



Employment Experiences

Of people with learning disabilities and autism



Essex County Council

REVEALING REALITY

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Executive summary

Essex County Council commissioned a research project during the summer of 2021 to explore the **needs, motivations, and barriers to successful employment** for people with learning disabilities and autism in Essex.

The research team interviewed ten people with learning disabilities and autism (LD/A), seven parents, and four employers to learn about their journeys into employment.

Their experiences demonstrate how employment can be rewarding and beneficial for both the employees and their employer. People with LD/A valued the opportunity to work as it had a positive impact on their lives, and employers also identified many advantages from employing someone with LD/A.

The benefits of having a job for people with LD/A included having a sense of purpose and feeling they were contributing to something bigger and of worth. Working gave them opportunities to progress and achieve things independently, which boosted their sense of independence and identity. Discovering and applying skills they didn't know they had and learning to do new things were central to developing motivation. Through employment, people with learning disabilities and autism were positively encouraged to think about their future and cultivate ambitions they could work towards.

Additionally, working meant they had a more consistent routine, giving them a better sense of structure to their day and week. A key benefit for people with LD/A was the opportunity to socialise and build new relationships.

Employers had positive experiences when employing people with LD/A finding them dedicated and loyal employees, who were motivated to upskill and progress. Moreover, employers were proud of employees and felt good about creating opportunities in their community.

People with learning disabilities and autism face many challenges in their journey to employment

In Essex, most people with learning disabilities and autism are unemployed, and the journey into employment was not easy for those who made it. The main **barriers** people with LD/A faced were:

- Parents were protective of their children and worried about them failing
- Support services often weren't doing as much as they could to encourage paid employment
- People with LD/A struggled to imagine what kinds of jobs they could get
- People with LD/A didn't know how to go through a typical application process
- Employers weren't always pushing to get the best out of their employees with LD/A, resulting in 'underemployment'
- Co-workers often didn't understand the support and adjustments required when working with someone with LD/A
- People with LD/A feared failure and therefore avoided trying new things

There are many opportunities to make change happen

These challenges show there are many **opportunities** to improve employment experiences for both employees and employers, where different partners can make a difference:

People with LD/A and their families can:

- Raise their goals beyond ongoing education and volunteering
- Engage with services, such as ECL, where people are supported to discover the range of roles that are available for them
- Talk to employers about the potential to progress—including expanding the types of tasks they do, and the amount of time they are working each week
- Explain to other employees where they will find tasks more or less difficult, and how their colleagues can best support them

- Increase their awareness of the work assistance support services available to them
- Help them feel confident trying new things, even if they fail

Education services can:

- Work with parents to discuss potential employment opportunities
- Support people with LDA in their work experience and guidance about how to get into employment
- Help people explore the types of roles they could do after education

Support services (i.e. residential care) can:

- Enable and encourage employment as best as possible
- Where possible, encourage those with LD/A, and their families, to raise their goals beyond ongoing education and volunteering
- Help those with learning disabilities and autism to feel confident trying new things, even if they fail
- Support those with LD/A to explain to other employees where they will find tasks more or less difficult, and how their colleagues can best support them
- Ensure people with LD/A are provided with support to go through the application processes for jobs, particularly at the initial stages
- Ensure those with LD/A are provided with support to go through the application processes for jobs, and where necessary, to negotiate adaptations to it

Employers can:

- Adopt alternative hiring processes to evaluate the skills of people with learning disabilities and autism (e.g., doing interviews instead of sending a CV, having a trial period before confirming their role, etc.)
- Discuss strengths and weaknesses of their employees to work out whether there are opportunities to support them to develop new skills
- Encourage managers to communicate with other employees about adjustments and how to get the best out of team members with learning disabilities and autism
- Increase their awareness of the work assistance support services available to them
- Help those with learning disabilities and autism to feel confident trying new things, even if they fail

Essex County Council can:

- Connect parents to other families who have experience of employment and overcoming similar barriers
- Continue to provide volunteering and work experience roles in a range of sectors to enable people to explore different roles
- Work with residential care providers to ensure that both the care home environment and support workers are enabling and encouraging employment as best as possible
- Encourage education and care providers to work with parents to discuss potential employment opportunities
- Work with schools and colleges to create more employment support, such as work experience and guidance about how to get into employment
- Work with schools and colleges to help people explore the types of roles they could do after education

Introduction

Essex County Council commissioned a research project during the summer of 2021 to explore the **needs, motivations, and barriers to successful employment** for people with learning disabilities and autism in Essex. The Essex County Council Research and Citizen Insight team was a key partner in this project.

The research team interviewed ten people with learning disabilities and autism (LD/A), seven parents, and four employers to learn about their journeys into employment. Fieldwork covered a range of workplaces, such as a pub, a café, a nursery and a charity.

The participants who took part had a range of needs and experiences of employment. Most of the people we spoke to required some support to meet their goals of being employed. Those who were successful often received significant support from parents, though the amount of support differed across respondents. Some only needed informal support from family and friends, whereas others had a mixture of informal and more formal support from service providers such as Essex Cares Limited (ECL), Essex County Council targeted apprenticeship services, Realise Futures, Access to work grants for transport, PIP motability schemes, as well as work experience organised through schools and colleges.

The people we spoke to were at different stages in their employment journey: from looking into employment, starting job trials, transitioning to their first paid job, to having a few years of work experience. Some had experience working in different roles in the past, and others who only had experience working in one job.

