



Green
ASC VET

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

IMPRESSUM

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Autors:

Project partners

Leading Partner of the Publication

Lead Organisation: **FPDA - Federação Portuguesa de Autismo**

Partner Organisations:

FPDA PT, Autism-Europe BG, Learn Virtual Europe HU, Industrijsko-obrtnička škola Slavonski Brod HR, Innoversa Factory DE, #STRUKA HR.

Editorial Team

Editor-in-Chief: Željko Habek

Editorial team: Green ASC VET partner consortium

Language Editing and Proofreading

Project partners

Graphic Design and Break

Tin Horvatin

Publisher

Association STRUKA, on behalf of the Green ASC VET project partnership

Address: HR- 35000 Slavonski Brod, Nikole Zrinskog 34

E-mail: info@struka-hr

Web stranica: <https://metautism.eu/>

Copyright

© 2026 STRUKA, on behalf of the Green ASC VET project partnership (Erasmus+ KA220-VET).

This material is protected by copyright and available under the **CC BY-NC 4.0** licence.

Non-commercial use is permitted with mandatory attribution of the authors and the project.

Co-funded by the European Union Erasmus+ Programme.

Disclaimer

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes (AMEUP). Neither the European Union nor AMEUP can be held responsible for them.

Kopenhagen – Lisabon – Brisel – Gyöngyös – Heidelberg – Slavonski Brod
May 2026

CONTENT

CONTENT	1
William Theviot: "Atypical Pianist"	2
Pierre Marcantonio: Animation Professional and Advocate for Neurodiversity	3
Breaking Barriers: A family' journey through VET and workforce inclusion for Autism – Portugal	4
Empowering Success Through Empathy: A mother's perspective on VET for Autistic students – Portugal.....	6
From School to Work – Niklas Schmitt.....	8
From School to Work – Rasiel Moser	10
Katarina and her father	12
POGLED (VIEW) - association for autismAuthors:	15
Good practice in Hungary: administrative employee at Toyota	18
András and Ádám Started Working at Airmax Cargo Budapest	21
FROM SCHOOL TO WORK – PETAR ČOP.....	24
MECHANICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT – DOMAGOJ JURČIĆ	27
Success, not in spite of, but because of Autism	32
A successful for programme for inclusion at Novo Nordisk	34

William Theviot: "Atypical Pianist"

Authors: Autism-Europe

William Theviot is an autistic pianist known for his exceptional musical talent. His story offers a compelling example of how vocational training and career paths can be tailored to the unique strengths of autistic people. His journey is marked by perseverance and passion, and the support he received was fundamental to channel his abilities into a fulfilling career.

From a young age, William displayed an extraordinary talent for piano. **Recognizing his abilities, his family and mentors prioritized vocational training to enhance his musical skills while accommodating his needs.** Throughout his training, William faced challenges such as navigating performance anxiety and the sensory sensitivities associated with autism. However, these were addressed through **customized strategies**, including **rehearsal routines that respected his pace and minimized overwhelming stimuli.**

In addition to technical piano instruction, William benefited from **training in public speaking and personal branding.** These sessions aimed to prepare him for interviews, media engagements, and interactions with audiences. By focusing on these complementary skills, William's team ensured he could confidently navigate the professional world.

William's success underlines the importance of identifying and nurturing an autistic individual's natural talents. His story highlights how vocational training can be designed not only to enhance technical abilities but also to address interpersonal and practical challenges, paving the way for a fruitful career.

Pierre Marcantonio: Animation Professional and Advocate for Neurodiversity

Authors: Autism-Europe

Pierre, an autistic professional specializing in animation, exemplifies how transparency and tailored accommodations can enhance career development and workplace inclusion. Pierre's journey is a testament to resilience, skill, and advocacy for neurodiversity.

After graduating from an animation program in Lyon, Pierre began his career by showcasing his demo reel to studios across France. His **proactive approach** and technical expertise quickly earned him a position in a production team. However, early in his career, a department head questioned certain behaviors, prompting Pierre to disclose his autism. **This openness transformed his professional relationships, fostering greater understanding and collaboration within his team. Pierre notes that sharing his diagnosis acted like a "magic formula," improving communication and mutual respect.**

To manage sensory challenges in a bustling studio environment, Pierre uses practical strategies, such as wearing headphones to focus on his tasks. His dedication to improving his craft is matched by a commitment to raising awareness about neurodiversity in the animation industry and beyond. **Pierre also highlights the need for systemic change to address low employment rates among autistic people.** Drawing inspiration from initiatives by companies like Orange, which employ neurodiversity specialists, Pierre advocates for widespread corporate awareness and updated scientific approaches to support inclusion.

