

## Portsmouth Autism Community Forum

### Notes from the Forum meeting on Wednesday 28 November 2018 at Buckland Community Centre, Portsmouth

1 The meeting was attended by 25 people - a mixture of autistic people, carers, parents and professionals.

2. Rosie Penlington from Portsmouth City Council and Portsmouth Clinical Commissioning Group, opened the meeting and explained its focus on employment.

2 Nicola Webb and Teresa Salter from Portsmouth Job Centre Plus gave an overview of the help they can offer to autistic people and answered questions from forum members:

- **How do you overcome barriers to coming in to the jobs centre for first meeting?**

The job centre will try and make reasonable adjustments - such as meeting the autistic person at the door, arranging private interview rooms rather than meeting in the open plan job centre.

- **Do you identify autistic people?**

Job centre staff have received the autism ambassador training - we ask that autistic people contact us beforehand so that we can make arrangements.

- **Are you able to help if there is a problem with registering online for benefits?**

There is an option to register offline as well as online - job centre staff are able to help people to use the computer system to register.

- **How can we make the job centre less intimidating?**

People on the ground floor are there to help with signposting and claiming benefits and can make an appointment with a work coach. We're trying to promote our services so that autistic people know what is available to them, we can make appointments.

- **Lots of younger autistic people wont go to the job centre, have you thought about offering home visits or other ways or working?**

Unfortunately the DWP doesn't have the resources to make home visits or go to other venues. Adjustments can be made to make the job centre more user-friendly - for example we can make private rooms available and have thought about possible designating specific days for autistic people to use the services.

- **Could we (the forum) work with you to develop a leaflet for autistic people?**

Yes we are happy to work with the forum on this and happy to be the contact point.

- **Does the Job Centre have advocates available? Having an advocate will help people who maybe don't know where to begin with claiming benefits and help them overcome the perceived hostile environment.**

The Job Centre does work with support workers, we don't have a list of advocates.

- **How flexible can the DWP be in arranging appointments for signing on etc?**  
If the claimant is on Job Seekers Allowance there is no flexibility in signing on as there are strict rules around the benefit. Universal Credit and Employment Support Allowance have more flexibility - appointments can take place with skype, online or via email. ESA is for people who may not be able to work. To receive JSA claimants need to be available for work.
- **How many jobs are JSA claimants required to apply for per week?**  
This is set for the individual. We would expect them to undertake 35 hours of job searching a week, not have to apply for 35 jobs. If Job Centre work coaches are aware that someone is autistic they can make adjustments to any requirements.
- **Can an autistic person be supported to find appropriate work?**  
DWP staff can talk to employers about reasonable adjustments and will know of companies that are autism-friendly.
- **How do we get employers to take into account the processes and reasonable adjustments when they don't want to make changes in the interview?**  
We hope that by working with employers we can ensure that reasonable adjustments are made. Something like agreeing the interview questions in advance would be good for everybody.
- **We have heard of cases of bullying and JSA claimants being forced into inappropriate jobs - it is the parents that have to pick up the pieces.**  
The Equalities Act can be used to ensure fair, and challenge unfair, practices. Unfortunately the reality is that autistic people are disadvantaged. We need to develop a better way of assessing competences.
- **JSA is crude - its only aim seems to be to get people into a job**  
We wouldn't put an autistic person into a job which isn't appropriate.
- **The first steps in seeking work can have a major impact on the person's whole life as there is no satisfaction in a job if an individual doesn't want to do it.**  
Job Centre advisers can help with practice interviews and other preparation to reduce the stress in getting a job.
- **Lots of autistic people are not claiming benefits- who do we contact for help?**  
The DWP people does try to reach out - the Forum has a role in publicising the help available.
- **Could the Forum develop an offer for people - develop family support?**
- **There are no employers here - we need to get employers involved in discussions, many companies do not know what to do to make reasonable adjustments.**  
Access to work adjustments can be made but employers need to be aware of what is available.
- **Small businesses can find it hard to employ autistic people - they don't have the time or resource to make reasonable adjustments.**

See also [information on Evenbreak service for jobseekers](#)

### 3. Philip Freed of the You Trust then set out the help they can offer to autistic people

The You Trust can help adults 18+ into work, referrals are accepted through the Kestrel Centre. The Trust would like to expand to work with anyone with a disability to help them to find and sustain a job. Currently referrals received through the Kestrel Centre are free, other referrals will need to be funded.

The You Trust can help with voluntary and paid work as well as advise those at risk of redundancy. Advisors will sit down with an individual to create a job profile and look at different types of work so that they are lined up for the best job. Support is also offered with interviews. The Trust can carry out 'job carving' -ie taking out bits of jobs to allow people to gain experience.

The You Trust is currently set up to work with people with learning disabilities. Autism is not a learning disability so many young autistic people can fall through the net, the You Trust would like to offer its services more widely but would need funding.

The You Trust doesn't have the restrictions of the Job Centre but is not able to access the resources of the Job Centre.

The Forum has a role in highlighting the need for services for autistic people such as those offered by the You Trust.

Perceptions of autism need changing - moving away from the 'Rain Man' stereotype.

Autism Hampshire run free workshops for employers and seek to build positive relationships with employers so that they acknowledge the range of possibilities.

### 4. Shirley Davies and Martin Ford of the National Careers Service gave an overview of the National Careers Service and outlined the help that they are able to provide for autistic people.

NCS (<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/>) is a free service, funded by the Department for Education and Skills, available to all adults enabling them to find out about careers and career development.

The NCS has three channels - website, phone and face to face. Advisors are based in jobs centres and are able to travel to see clients but will only go to public places, not homes.

The NCS has worked with Autism Hampshire on a workshop on autism friendly interview skills

All NCS staff are aware of autism and will make reasonable adjustments to ensure that individual needs are met. The service complements other organisations such as job centres.

The meeting heard positive feedback on the NCS services and the help available to autistic people.

## 5. Updates

Liz McDonald, Portsmouth City Council - following on from the July Forum meeting autism is now included in 25 workstreams. After a meeting with Jenny Wessels the elearning resource is to be included in the pathway to raise awareness. It is hoped that there will be an autism ambassador in every school.

Dynamite - the first autism focus group was held in September. A further group is planned for 13 December 2018 to talk about autism affects us - flyer to be circulated.

## 6. Next steps

A future session will look at the gaps in provision - it is hoped to co-design a leaflet with the Job Centre. Beatriz Lopez of Portsmouth University's Autism Centre for Research on Employment will be invited to contribute as well as employers. Beatriz is currently developing a course for the university students to equip them to move into work successfully - details will be circulated to the forum.

## 7. Next meeting

The next forum meeting will be on Thursday 28 February 2019