This report shows evidence of the needs, motivations and barriers people with learning disabilities and autism in Essex face in their employment journey, as well as focusing on what can different parts do to reduce the barriers to successful employment.

As part of this research project, Revealing Reality has also made a short, inspiring film showing just how much difference employment can make to people with learning disabilities and autism.



Watch it [here](#)

The journey into employment was not easy

The employment journey had many ups and downs, and the respondents we talked to had often experienced both.

The first section of this report focuses on **what is possible when things worked well** at different stages of employment, based on the experiences of respondents.

The second section covers **the barriers and challenges people with learning disabilities and autism face in their employment journey**, alongside suggestions of what could be put in place **to overcome them**. This includes examples from the research where respondents had successfully overcome these barriers, often with the support of family, employers and other support services.

Note: Participants and their families gave consent to use their real names in this report and film.

Meet the respondents

Tania, 42

Learning disability

-

Receptionist at Summit House

“Working at reception my speech got a lot better. I’ve got more confidence now.”



Nathan, 21

Autism

-

Grounds Maintenance
Operative at PMC
Landscapes

“I just wanted to be working, I don’t like to be sitting around.”



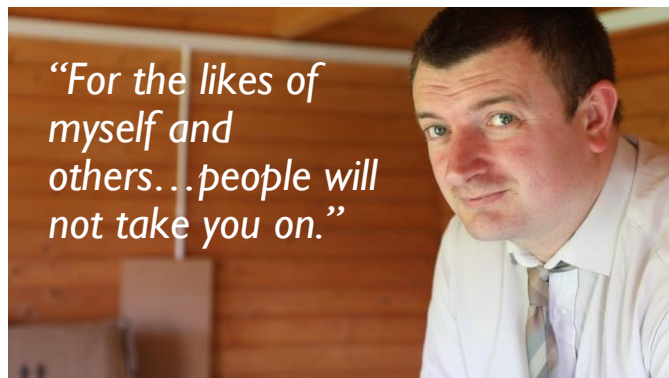
Richard, 36

Learning disability

-

Unemployed

“For the likes of myself and others...people will not take you on.”



Louise, 23

**Learning disability
and autism**

-

Volunteer at Go4 Café

“I like everyone that works at the café, and serving customers”



