
August 21st 2020

**Written questions on notice for Xceptional from Senator Brown
Arising from 28 July 2020 Select Committee on Autism hearing**

Submitted by:

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Question “On page 28 of your submission you state 'The vast majority of the autistic individuals who come to Xceptional for recruitment services are not registered with NDIS and therefore do not have an NDIS plan'. Do you collect data on these individuals? How many do you estimate are falling between the cracks?”

Only 6% of our candidate pool who come to Xceptional looking for a job are registered with the NDIS.

Of the other 94% that are not, there are a range of reasons why. A few have not heard of the NDIS.

Our candidates are usually in their 20s or older. So when the NDIS was rolled out they were adults. The majority were not previously receiving services from a nonprofit (e.g. therapy such as OT, PT, ST), so many have fallen through the cracks because they have been excluded during the transition to the new system.

They do not know about the new system or their eligibility for it. Many have asked us, “NDIS? What is that?”

This is particularly important when you consider that individuals are moving from a more inclusive system (schools) to a less inclusive system (workplaces). So, it would make sense that some people would not need support in the former but may need support in the latter. Therefore, while there was a time to simply transition existing customers to the NDIS, there is now a need to locate those who have fallen through the cracks.

Xceptional are seeking to market to these individuals; there needs to be a targeted campaign to find those who need assistance yet are stuck in long-term unemployment. We are working with several of the Disability Employment Service providers to locate jobseekers.

Historically, autistic individuals may have been put off applying for a plan and did not think they met requirements. Therefore they have not revisited this option still believing they do not fit.

Sarah's personal situation is of relevance here. When making the transition to work, she had limited understanding of what employment services were available, her eligibility for said services and lacked appropriate career guidance to help build meaningful employment opportunities.

Advocates are needed who can explain the system and break it down into manageable steps.

The dominant reason that autistic people are falling through the gaps of the employment system overall is due to the barrier of traditional job interviews. These are often not being done in a way that is appropriate for autistic people (Sarett (2017)).

Question: "What could be introduced at workplaces to improve retention of employment for autistic people?"

Two primary steps will go a long way to improving retention of autistic employees.

Firstly, ensuring that people are matched to roles that are appropriate for their skills. This will ensure that people find meaning in their work and that they are doing something that they can do well. This will prevent many of the situations that we see that cause people to leave a job.

Secondly, autism awareness training (or neurodiversity awareness training) for managers and teams will also help prevent many problems.

In the paper "Why Don't Employers Hire and Retain Workers with Disabilities?", Kaye et al (2011) list key barriers to retention, many of which point to the need for employer training.

For example, one of the top cited reasons by Kaye is managers are "worried about the cost of providing reasonable accommodations." This is addressed through training because the costs are in fact, usually very low. Scott et al (2017) found in a study of open employment in Australia that there "No significant differences between employees with and without ASD were evident in the weekly supervision cost ... and costs related to workplace training." So, appropriate training can help managers understand the low-cost accommodations that are available.

Another frequent reason for poor retention is that managers "don't know how to handle the needs of a worker with a disability on the job" (Kaye et al). Again, training can clearly address this lack of knowledge, by giving examples of how others have responded to similar needs.

Once in an appropriate setting, with a supportive manager, autistic employees tend to thrive as loyal and long-term employees.

Aiden article

It was also requested at the hearing that we provide a soft copy of the Sunday Telegraph. According, please see the attached article.

SUNDAY JULY 5 2020

Genius autistic teen hired without saying a word

The best man for the job

EXCLUSIVE

JANE HANSEN

AIDEN Soedjarwo could install Windows on a computer at age six and, at 13, was talking to NASA about how to extract water from Mars. But, as a non-verbal autistic Year 12 student living at home in Katoomba, the 18-year-old rated his chances of getting a job as low. Yet he has just landed a job, without having an interview or even meeting his new boss face-to-face, after proving he was far better than anyone else. It was thanks to recruitment firm Xceptional, which helps autistic people such as Aiden find meaningful work in a world that often rejects them. Aiden's mum Julie said that despite her son's intelligence, she feared he would not be employable. "He has so much potential but I was worried about how he would go in the workplace and relate to people," she said. Aiden was booked in for a three-day workshop with Xceptional last year. Chief growth officer Aron Mercer said most standard recruitment processes, whether writing a cover letter on a CV or sitting in a panel interview, are based on a person's ability to sell themselves. "So often autistic people who have degrees of social anxiety can find it really hard meeting new people, can really struggle in those interview processes and they struggle to articulate what sets them apart in a letter," he said. Aiden's work on problem-solving in the workshop quickly showed his talents. "In a traditional interview, we could not get this guy a job at Red Rooster. But he has an amazing brain," Mr Mercer said. Geoff Osborn runs a Brisbane-based company called GeoSynergy that specialises in analysis of water and gas utilities and requires technical data analytics. "I just need people who can solve problems and solve data problems in different ways, and who are hardworking and focused," he said. After setting Aiden a task, Mr Osborn was impressed with his skills. "Aiden had a go at all problems and got it done in 12 hours ... the next closest person took 40 hours, so he was much faster and had clearer answers," he said. Aiden, who is still in Year 12, was offered a job with Mr Osborn's firm two days a week. They have never met or spoken in person. Aiden conducts his job from home in Katoomba via messaging. "For the future, people on the autistic spectrum are beneficial in society in areas of business and science if they are supported to continue developing their gift," Aiden said via text message.



Non-verbal autistic teenager Aiden Soedjarwo at home in Katoomba. Picture: Sam Ruttyn

References

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Scott, M., Jacob, A., Hendrie, D., Parsons, R., Girdler, S., Falkmer, T. and Falkmer, M., 2017. Employers' perception of the costs and the benefits of hiring individuals with autism spectrum disorder in open employment in Australia. *PloS one*, 12(5), p.e0177607.