Charter 11.5 - Autism and Employability

Improvement Project Title: Autism and Employability
Executive Sponsor (Chair of Outcome Improvement Group): Sandra Ross
Project Lead: Jenny Rae **Job Role & Organisation:** Strategic Development Officer, Aberdeen City Health & Social Care Partnership **Email Address:** Jenrae@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Aim statement Increase the number of autistic people aged 16 to 25 who are supported into employment by 2021.
Link to Local Outcome Improvement Plan: This is a project within the LOIP under Stretch Outcome 11, Healthy life expectancy (time lived in good health) is five years longer by 2026, and Key Driver 11.1, Supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged people, families and groups.
Why is this important: Autism *(also known as Autism Spectrum Condition - ASC, or Autism Spectrum Disorder - ASD)* is a neurodevelopmental lifelong condition. It affects different autistic people in different ways, with some individuals able to live and work independently, and some requiring specialist support. Autistic people develop differently from non-autistic people *(neurotypicals)*, sometimes faster than their peers, sometimes slower. What everyone on the autism spectrum will have is sensory and social difficulties. These are not always obvious, as they can be masked, and people can develop coping strategies. Most have also held the assumption that others experience the world the same way, so it can make it difficult to recognise these differences. Autistic people have issues with communication, both verbal and non-verbal, e.g. difficulties with interpretation, tone of voice, facial expressions. Research commissioned by Scottish Government launched in 2018 titled 'The Microsegmentation of the Autism Spectrum', identified a new national prevalence rate of autism of 1.035%. Additionally, research also suggests that prevalence of autism with an intellectual disability is noted as 32.7%, which is less than previously evidenced. Education, Training and Employment are key themes within our local Autism Strategy and Action Plan. The greatest capacity for change sits within the sphere of employment. This targets a wider proportion of the public (working age or approaching working age); allows for sustained improvements in quality of life; and supports and promotes partnership working. Additionally, employment is a core factor of our lives as active citizens, with education and training typically preparing people to engage in the world of work. Learning from this project can be cascaded to training and education services, and links will be made to other relevant projects within the LOIP.

Benefit to Individuals

Many autistic people want to work. They possess valuable skills which may enhance team delivery and effectiveness however they often face barriers into employment which prevents them from being able to demonstrate their skills. Employability skills should be more readily taught or explored during education or within other formal supports.

Supportive aspects such as work trials, getting the right support at the Job Centre, reasonable adjustments or the Project SEARCH programme can be positive for autistic people, but these are not always available or utilised options. Often the key is finding the right work environment or one member of staff who can offer support. Providing support to increase knowledge and understanding of autism in the context of employment may lead to further positive opportunities.

Existing Support

There are a variety of employment support approaches which are undertaken locally, however none which centre on autism. Locally a Project SEARCH site provides support to young people (16-25) with additional support needs to gain skills towards employment. Although autistic young people can access this project, criteria is such that limited numbers may be able to access if they require the support the project can give. A number of employability projects exist in Aberdeen, which although may have supported autistic people into employment, had a broader remit and do not have specialist knowledge of autism and the workplace. There are no projects locally which offer to work with employers directly to enhance their ability to value autistic people within the workplace.

Some national and global organisations have adopted schemes which recognise and value the skills and abilities of autistic people within the workplace. Google, Microsoft and JP Morgan are some of the organisations actively seeking to attract autistic employees into their organisations. JP Morgan are working with Autism Network Scotland in Glasgow to deliver upon this aim. Learning from existing projects, locally and nationally, has supported the development of this project to centre on identified gaps; more specially on assessing and enhancing the confidence of employers to recruit and sustain autistic employee within their organisations. This also extends to employability programmes knowledge and skills in supporting autistic people to gain employment.

Currently little data exists on number of autistic people in employment, there are a number of reasons for this. Autism is generally a hidden condition; if someone is autistic they do not need to disclose this within a workplace; lack of diagnostic services mean that many people will lack the confidence to state they require support around autism in the workplace as the may be asked to prove this requirement; there is still stigma and discrimination around autism meaning people may be less inclined to disclose; data may be collected at school leaver stage but there is no way to track people's destinations and ongoing support needs. Where we do hold data around health and social care need it is likely that the needs of the individual make sustaining employment difficult.