Lenny, 21

Autism

-

Volunteer at Go4 Café and
Customer Experience Assistant
at Mercury Cafe



Imogen, 19

Learning disability and autism

-

Apprentice at Willow Tree
Nursery

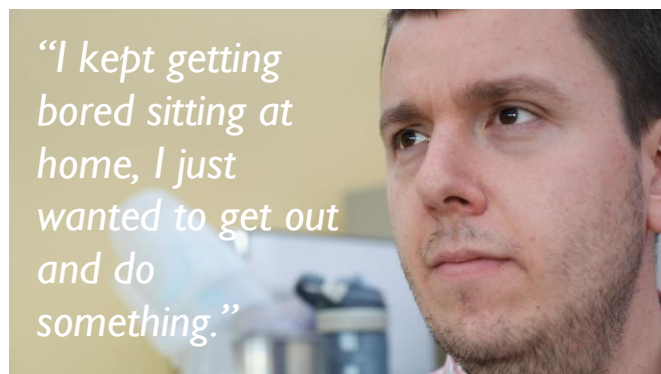


George, 29

Learning disability

-

Barman at The Hanover Inn



Paul, 35

Learning disability

-

Trainee at Potters Arms Pub

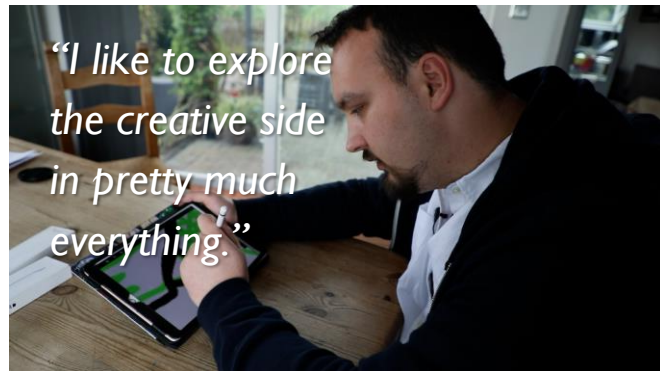


Harrison, 24

Learning disability and autism

-

Unemployed



Ashley, 24

Autism

-

Stock assistant at Sainsbury's



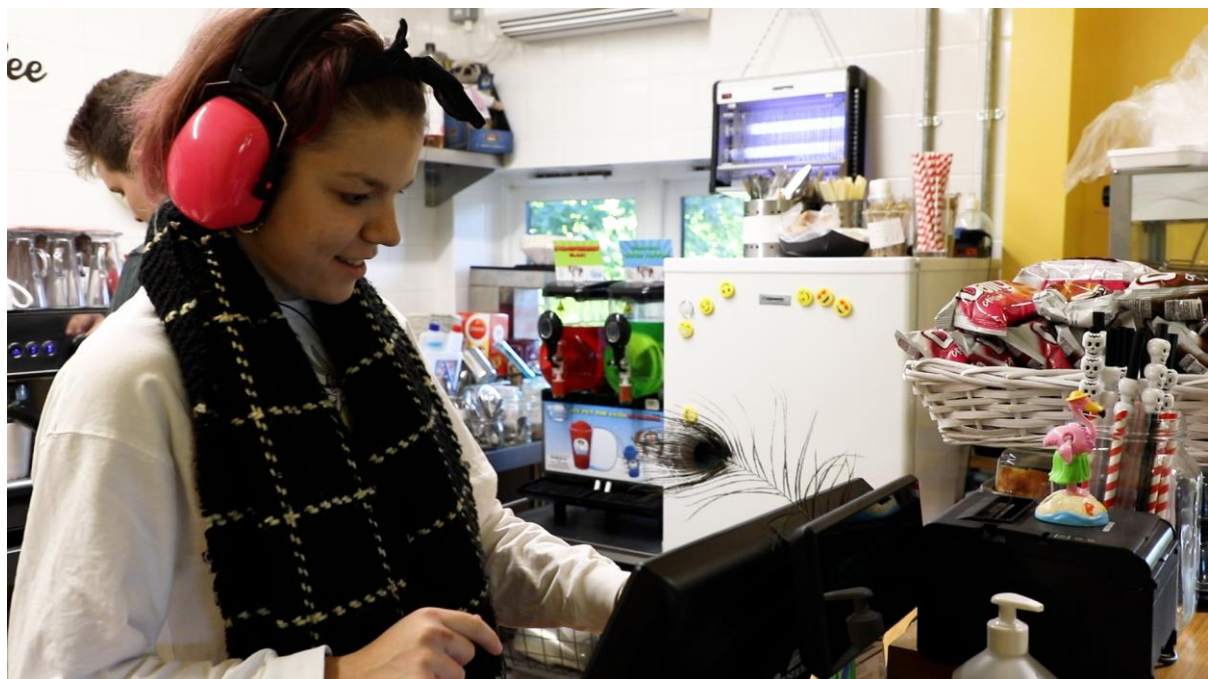
Employment can be rewarding for employees with LD/A and their employers

While it was rarely an easy journey into employment, when it did work out for people, there were many positives.

People with learning disabilities and autism valued the opportunity to work, and the positive impact it had on their lives

For many people in the UK, having a job can play an important role in their lives—shaping identities, social lives, daily routines, providing a sense of purpose and influencing their aspirations for the future. Equally, for the people who took part in this research, having a job was incredibly valuable. When people with learning disabilities and autism had the opportunity to work, it had a huge positive impact in different areas of their lives.

Purpose and the opportunity to contribute. Those who had worked before or were working at the time of the research said it gave them a sense of purpose. They felt they were doing useful things, and contributing—to the businesses they worked for, to the customers' daily lives and to society.



“She likes knowing that she’s working like everyone else [...] she really feels like she is able to do her job. I think she’s proud of her achievement”

Véronique, Mother of Louise

Watch [this clip](#)

Previously, many people with learning disabilities and autism, and their families rarely took part in activities and defaulted to living their lives around their disability. They were used to hearing there were many things that people with learning disabilities and autism couldn't or shouldn't do, employment being one of them. The people we spoke to often depended on their family, support workers or friends in their day-to-day life to arrange and attend activities. This limited their feeling of independence, making them feel that there was little they could do by themselves.

Progress and achievement. Being able to see they were making progress in their jobs, no matter how small the task, demonstrated to them that there were many new things they could do in life. Working created opportunities for growth and achievement – something they rarely had before.



“What I love about working is the independence that it gives you. It’s something where you can really develop your skills. You’re always learning when you’re working”

Lenny

Watch [this clip](#):

Independence and identity. Discovering their own skills allowed people with LD/A to progress towards independence and rely less on other people over time. Lenny, for example, felt he was “working his way up in society” by acknowledging all the new things he had learnt in his job at the Go4 café.

Work cultivated people’s confidence, showing them that the valuable skills they use at work could also be transferred to other areas of their life. This impacted how they perceived themselves and how they approached new things.

For example, Ashley finds working part-time at Sainsbury’s important for his identity because he “loves helping people...I’m just a helpful person”. Working made Ashley “feel like a person”. Furthermore, Tania shared that since working at the charity reception, her speaking ability has improved drastically and she now has a lot more confidence conversing with people.