Pierre's experience highlights the importance of hearing individuals' needs and fostering inclusive workplace cultures. His focus on advocacy also demonstrates how raising awareness can have a great impact on the autistic community when learning new skills and succeeding in the workplace.

Breaking Barriers: A family' journey through VET and workforce inclusion for Autism – Portugal

Authors: FPDA - Federação Portuguesa de Autismo

This example of best practices was shared by Patrícia Castanha, a dedicated 27-year-old administrative secretary at the FPDA (Portuguese Autism Federation) and her father, Artur.

In her own words, **Patrícia embodies a remarkable combination of professionalism and personal passion for her work. Known for her punctuality, organization, and friendly demeanor, she finds joy in managing documents and keeping everything in order.** Her dedication to her role comes from a deep love for what she does, and she is grateful for the support she receives from her colleagues, which has contributed greatly to her happiness at work.

However, like many individuals, Patrícia faces challenges— communication, in particular. She shares candidly how understanding spoken language and expressing herself clearly can be difficult at times, especially when encountering unfamiliar words. Despite these struggles, she demonstrates immense resilience and continues to thrive in her career.

Reflecting on her experience in vocational education and training, Patrícia highlights both the struggles and the triumphs she encountered. While her early years in school were not without challenges, particularly in terms of inclusion during the 10th grade, she eventually developed strong bonds with her classmates and felt a sense of belonging.

One of her proudest achievements was successfully completing the Professional Aptitude Test, which, despite being a significant challenge, led to an excellent final grade. Patrícia also fondly remembers the camaraderie fostered in her final year when her secretarial class merged with the theatre class, offering the opportunity to meet new people and form lasting relationships. Throughout this journey, one person stands out as an extraordinary source of support: her teacher Elisabete. With patience and empathy, Elisabete helped guide Patrícia through the Professional Aptitude Test and ensured that her learning process was tailored to her unique needs.

Eight years after completing her vocational training, Patrícia feels she has acquired invaluable knowledge, skills, and tools that have shaped both her professional career and personal growth. Through her experiences, she has not only built a successful career but also gained the confidence to be the person she is today. Patrícia's story is a testament to the power of perseverance, support, and self-discovery. She is truly an inspiring individual whose journey offers hope and encouragement to others facing similar challenges.

Artur's perspective, as Patrícia's father, provides a heartfelt and in-depth view into the challenges and successes of supporting an autistic person in vocational education, training, and integration into the workforce. His experiences offer valuable lessons not only for families but also for organizations, society, and policy makers.

Artur begins by describing how **vocational training was an essential part of Patrícia's educational journey**. He highlights the importance of this training in helping Patrícia develop the skills needed for a smoother transition into the work environment. Over the years, Patrícia completed internships in diverse settings, including the Senior's University in Benfica (Admin Office), the Ministry of National Defense (Recruitment and Public Affairs Office), Sport Lisboa Benfica (Human Resources), Hotel Excelsior (Admin Office), and in FPDA-Portuguese Autism Federation (Deputy Secretary). These internships provided Patrícia with both practical experience and exposure to various working methods, which helped her grow in confidence and independence.

However, Artur also emphasizes that the opportunity to interact with people from different backgrounds, some familiar with autism and others not, was crucial in building Patrícia's **problem-solving skills and boosting her social behavior**. **Despite her speech limitations, Patrícia learned to ask questions, clarify doubts, and engage in routine communication, all of which significantly helped improve her speech over time.**

One of the key takeaways from Artur's testimony is the challenge of what he calls "the day after." While many institutions were open to accepting Patrícia for internships, only FPDA-Portuguese Autism Federation offered her employment. Artur highlights a significant societal issue: the **reluctance of many companies, even in the public sector, to hire individuals with autism**. This reluctance often stems from a lack of understanding and training in how to work with autistic individuals. Additionally, Artur points out that integrating an autistic person into a team can be difficult when colleagues fail to understand their unique personalities and behaviors, leading to potential ostracism.

Artur reflects on his 27 years of experience raising Patrícia, stating that **there are no magic solutions but that continuous and focused support from an early stage is key to helping autistic individuals succeed**. He believes that society may never fully accept individuals with autism unconditionally, which is why it is crucial to prepare them as best as possible to thrive in the outside world.

Artur's testimony underscores the importance of early diagnosis, continuous support, and societal understanding in helping autistic individuals reach their full potential. His reflections provide not only a window into the challenges faced by individuals like Patrícia but also valuable insights into how society can be more inclusive and supportive.

Empowering Success Through Empathy: A mother's perspective on VET for Autistic students – Portugal

Authors: FPDA - Federação Portuguesa de Autismo

This example of best practices was shared by a mother of two Portuguese autistic young women who are currently in vocational education and training (11th grade). This mother shares her experience throughout her daughters' educational and therapeutic journey, highlighting the family's constant involvement due to insufficient institutional support. From an early age, the children attended daycare and preschool, with the mother adjusting her career to stay close and meet their needs.

