

**INQUIRY INTO TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS
WITH ADDITIONAL OR COMPLEX NEEDS AND THEIR
FAMILIES**

Organisation: AS Capable

Date received: 26/08/2011

Vicky Little
35/267 Miller Street
North Sydney, 2060

Inquiry submission:

Transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families

There is a gap in the Australian market for supporting the transition of young adults with Asperger Syndrome from education in employment. People with Aspergers can offer a great deal to a company. They are reliable, hard-working and extremely motivated. However, they can find it difficult to secure and retain a job due to the challenges they face as part of their condition, and because employers lack an understanding of autism. Typically it is during times of change that people with Asperger Syndrome tend to lose their way and fall through the cracks in the system. Consequently the transition period is one of the most challenging times for young adults with Asperger Syndrome, a hidden and misunderstood disability which impairs communication and social skills, their ability to plan ahead and leads to debilitating anxiety. Without adequate specialist support and understanding, these highly intelligent and highly gifted young adults may not be given the opportunity to access suitable employment opportunities. Disability Employment Services aren't equipped with the understanding or expertise to be able to train these individuals through their transition due to the nature of the condition impairing their communication skills. They require specialist support from experienced and trained advisors.

To address this issue in the UK, the National Autistic Society founded Prospects – a specialist employment service for people with autism. Prospects strives to ensure that people with autism and Asperger syndrome have the same training and employment

opportunities as non-disabled people, and works with forward-looking companies to offer real job opportunities for real pay.

At Prospects, I coordinated the Transition program which works with recent graduates with Asperger syndrome to prepare for and access work placements and employment opportunities. It was established in April 2005 with funding from the London Development Agency and European Social Fund. Experience has shown that fewer than 20% of Prospects' clients would actually succeed in employment without the support of the Prospects Transitions program, because of the social barriers created by their disability. The Transitions program was developed to overcome these barriers to employment and bring talented graduates with Asperger syndrome to the attention of suitable employers. Research has shown that "it is evident that specialist supported employment schemes (such as Prospects) can have a major and sustained impact on the lives of people with autism. Only if government funding for such programmes is also maintained can equality of opportunity within the workplace be achieved" (*Howlin, 2005*)

The current statistic on global prevalence of Autistic Spectrum Condition's (ASC) is 1 in 100, however recent UK research by Autism expert Simon Baron-Cohen estimates that 1 in 64 people have AS (which accounts for both diagnosed and undiagnosed). The number of adults with ASC's in the UK is estimated to be around 454,000. It's estimated that only 6% of these adults in employment. Specialist Transition support programs such as Prospects have proven to be successful in support adults with Asperger Syndrome into work. Therefore with a specialist scheme, the employment rates have the potential to "increase, and more importantly, maintained at around 70% (almost threefold in employment)" (*Howlin, 2005*)

These statistics indicate there is significant scope in Australia to support these young adults through the transition untapped capabilities someone with Asperger Syndrome can bring to the workplace.

I strongly believe the Australian government need to recognise the high needs and high skills of young adults with Asperger Syndrome, and implement a specialist Transition program to increase the access to employment and reducing the cost of autism in Australia.

Consequently, I have started a specialist support service which aims to meet these needs and fill the gap in the market, called AS Capable.

What is AS Capable?

AS Capable is a Sydney based specialist employment and education support service for adults with Asperger Syndrome. Our aim is to develop and promote the skills and capabilities of adults with Asperger Syndrome through employment training workshops, one-on-one employment and education coaching and mentoring, advocacy and employment placements programs. We will be working with reputable organisations to provide employment opportunities for job seekers, as well as coaching and in-work support with the employers to build their confidence in recruiting and managing employees with Aspergers. We will work with key stakeholders such as Universities, Autism charities and Disability Employment Services to provide coaching and training on best practices for support. We provide individual one-on-one mentoring for job seekers or students to develop skills to prepare them for employment to ensure a successful transition.

We will commence a pilot program will commence at the end of this year, consisting of small group workshops and one-on-one coaching sessions for graduates of higher and vocational education. The small group workshops aim to develop skills in areas across these topics, as well as interview skills, communication skills for the workplace, confidence building and occupational decision making. The one-on-one coaching will support them in building a successful resume and develop job searching skills, and place them with suitable employers or recruitment agency opportunities.

AS Capable offers a unique service which isn't adopted by other Disability Employment Services. Considering Asperger Syndrome is a spectrum condition, the support offered must recognise the individual learning styles and support needs of each candidate. AS Capable adopts a person centred approach, ensuring the training and support is tailored to each individual. This support is vital to the success of young adults making a successful transition into employment.