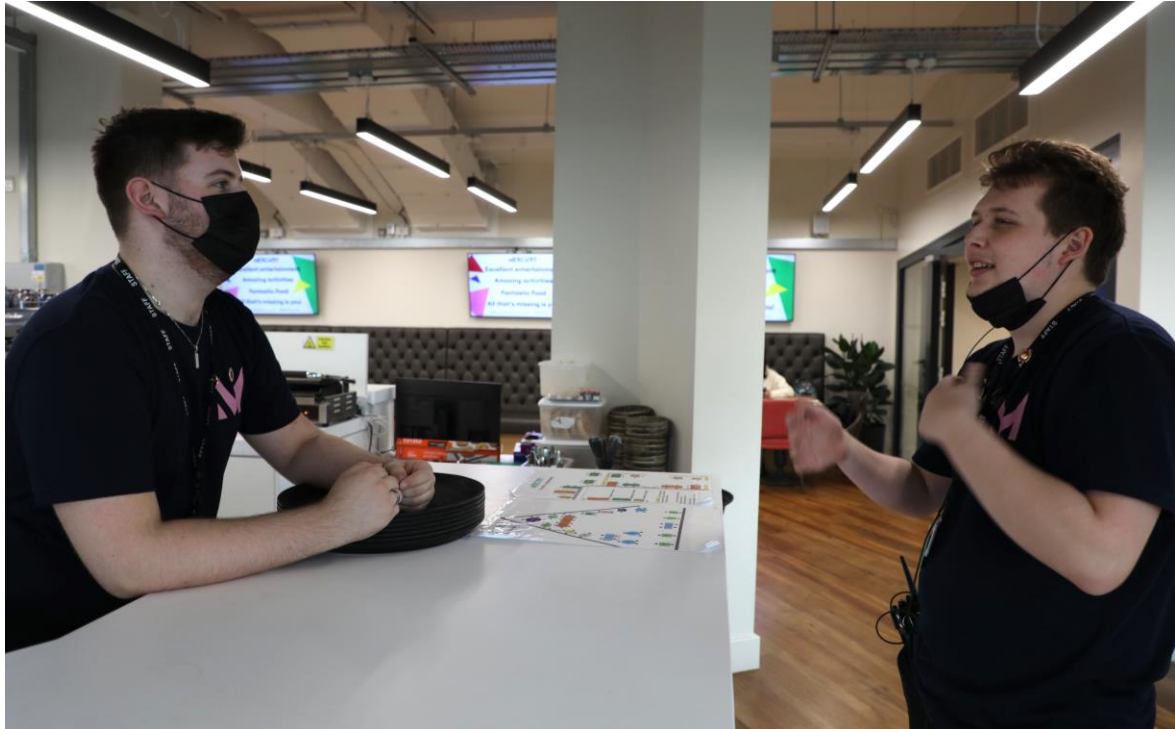


Aspirations for the future. In the long-term, employment opportunities encouraged people with learning disabilities and autism to think about their future and have ambitions to work towards. George, who had recently secured a job at a local pub, had started to think about other future goals, like getting a girlfriend and getting a place of his own. Lenny said, “everything I’m doing now [in regards to work] is building up for my own future”. One of the things he wants to do is to get involved in politics so he can advocate for the rights of people with LD/A.

Structure and routine. For the people with learning disabilities and autism we spoke to, starting a job helped them create a routine by organising other activities around their work shifts.

Socialising. Many of the people with learning disabilities and autism we spoke to were living an isolated life before they had a job, which had limited opportunities to meet new people. Being in employment created an opportunity to widen their social network.

Lenny now socialises with customers and staff at the Go4 Cafe and the café at the Mercury Theatre. He shared how much they value him in the team, particularly for his positive energy.



“He’s [Lenny] got a great personality and great work ethic. He always has a smile on his face. Even on the days we might not have one, he always has a smile. Little things like that [...] he’s a very nice member of the team”

Rhys, Customer Experience Team, Mercury Theatre

Watch [this clip](#)

Employers also identified many advantages from employing someone with LD/A

The positive impact that a job opportunity can have on the lives of people with learning disabilities and autism is not the only reason why they should be in employment. Those with LD/A can bring multiple benefits to their employers and workplace.

Dedicated and loyal employees. The people with learning disabilities and autism we spoke to love their jobs—working made them feel useful and they enjoyed helping others. Going to work was something they looked forward to and as such, did not like missing days from work. Employers noted that they were punctual, loyal, dedicated and had a great work ethic.

Imogen was highly committed to her job, and it was something she enjoyed doing. She had never missed a day of work in 18 months, coming into work even throughout her college holidays.



“She [Imogen] is a very valued member of staff, the children absolutely love her [...] Yes it was a little bit of a risk, but it will definitely pay off in the end just because of her mentality and how dedicated she is and how much she just wants to be here. It’s very clear”

Jessica, Senior Manager at Willow Tree Nursery

Watch [this clip](#)

The Go4 Cafe has some experience working with multiple staff with LD/A, by offering volunteering opportunities. Louise, for example, did a couple of days of work experience at the café back in 2018 as part of her school course. The manager, Pepi, saw how much she enjoyed the experience and offered her a volunteer position which she had held for three years.



“At the end of the day, they’re really hard workers. They’re very loyal, and that’s the best thing—they love the work that they do”

Pepi, Owner of the Go4 Cafe

Watch [this clip](#)

Motivated to upskill and progress. The people we spoke to have the capacity to build new skills and develop further. Many enjoyed learning and seeing they could do more than they initially thought, so they worked hard to keep making progress. Some felt encouraged to achieve what other people asked them to do and took these instructions very seriously, as they didn’t want to disappoint others.



Since working at a landscaping company, Nathan had been taught to use different power tools such as the ride-on lawnmower and the grass trimmer. Seeing the forklifts being used at the landscaping company inspired him to get a license to use these, which he successfully completed in October 2021.



“They [volunteers with LD/A] get used to the rules and to the new habits when they come. It took us quite a bit of time to get a routine for them [...] Now they have the confidence and they can serve a customer, charge for a coffee or make a sandwich just as if they’ve been running the business by themselves!”

Pepi, owner of the Go4 Café

Watch [this clip](#)

Feeling proud of employees and good about creating opportunities in the community. Employers noted that, in addition to the benefits of hiring people with LD/A mentioned above, they felt they were giving back to the community. Some employers described feeling extremely proud of those they had employed and took much joy in their success.



“You just have to have a little more patience in showing people the ropes and you will reap the rewards.

The look on his face just made it all worthwhile. It’s great to give something back. We’ve got a great barman and I feel like I’ve done something for the local community”

Dave, Manager of the Hanover Inn Pub

Watch [this clip](#)

Why are most people with learning disabilities and autism in Essex unemployed?

