



Autism Spectrum
Information Advice
and Meeting Point

Bridging the Gap between Education & Employment for People with Autism

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ICTU Disability Seminar
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What is AsIAm?



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NATIONAL AUTISM
CONFERENCE 2016
EMPOWERING POTENTIAL



A little bit about me..



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- Founded AsIAM in 2012 based on my own experiences of living with Aspergers Syndrome
- Diagnosed at 5
- Spent time in Special Education, Mainstream School with an SNA and Mainstream Secondary School Independently
- Have had a job!
- On a large number of boards and policy committees including DSG & CESIG

What is Autism?



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- Neurodevelopmental Condition
- Affects 1 in 100 people in Ireland and by extension over 243,000 people in Ireland, when family members are considered (DCU Study). 1 in 65 students (or 14,000 students) in the school system have a diagnosis of Autism
- Impacts on a person's abilities in the areas of social communication, interaction and imagination
- Poses difficulties to sensory processing
- Often includes heightened levels of anxiety, repetitive behaviours, a need for routine
- Often co-morbid with other conditions including Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, ADHD, Epilepsy and Intellectual Disabilities
- An enormous spectrum of people affected in many different ways and to different degrees - if you have met one person with Autism, you have met one person with Autism
- Thinking Differently could also refer to the condition of "being innovative" - people with Autism often have special interests, attention to detail, huge focus and drive, an ability to think visually and very strong values systems

Autism & Education - The State of Play



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- 86% of people with Autism now attend mainstream schools - 70% are based in mainstream classes
- 14% in Special School can often be overlooked
- A lack of data around informal attendance at
- People with Autism receive a range of supports while in school such as SNAs, resource hours, reasonable accommodations and access / enrolment in an Autism Class
- We have mainstreamed people but not the knowledge this has led to a lot of social challenges within the education system
- People with Autism have a broad range of experiences in school
- There is a lack of quality control and oversight of this experience

What happens after school?



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- Some people go to University and flourish
- Some people go to University and find the transition and change overwhelming
- Some people never go to University or Third Level
- Some people access adult services
-The majority of all these cohorts experience unemployment

Gaps in Transition



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- People are often under-prepared and supported
 - People can move from highly supportive environments to highly independent environments
 - People who have had advocates there whole lives often suddenly need to advocate for themselves
 - There is often a lack of emphasis on non-academic support
 - There is often huge fear
 - There is often low expectations

Focus on University



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- University presents phenomenal social opportunities to those who have Autism
- University also represents huge change and upheaval - new routine, expectations and often location
- We know there is a real diversity in experience of University
- We know most of the challenges students experience in University are not academic - yet this is where support is focused
- Awareness and understanding tends to be much lower than in school
- University remains inaccessible for many people who have Autism
- We know people with Autism qualify but go on to experience unemployment
- We know people with Autism do not access the opportunities other students do in University - this affects opportunities after
- We know people with Autism can face barriers in the assessment system

Non-Academic Challenges of University



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- Physical Environment
- Independent Learning
- Organisational Skills
- Public Transport
- Communication
- Self-Advocacy
- Socialising
- Lack of routine
- Attitudes of campus community

Our Vision

- Better transition should be facilitated between School and University
- People with Autism should be able to fully participate in the life of the University
- People with Autism not just “in” University but happy, accepted and included
- University should serve as a “launchpad” to employment
- Universities as incubators for a more inclusive society

The Project



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- Pobal funded
- Partnership with Specialisterne
- Dublin City University selected as pilot campus
- A holistic approach to “autism-proof” all aspects of the university, engage students with Autism in improving student experience and intensive work on improving the understanding of Autism on campus
- Define “autism-friendly” University and develop an independent measurement tool
- Package for Universities to run independently
- Provide access to the workplace while still in University
- Provide “soft skills” training around employment - CV, interview skills etc
- Create a window to permanent employment

Timeline

- Consultation with Autism Community (Currently underway to complete in December 2016)
- Internship Supports & Placements (Currently Underway)
- Separate study for Autism-friendly University measurement tool (Currently underway, TCD)
- Autism Awareness Campaign on Campus (February-April 2017)
- Publication of a “Roadmap” for DCU (April 2017) and Seminar on Autism-Friendly Universities to engage other campuses
- Publication of measurement tool (May 2017)
- Continued roll-out of programme (Academic Year 2017/18)
- First measurements (May 2018)

Autism & Employment - Key Barriers



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- Public Attitudes & Expectations
- Recruitment Processes
- Disclosure & Openness of Employers
- Lack of mentorship
- Ability to access the workplace
- Colleagues Awareness
- Holding down a job
- Finding the right job at the right time
- A lack of discussion around disABILITY

How we can change things



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- Increased awareness & understanding by employers
- Leadership
- Focus on “I can”
- Changing workplace culture
- Improving sensory environments and allowing people flexibility in the workplace
- Better transition from education system
- Provision of mentorships and fostering of a culture of inclusion and openness
- Changing our recruitment expectations
- Keeping our eye on the ball when it comes to changes in the workplace, expectations and upheaval¹⁴



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Q&A