their families.

ProACT and Autism Inclusive have worked closely together on a number of projects. From previous meetings with people with autism, we found that there was demand for specialist autism training around employment. To meet this demand, we decided to work together on a supported employment project

What we wanted to achieve

The objective of this project was to enable adults with autism to live independent, fulfilling and rewarding lives through active participation in employment.

Adults with autism are often educated and dedicated employees with an excellent work ethic and high quality standards. However due to the nature of autism and its inherent impairment in interaction, communication and flexible thinking, many people with autism are unsuccessful at the interview stage or are unable to maintain employment due to the difficulties they face with the social demands of working life without appropriate support.

According to research, only 15% of adults with autism find long term employment. It is reported that this is largely due to the disadvantage they face at routine selection processes which rely heavily on the ability to socially interact and socially communicate.

This project aimed to address these issues in the following ways:

For the individual with Autism

We wanted to provide autism specific social skills training, interview preparation and practical help and advice on subjects including CV and application form completion. We also wanted to provide a liaison service to offer support to individuals throughout the selection process (including how to make reasonable adjustment requests) and their initial period of employment if successfully employed.

For potential employers

We also wanted to deliver training, advice and support to local community employers and employment services in order to raise awareness of autism spectrum conditions. Part of this would also include positively promoting our beneficiaries as capable and motivated potential employees. We also wanted to provide ongoing advice and support services for any individual with autism and their employer who is placed in permanent positions as a result of their participation in this project.

What we did

As part of this project we:

- Ran twelve weekly sessions offering advice, support and specialist training for nine people with autism. We also provided advocacy services and supported participants to make reasonable adjustment requests to their employer. This work included working with local employer, Bentleys Motors.
- Delivered a specialist 'Supporting an Employee with Autism' training course for 207 managers, supervisors and employees. Organisations included Barclays, Chester Zoo, Cheshire Centre For Independent Living, Hawk Electrical and 3P.
- Hosted an open event and forum where employers were invited to attend to meet people with autism and receive specialist advice regarding employing people with a diagnosis. No employees choose to attend.

Thanks so much for the training, everyone really enjoyed it – and from that I hope we'll be able to think about improving the environment here. My son will be doing his work placement in June, which we are also hoping will be the start of a bigger work placement programme for teenagers with Autism.

Parent of participant

What we learnt

There were two main challenges in the project.

1) Even though all the attendees of the support session had a diagnosis of autism spectrum conditions, simply entering a new environment and meeting and interacting with new people (even though themselves diagnosed) was difficult. We operated a 'flexible' time system so that people could still access the service without being over-whelmed. This highlighted some of the issues faced when entering employment where the environment is not so welcoming or adjustable.

2) By far the biggest challenge was the general negativity from employers regarding accepting training, even with no cost. In total over 200 individual companies were contacted. These were targeted specifically at those industries where the strengths of people with autism tend to lie (science, engineering or information technology). Only 8 replied and accepted the training. Of these, some were clearly requesting general autism training and nothing specific to employing people on the spectrum. This is also reflected in the zero turnout on the open forum.

We found that from talking to attendees both pre and post training, that there is a media-driven stereotype of people on the autism spectrum. This stereotype often portrays people with autism as being low-functioning individuals who display challenging behaviour and need a high level of associated care.

We feel it would be beneficial to offer further training to employers and organisations regarding what autism actually is and how it presents itself as a spectrum. We hope this will help to dismantle these stereotypes before specific training on employing people with autism.

Being on an autism specific supported employment scheme really reduced some of my anxieties around attending and looking for work

Participant

For more information please contact

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Skills for Care Recommends

Skills for Care has helped to develop a range of resources that directly help employers and those caring for people with autism.

Autism skills and knowledge list

This enables individual workers, or services and teams, to work out whether they have the knowledge and skills needed to provide a good service to people who have autism.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Autism

Autism qualifications

There are two autism qualifications. These are a Level 3 Award and a Level 3 Certificate in Supporting Individuals on the Autistic Spectrum.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Autism

Workforce Development Fund

Funding is available for employers to claim back costs for the learning and development of their staff, including Autism units and qualifications.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/wdf

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