Stats show that more than 90% of people with learning disabilities and autism* are currently unemployed. Indeed, almost everyone we spoke to had experienced some challenges and barriers along their employment journey. While some were fortunate enough to have support from family, employers and other support services which enabled them to overcome these barriers, this was not always the case.

What is making it hard for those with LD/A to get a job?

Based on the people we spoke to, some of the barriers to getting a job in the first place were:



Parents were protective of their children and worried about them failing

Some parents felt anxious about their children with LD/A failing and how it might impact their self-esteem. The fear of failure could sometimes mean that parents were reluctant to encourage their children to try new things.

Parents had often heard about

the things their children “can’t” or “wouldn’t be able” to do which meant some parents had underestimated what their children were capable of. Therefore, they were understandably overprotective of them and were sometimes conditioning their children not to try new things.

Louise’s mother was apprehensive when her daughter started at the Go4 cafe and initially thought she might not be capable of doing the work required. These reservations were seen amongst many parents of the respondents we interviewed.

* Known to services in Essex



“I always wanted her to be accepted and normal, but I also know the challenges she has to overcome to be in an environment that is new and people are expecting things from her. But no, I must admit I didn’t think she could get a paid job”

Roz, Mother of Imogen

Watch [this clip](#)

Parents’ assumptions of how capable their children were meant adults with LD/A were receiving support that could inadvertently restrict opportunities for developing the skills and confidence they needed to get a job.

For example, Paul’s mother and grandmother didn’t allow him to cook or to have a bank account, and did everything for him because they believed he wasn’t capable of doing it himself. When his mother passed away, he moved in with his uncle, who encouraged him to do new things for himself and to be more independent. He now manages his own finances and secured a job trial as a kitchenhand at local pub.



From these stories it is evident that people with learning disabilities and autism need a strong support network, with people who believe in them and encourage them even if they fail.

There are opportunities to:

- **Connect parents** to other families who have experience of employment and overcoming similar barriers
- Encourage **education and care providers** to work with parents to discuss potential employment opportunities

Support services often weren't doing as much as they could to encourage paid employment

Although **education and other support services** were well intentioned with the opportunities they offered to people with learning disabilities and autism, the amount or type of support they offered sometimes had unintentional negative impacts. For example, some services were allowing some of the people in this research to spend long periods of time in ongoing education, instead of encouraging them to take on new challenges and put the knowledge they had acquired into practice.

It seemed that some **support services** defaulted to encouraging people with LD/A to engage in unpaid activities —volunteering and apprenticeships— only. Although starting with volunteering activities helped them to work on their confidence and recognise what they can do, it seemed that many could be transitioning to paid opportunities sooner.

In Paul's situation, his mother and grandmother thought it was best to keep him studying in college five days a week for 17 years. His college did not do much to help him progress beyond education either. As a result, he never pursued any paid work until he moved in with his uncle at age 35.

Richard had multiple volunteering roles —as a shop assistant at St Helena Charity Shop, as a helper at the Essex Outdoors Mersea Camp and as an assistant coach at the 'Healthy 4 Life' football project— but he hadn't been able to secure paid work since he was 16.



“I’m always good enough to work for free but when it comes to paying me, I might as well ask the Queen to pay me”

Richard

Watch [this clip](#)

Some had the option to live more independently from their families but faced the unintended consequence of being limited in other areas of their lives, including employment. For example, the respondents living in a **residential care home** at the time of the research mentioned that they had to adhere to restrictive schedules set by the home. The staff often did not see it as part of their remit to assist residents to look for or attend work. These aspirations were often seen as an inconvenience to the general running of the home.

For the past 2.5 years Harrison has been volunteering every Thursday at a charity shop. Since moving into a care home in Southend-on-Sea in 2021, he missed his volunteer shift on 3 occasions. This was only discovered when the charity shop called his mother, Anita, asking why Harrison hadn't been attending. The care home told her they weren't able to organise it.

Due to Harrison's sudden unreliability, the charity shop had reservations about allowing him to continue as a volunteer. His mother felt she had to cover the shifts he had missed so Harrison didn't lose his position.

After ten months, Harrison's mother pulled him out of the home as she noticed the "suppressive" effect it was having on her son. She noticed a reduction in his verbal communication, loss of confidence and a negative effect on his mental health.



“The care home was meant to be a steppingstone to independence, but I was less independent when I joined them”

Harrison

Richard has lived in a care home since 2008 as he didn't have any family nearby that he could rely on. He felt that the care home staff didn't see it as their role to assist him with getting paid employment and this had a huge impact on the opportunities he could get. Richard didn't have a personal email address and all online communication had to go through the care home manager.



“Unless you’re one-to-one you can get funded for support to look for work. If you’re like myself who is more than capable of looking for a job then you should be doing it yourself. The way this place runs, the clear message is, if I want to get a job I have to get out there and do it myself”

Richard

Watch [this clip](#)

Some of the people we spoke to had gone to schools or colleges where they were encouraged to think about next steps after education, including employment which enabled them to start their employment journey. For example, Ashley and Imogen were provided with work experience through the courses they were studying at school and college, which had led to paid employment.

There are opportunities to:

- Work with **schools and colleges** to build in more support around employment, such as work experience and guidance about how to get into employment
- Work with **residential care providers** to ensure that support workers and the care home environment enables and encourages employment as best as possible
- Where possible, encourage **those with LD/A, and their families**, to raise their goals beyond ongoing education and volunteering

People with LD/A struggled to imagine what kinds of jobs they could get

Many respondents said they had been aspiring to get a job for a while, but they were having doubts about whether they would be good at it. Many people with LD/A hadn't had opportunities to discover their strengths and weaknesses, so it was difficult to know what type of jobs would be more suitable for them.