Measures: (How will we know if a change is an improvement?)

Outcome measures
- Number of autistic people engaging in existing employability programmes
- Number of autistic people entering employment
- Number of employers with increased knowledge of autism in relation to employment
- Number of employability programmes with increased knowledge of autism in relation to employment

Process measures
- Number of employers engaged
- Number of employability programmes engaged
- Number of organisations accessing autism specific employment information
- Type of autism specific employment information required

Balancing measures
- Number of autistic people entering other 'positive destinations'
- Number of referrals to for Social Work intervention

Change ideas (What changes can be made that will result in improvement?)

- Develop, test and refine a self-evaluation tool to gauge autism knowledge in employers and employability programmes to establish a baseline of knowledge of employer's autism confidence. A repeated self- evaluation will gauge improvements
- Develop, test and refine a toolkit of autism specific employment information which increases knowledge and skills of organisations
- Work with organisations to further develop and refine the toolkit available to ensure relevancy and sustainability and repeated improvements
- Develop, test and refine the creation of a platform to showcase 'good' stories/case studies which encourages organisations and autistic people to learn from one another, seek to provide good outcomes and improvements, and enhance quality of life

Potential risks and/or barriers to success & actions to address these

There is a risk that autistic people may not wish to enter employment. This is mitigated by showcasing the 'good stories' of autistic people in employment. This also supports the risk that employers or employability programmes do not wish to engage. Additionally, employers and employability programmes will be approached who have links to our Project Team, autistic-led organisations, the Community Planning Board and those organisations who already hold an 'autism accreditation award'.

Employment is not the sole responsibility of the Health and Social Care Partnership or the Council, as such engagement with partners is key. A range of partners are part of the Project Team and additional links will be made with relevant parties as the project progresses, including engagement with autistic people.

Project Team:

Sponsor – Sandra Ross (Chair of RIS Group & Chief Officer - ACHSCP)
Project Manager – Jenny Rae (Strategic Development Officer - ACHSCP)
Subject Matter Expert – Bill O'hara (Principal Educational Psychologist -ACC)
Subject Matter Expert – Lesley Parker (Autism Outreach Principal Teacher – ACC)
Subject Matter Expert –Ruth Bell/Claire Rankine (Careers Advisors - Skills Development Scotland)
Subject Matter Expert – Ann Morrison/Derek Wright (Disability Employment Adviser/Employer & Partnership Adviser - Department for Work & Pensions/Job Centre Plus)
Subject Matter Expert – Marion McLaughlin/Alastair Meek (Vice Chair/Social Coordinator Triple A's)
Subject Matter Expert – Brian Walsh (General Manager - Grampian Autistic Society)
Subject Matter Expert – Heather Crabb (Business Liaison - Project SEARCH)
Subject Matter Expert – Sandy Reid (Lead – People and Organisation - ACHSCP)
Subject Matter Expert – Martin Allan (Business Manager - ACHSCP)

Outline Project Plan - Set out your initial plan about the timeline for your project. (This should be reviewed regularly)

Project Stage	Actions	Timescale
Getting Started (Project Score 1-3)	Forming the improvement team	September 2019
	Developing the project charter	October 2019
	Gathering and analysing baseline data	Dec 2019
	Understanding the current system	Dec 2019
Designing and Testing Changes (Project Score 4-7)	Identifying changes and prioritising	Jan 2020
	Engagement with customers & colleagues	Ongoing throughout project lifespan
	Identifying the people, place to start testing	Jan 2020
	Commence Testing	September 2020 onwards
Implementing and sustaining changes that demonstrate improvement (Project Score 7-10)	Reviewing findings and forward planning for upscaling or revising project	March 2021
Spreading Changes (Project Score 9-10)	Reviewing findings and forward planning for upscaling	July 2021