The support provided by the Portuguese state, such as occupational therapy and speech therapy, was inconsistent, forcing the family to bear much of the cost for these services. There were periods when a lack of funding for the CRI (Inclusion Resource Center) disrupted services, prompting the parents to protest and propose alternative solutions. Additionally, the mother became actively involved, studying and acquiring materials to complement the therapies at home, especially during months without formal sessions.

As her daughters progressed through the school system, they participated in projects and workshops that fostered social skills and autonomy. The school encouraged independence, with the students themselves seeking internships and engaging in activities that contributed to their personal and professional development.

The mother shares her **positive experience with the current school, emphasizing its good practices in supporting her autistic daughters**. Unlike previous schools that focused only on meeting legal requirements, **this school actively works to adjust its approach to the students' needs, creating a safe and empathetic environment**.

The school's flexibility is evident in small adjustments, such as changing seating arrangements in the classroom to reduce distractions or pairing the students with suitable peers. The mother appreciates how the school encourages group work but ensures that expectations are clear and achievable. She highlights the importance of **clear communication**, saying:

"Their autism is not an excuse for avoiding group work, but you cannot demand skills they do not have. You need to specify: communicate what? how? when? with whom?"

She also highlighted that **teachers handle emotional outbursts with care, allowing students to leave the classroom if needed**. For example, when one daughter had a meltdown, **the teacher allowed her to step outside and calm down without embarrassment, avoiding unnecessary conflicts with peers**. The teacher later used the student's personal interests to help her refocus:

"When B. had the meltdown last week, I noticed that (...) they let her leave the classroom and that was good. She went to the bathroom and could vent her frustration, which in a normal situation would happen inside the

classroom because they wouldn't let her out. And then his classmates would be watching and getting involved and it would be a big problem”.

“(...) when I went to see her, I noticed that she was already calmer because the teacher managed to calm her down along the way by appealing to her interests and the perspectives of her work in the internship (what she was doing, the story she was writing, the drawings, the illustration, ...) and I think this is very good practice. Firstly, because it shows a very “human” side, which not all teachers are able to demonstrate; and secondly (...) not embarrass her in front of her classmates, so that her classmates don't come and criticize her and all that. And I think that's very good practice”.

The mother also values the **school's emphasis on practical learning and reducing reliance on formal tests**. Instead of memorizing content for exams, students complete projects reflecting real-life professional scenarios. She notes:

"In real life, no one will ask you to memorize a book of architecture. Instead of useless memorization, let's do meaningful, practical work."

The school encourages **student autonomy and self-management, such as consulting daily schedules and managing internships**. Teachers and coordinators **actively communicate with students, trying to understand and support their needs**. The mother praises the teachers' **empathy and openness**, particularly those passionate about their subjects.

She believes the school strikes a good balance between fostering academic growth and prioritizing well-being, which reassures both students and parents. She also emphasizes the **importance of how the school was introduced to her daughters** stating:

"I think the way they were introduced to the school was very important. The fact that the pedagogical coordinator called the course coordinator straight away and said that they had a strong area there, talking in terms of a life project (...) and introduce them to the school and the course before they decide what to do. (...) Also, every Wednesday there is an open school, which means that anyone can visit the school, ask questions, consult the teachers, etc. It's not a perfect school, but I think these little things put parents and children, autistic or not, at ease. In their case, it's reassured them a lot (...) because it's a quieter, more familiar, safer environment”.

From School to Work – Niklas Schmitt

Authors: Innoversa Factory

Introduction

This example of good practice will cover the educational journey of Niklas Schmitt, a twenty-six-year-old on the autism spectrum.

Overview of the Educational Journey

Diagnosis

At the age of twenty-one, Niklas was diagnosed with autism.

Kindergarten

Even in kindergarten, Niklas noticed that he was different from other children. He attended preschool because he had difficulties with reading and fine motor skills.

Elementary School

The beginning of elementary school was very challenging due to these issues, but he showed strength in mathematics.

After two years, he was initially diagnosed with dyslexia, which later turned out to be incorrect. Additionally, he encountered bullying at an early age.

Secondary Schools

These early experiences of bullying led to severe depression, at times so intense that he attempted suicide. He changed schools several times: first attending a Realschule (a type of secondary school), then a Hauptschule (another type of secondary school), where the bullying continued, and he remained significantly underchallenged.

Afterward, he moved on to a comprehensive school, which he completed with moderate success.