People with learning disabilities and autism rarely knew of other people like them in employment so they lacked examples of what this might look like. Additionally, people around them didn't always assume they would move to employment, so the conversation rarely came up when talking about their future.

This was the stage where people with LD/A really valued the **support from ECL**, who helped them discover what they would like to do and how they might succeed in employment.



Harrison had a passion for art and had taught himself to use the program ProCreate to illustrate artwork on the iPad.

He previously only had volunteering jobs —once a week at a charity shop and occasionally as an usher at the Palace Theatre in Southend-On-Sea.

He wanted to pursue paid work, so he engaged with the services of ECL. They discussed his interests and

skills, and within a few days they had secured a job interview for Harrison at a small digital art studio.

George was initially unsure of his ability to secure paid employment, but also received support from ECL. His employment support worker started by exploring what types of workplaces he wanted to work in. As he often visited pubs with his father, he felt comfortable applying for jobs in that environment.

George expressed that he wasn't confident in handling money, so ECL assisted with basic finance training. Within three months ECL had secured a four-day work trial at a local pub, and George got the job as a result.



For Harry, Louise, George and Lenny, having opportunities where they could prove their skills to themselves and others was key to learning what kind of job was suitable for them. It enabled them to understand what they could and couldn't currently do, and they were supported to discuss this with their employers.

There are opportunities to:

- Encourage **people with LD/A to engage with services**, such as ECL, where people are supported to discover the types of roles they could do
- Work with **schools and colleges** to help people explore the types of roles they could do after education
- Continue to provide **volunteering and work experience** roles in a range of sectors to enable people to explore different avenues

People with LD/A didn't know how to go through a typical application process

Another barrier people with learning disabilities and autism faced at the start of their employment journey is that they didn't know where to begin —where to find advice or look for a job.

Many felt nervous about filling out job applications, writing a CV and preparing for an interview. This was another part of the journey where **ECL was able to offer support**. They were supporting people with LD/A in the application process, acting as an intermediary to discuss adaptations with employers, and helping applicants to practice for their interview, among other things.

George had never secured a paid job before he engaged with the services of ECL. They provided training and helped him apply for jobs over a three month period.

George was very nervous about applying for a job and struggled to communicate his strengths. So ECL spoke on his behalf to the manager of the Hanover Inn Pub, explained his conditions and convinced the manager to give George a four-day job trial instead of the typical interview process. The trial gave him the opportunity to demonstrate his skills and it removed the pressure to know how to do everything from the start.



George and the pub's manager saw the trial as a chance to receive training instead of needing to have specific experience beforehand. Although George was nervous about having to face customers, serve drinks and food and offer a good customer experience, he gained confidence by seeing how much he improved during his trial. After the trial he was offered the job.



Nathan was very anxious of speaking on the phone and didn't pick up or call back numbers he didn't recognise. He believed he had missed out on job interviews because of this.

Nathan also didn't feel comfortable going to interviews alone. For his latest job interview Jon, his **ECC Targeted Apprenticeship Employment Officer**, attended the interview with Nathan and assisted in answering the questions from employers. This type of

support enabled Nathan to be successful in securing part-time work at the landscaping company.

These successful stories suggest that people with learning disabilities and autism need access to support at the initial stages of employment. This is particularly important to feel confident during the application and interview process.

There are opportunities to:

- Ensure people with learning difficulties and autism are provided with support to go through the **application processes** for jobs, particularly at the initial stages

People with LD/A often lack experience, don't have formal qualifications and don't appear competitive on a CV

In the application process, it seems unfair for people with learning disabilities and autism to have to present a standard CV. When compared to other people, their education background, qualifications and job experiences could trigger employers to make the wrong assumptions. However, the alternative of clearly signposting in the CV that the applicant has autism or a learning disability is unlikely to solve the problem alone. Therefore, alternative ways of hiring need to be considered for those with LD/A.



“Imogen has never had a paid job before. We dropped her CV in a couple of local restaurants and pubs, and she hasn’t been given a chance really. A lot of her peer group have had local jobs like that. Imogen has never had that opportunity. She’s missed out socially. I think that it’s someone looking at her CV, seeing the autism type traits and dismissing her”

Russ, Father of Imogen

There are opportunities to:

- Encourage **employers** to adopt alternative hiring processes to evaluate the skills of people with learning difficulties and autism (e.g., doing interviews instead of sending a CV, having a trial period before confirming their role, etc.)
- Ensure those with LD/A are provided with support to go through the **application processes** for jobs, and where necessary, to negotiate adaptations to it

Why aren’t those within paid employment progressing?

In addition to the barrier of getting into paid employment, the research identified the challenges faced by those with learning disabilities and autism in **progressing within employment**.

Employers weren’t always pushing to get the best out of their employees with LD/A, resulting in ‘underemployment’

Employers tended to offer jobs that were very simple and below the skills held by some people with learning disabilities and autism. The working hours that were offered to them were also very limited, with some only working one day a week.

There seemed to be a lack of confidence in what people with LD/A could do, fuelled by a lack of understanding around learning disabilities and autism. Many employers hadn’t heard examples of people with LD/A working successfully or lack of references from other employers, so they tended to under-employ people with learning disabilities and autism.



