

FACT SHEET



AUTISM AND EMPLOYMENT: A GUIDE FOR NEW EMPLOYERS

In this fact sheet Employ for Ability Managing Director David Smith draws on his knowledge and experience in neurodiverse recruitment to provide an overview of what you need to know when employing a neurodiverse person.

What is autism and neurodiversity?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition. It affects people in different ways, but common characteristics are deficits in social and communication skills and restricted, repetitive behaviours and interests. Many people have sensory processing difficulties.

Prevalence rates in Australia are estimated to be about 2% of the population. People with ASD have the normal range of intelligence, compared to their neurotypical colleagues. Being a spectrum disorder, no two individuals are the same and many business owners and managers do not fully understand the nature of ASD and the strengths people with this condition can provide to their workplace.

In society we see diseases and disorders as something to be fixed or cured. This is called the medical model of disability. With ASD being a condition that is lifelong and with no cure, the social model of disability is a better lens to consider workers through.

The worker cannot change their ASD and the environment around them needs to be modified so that they can succeed. When we see someone in a wheelchair, we know we need to remove the steps so they can reach the entrance. For ASD and other psychosocial disabilities the steps that need to be removed are less obvious, but just as important.



ASD from a social model of disability is often referred to as neurodiversity.

Why hiring neurodiverse staff is important

Being employed develops a sense of purpose, achievement and provides opportunities to improve social status and contribute to society.

Job seekers with ASD face serious challenges gaining meaningful employment. The employment rates of people with a disability in Australia are 53% and for people with ASD are 42% (ABS, 2014). There are higher rates of employment for workers with an intellectual disability than those with ASD.

Workers with ASD are demonstrating through work programs across Australia that they make excellent employees with some very good employment strengths over neurotypical workers.

Modern recruitment programs involve an interview and either consciously or

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subconsciously we hire people who have strong communication and social skills. These skills are often weaknesses in someone with ASD and they often do not perform strongly at interview.

Many roles do not require strong communication and social skills and require strengths in areas an ASD job seeker has, but often cannot articulate at an interview.

Workplaces that are ditching the interview and hiring based on work experience, trials or assessment centres are reflecting that this is a much better method of determining a worker's suitability for the role.

Benefits of hiring an ASD worker

A neurodiverse workforce is an innovative workforce. Autistic individuals don't see 'the box' to think within, can bring diversity of thought and often create innovative solutions neurotypical individuals wouldn't be able to create.

Understanding, embracing and supporting different methods of thinking and delivering can release the true ability of the neurodiverse worker. Here are some of the great strengths of neurodiverse individuals.

1. Attention to detail
 - Thoroughness
 - Accuracy
2. Methodical approach
 - Analytical
 - Pattern recognition, following repetitive processes accurately
3. Deep focus
 - Concentrate on task for long periods
 - Ability to not be distracted
4. New ideas
 - Unique thought processes create new ideas
 - Create innovative solutions to long standing problems
5. Observational skills
 - Listen, look, learn approach
 - Fact finding
6. Creativity
 - Original imagination
 - Happy to express ideas different to their peers
7. Absorb and retain facts
 - Excellent long-term memory
 - Superior recall
8. Tenacity and resilience
 - Determination to succeed
 - Will challenge others' opinions



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9. Visual skills
 - Visual learners and recall
 - Detail focused
10. Accepting of differences
 - Less likely to judge others
 - May question social norms
11. Expertise
 - In-depth knowledge on their favourite topics
 - High level of expertise and skills
12. Integrity
 - Honest and loyal
 - Strong commitment to work.

Every neurodiverse person will be unique and may not identify with every positive feature of autism. We all have unique skills, ways of thinking and personalities. This is the power of neurodiversity. If you hire people who are all the same, you will not innovate and grow as an organisation.

Other benefits to your organisation will be that staff who have ASD but have not told you, will be more likely to share that information when they see your organisation become an ASD supportive workplace.

Workers who have children with ASD will be more loyal to your organisation and people who have other psychosocial disabilities will share that information, so the workplace becomes more inclusive.

How to hire a neurodiverse worker

- The key to success is to educate leaders in your organisation on the competitive advantage neurodiversity can bring
- Hire based on practical assessment

- Support the line manager, co-workers and neurodiverse worker. It will be different than with other staff but through perseverance will come respect, improved management and output from the whole team.

Engage with a Neurodiversity recruitment specialist. Organisations like Specialisterne Australia and the Disability Employment Services in your local area are good places to start a conversation about ASD employment.

Strategies to sustain and succeed in the long term

Education and training of managers, co-workers and creating mentors or buddies for your ASD workers will help to sustain the hiring programs.

Support can be obtained from Job Access <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/employers/employer-toolkit>. Job Access is a Federal Government program that provides tools, supports and resources mostly at no cost to the employer to assist with hiring and onboarding a worker with disability. Financial assistance for workplace adjustments, training, and potential wage subsidies make hiring an ASD worker easier than ever before.

Resources

Specialisterne au.specialisterne.com

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) ndis.gov.au

Autism Queensland autismqld.com.au

Autism Spectrum Australia autismspectrum.org.au

Marymead marymead.org.au

Autism CRC autismcrc.com.au

Employ for Ability employforability.com.au

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