During Ashely’s work experience at M&S, he wasn’t allowed to do much more than pack the bags at the end of the till. His employer wouldn’t let him leave the floor he had been assigned to, and Ashley felt like they constantly had to monitor him.

When people with learning disabilities and autism had the opportunity to get into employment, they didn’t have many opportunities to try different tasks or gain

more responsibility. This meant they couldn’t develop new skills and opportunities to progress in their role were usually nonexistent.

Tania, for example, had been working the same job at reception for the past eight years. She used to work two shifts a week but was reduced to one day due to the pandemic. However, she would ideally have liked to be working four days a week.



“They didn’t understand me sometimes. They didn’t understand that I needed time to learn things. That made me feel even more nervous about things. Their attitude was ‘oh don’t you get that yet?’”

Tania, reflecting on her previous experience as a care home assistant.

Other employers had spotted opportunities to develop their employees’ skills. Dave, Manager of the Hanover Inn, recognised that George required more time during his work trial period to get comfortable in the role, especially interacting with customers. He provided George with extra encouragement and made himself available for George to come and ask questions. He had since seen George grow in confidence and noticed he was conversing with the regulars a lot more.



“I’m a great believer in throwing people in the deep end, but I knew that approach probably wouldn’t work with George. I took him around and he just shadowed me with everything I did for the first couple of shifts. What you had to do was invest the first couple of shifts in nurturing him[...] Where George has excelled is that when he’s not sure, he comes to me and he asks”

Dave, Manager of the Hanover Inn

This suggests that when employers can recognise the strengths and weaknesses of their employee, it can make a huge difference to their development. For example, recognising that people with LD/A need clear instructions at the start, additional time or training, and support to be able to deliver their best.

There are opportunities to:

- Encourage **employers** to discuss strengths and weaknesses of their employees to work out whether there are opportunities to support them to develop new skills
- Encourage those with learning difficulties and autism to **talk to employers** about the potential to progress—including expanding the types of tasks they do, and the amount of time they are working each week

Co-workers often didn’t understand the support and adjustments required when working with someone with LD/A

While some **managers** were happy to hire someone with learning disabilities and autism, they often didn’t communicate to other staff how best to integrate the new employee into the team, the type of support they needed or the tasks they would find difficult. This type of miscommunication led to misunderstanding and frustration, as the employee with LD/A was not well supported to adjust to their new roles.

Even though there is some support on offer for employers (e.g. **advice on reasonable adjustments**), the employers included in this report seemed to not be aware of it, since none had requested it.

As for employees, Ashley had Realise Futures providing regular check-ins from an **in-work support advisor** while working at Sainsbury’s. They also supported Ashley to complete some forms at the start of his work contract.

In Harrison’s situation, his employer expected him to start doing new tasks, without discussing this with him. For example, the employer increasingly wanted him to deal directly with the clients and also started pushing him to teach art courses to customers over video conferencing platforms without any support from other staff. Harrison and his mother felt this was a big change and not under the role requirement initially discussed when taking on the job.

Although these were good opportunities for progression, it seemed that the approach taken to introduce Harrison to these new responsibilities was not adequate. For example, Harrison needed support to understand what he should do, how to manage the video platforms, and to learn from others first.

There are opportunities to:

- Encourage **managers** to communicate with other employees about adjustments and how to get the best out of team members with learning difficulties and autism
- Support **those with LD/A to explain to other employees** where they will find tasks more or less difficult, and how their colleagues can best support them
- Increase awareness of **both employers and employees** of the work assistance support services available to them

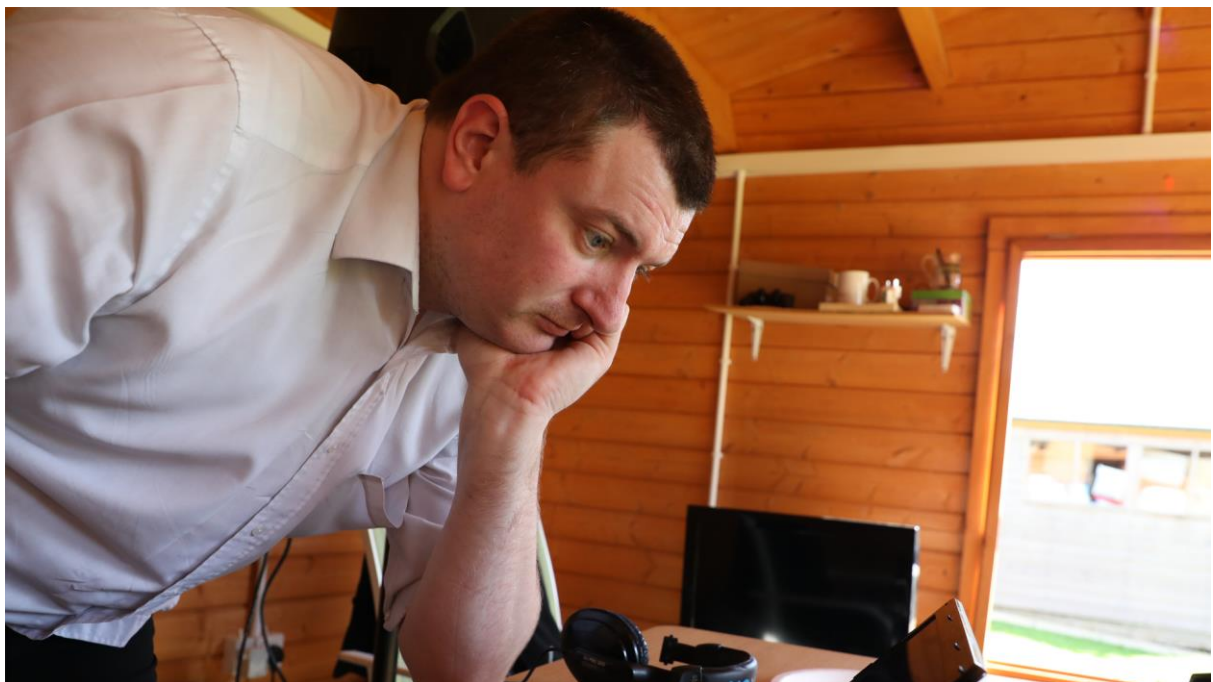
People with LD/A themselves are scared of failing, and sometimes avoid trying new things

Many people with learning disabilities and autism grow up being told that they shouldn't do certain things, and they fear facing negative consequences if they don't follow instructions. Therefore, it's not surprising that they are unlikely to take initiative to try something new.

Some lacked confidence when they started work, especially when it was their first opportunity to have a job. They sometimes perceived themselves as different from the rest of the employees, which undermined their confidence even more.

Previous negative experiences when they took some initiative had a negative impact on their confidence, even more than it would do to anyone else without learning disabilities and autism.

Richard had experienced unkindness from co-workers at previous volunteer jobs and left as a result. He had also applied for paid jobs and repeatedly been rejected while seeing other candidates succeed.



“It was a lot tougher, over here, to get paid work for people with learning disabilities... I’m one of these guys who, if I feel like I lack in one department [can’t do something], I won’t try 1000 times”

Richard

George had done stints of volunteering but always felt unsure whether he would be capable of doing a job. This meant that he didn't want to try for paid employment, until he recently secured a part time job at a pub at the age of 29 thanks to the support from ECL.

Harrison was let go from his job as a digital artist after six months, which had a significant negative impact on him. He was upset about how he was let go and struggled to talk about it for a while. It affected his confidence in his artistic ability and made him question whether he wanted to continue with art altogether.



“We’ve backed off the whole idea of taking on employment for the time being”
Anita, Mother of Harrison

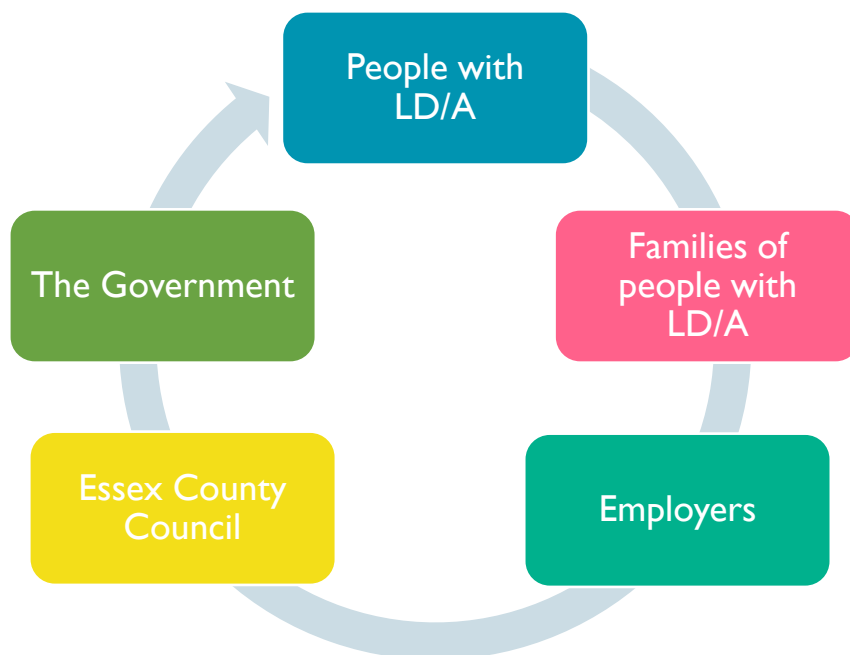
Watch [this clip](#)

There are opportunities for:

- **Support services, education providers and employers** to help those with learning difficulties and autism to feel confident trying new things, even if they fail

Conclusion

People with learning disabilities and autism need better support to get into and maintain employment, and providing this support will benefit multiple stakeholders in Essex and beyond



Graph 1. The benefits of providing better employment support will be felt not only by people with learning disabilities and autism, their families and employers, but will also help reduce the need for other council and government services.

There are many people with learning disabilities and autism in Essex who are unemployed or who are experiencing many disabilities in their employment journey. This demonstrates there is a need for more and better support to enable people with LD/A to transition into and maintain employment.

Making this happen is not easy and there are challenges that need to be overcome to provide more support. However, there are numerous opportunities for multiple partners to do this. Schools, colleges, employers and service providers, as well as people with LD/A themselves and their families can all make a positive impact.

And the benefits of providing better employment support will be felt not only by people with learning disabilities and autism, their families and employers, but will also help reduce the need for other council and government services.

If everyone believes in people with learning disabilities and autism and takes steps to turn these opportunities into action, these benefits will be realised.

As part of this research project, *Revealing Reality* has also made a short, inspiring film showing just how much difference employment can make to people with learning disabilities and autism. Watch it [here](#).