Professional Career

After finishing school, Niklas searched for a suitable job for a long time and worked in various positions, none lasting longer than a year. Due to his depression, he eventually sought help. He met someone knowledgeable about autism who referred him to a specialist, where he finally received his proper diagnosis. After further therapy, he began a vocational preparation program (Career-preparatory training measure, BVB) with the support of the employment agency, although it did not yield the progress he had hoped for.

Eventually, he started training as an application developer at SRH in Neckargemünd, where he felt well supported and also found suitable therapists. After completing his training, he secured a position at Innoversa-Factory, where he had been interning since his second year of training.

Currently, he is happy to be working in his chosen field and contributes successfully to the team.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Niklas's journey highlights the importance of timely, accurate diagnoses and comprehensive support systems for individuals on the autism spectrum. His experiences demonstrate that early recognition of learning difficulties, combined with targeted interventions, can foster academic strengths—such as his aptitude in mathematics—while minimizing the negative impact of any developmental challenges. However, this journey also underscores the long-term consequences of bullying, misdiagnoses, and inadequate support structures, which can severely affect mental health and hinder educational and professional progress.

Rekommandation:

- 1. Early and Accurate Diagnosis:**

Professionals should closely monitor signs of developmental differences as early as preschool. Early screenings, thorough assessments, and ongoing evaluations can help ensure that learners receive appropriate support and interventions at the earliest possible stage.

- 2. Holistic Support Systems:**

Educational environments need to provide not just academic assistance but also psychological and emotional support. Access to counseling, therapy, or mentorship can help prevent issues like bullying from escalating into severe emotional distress or depression.

- 3. Individualized Learning Plans:**

Schools and training institutions should customize learning approaches to the individual's strengths and challenges. Recognizing areas of exceptional ability (such as strong mathematical skills) while addressing other difficulties can help maintain engagement and motivation.

- 4. Anti-Bullying Measures and Awareness:**

Creating a school culture of respect and inclusion—supported by clear anti-bullying policies, staff training, and peer-education initiatives—is crucial. Such measures can protect vulnerable students and promote a positive learning environment.

- 5. Smooth Transitions Between Educational Levels and into Work:**

Supporting individuals through key educational transitions and into the workforce is essential. Career counseling, internships, job placement support, and ongoing professional mentorship can help ensure a fulfilling and stable career path.

- 6. Interdisciplinary Collaboration:**

Collaboration between educators, healthcare professionals, employment agencies, and families can ensure comprehensive guidance and continuity of support across different life stages.

From School to Work – Rasiel Moser

Authors: Innoversa Factory

Introduction

This example of good practice will cover the educational journey of Rasiel Moser, a twenty-one-year-old on the autism spectrum

Overview of the Educational Journey

Diagnosis

He received his Autism diagnosis at the age of 10.

Kindergarten

In kindergarten, he was placed in a younger group. He was mostly alone, as he was excluded by the other children. Even in the preschool group of the kindergarten, he experienced exclusion.

Elementary School

The principal showed no interest and had no information about him. During those years, he was bullied and beaten by his classmates. He was often alone and isolated.

Special Education School

He was extremely underchallenged and felt very bored. He was classified as having a learning disability.

Secondary School

In secondary school, he encountered a teacher who was knowledgeable about autism. She supported and guided him until he graduated. He finally found classmates who did not exclude him and allowed him to be part of the community.

Job

The employment agency recommended he take part in a pre-vocational training program (BvB), but it was not very helpful to him. Subsequently, he started an apprenticeship as an IT specialist in application development. His first supervisor supported him, provided him with a practical training opportunity, and his fellow apprentices were friendly and fostered a sense of camaraderie.

However, in the second year of his apprenticeship, there was a change in both the supervisor and staff. As a result, the support ceased, his autism was ignored, and no further assistance was provided. Additionally, the class dynamics changed significantly. He then transferred to SRH, where he joined directly in the second year of the apprenticeship. At SRH, he immediately received support again, and another practical training opportunity was made available to him.

He feels very comfortable in his new class because he is welcomed there. The teachers and supervisors have experience with autism and provide him with full support. Currently, he is in his third year of apprenticeship and is generally satisfied with his new training location. Additionally, he is a long-term intern at Innoversa Factory.

Conclusions

The early exclusion experienced during kindergarten and elementary school had a profound impact on his social development and self-confidence. The lack of understanding and support from educators during these formative years led to isolation and difficulties in adapting to group dynamics. Additionally, the misclassification of his abilities during his time at the special education school, where he was labeled as learning disabled despite being capable of more, resulted in frustration, boredom, and a feeling of being misunderstood. This highlights the importance of accurate evaluations and tailored support for autistic individuals.

However, the positive influence of a knowledgeable teacher during secondary school demonstrates the transformative power of understanding and support. This guidance not only provided him with the necessary tools for success but also fostered an inclusive environment among his peers, which significantly improved his social interactions. Similarly, in his apprenticeship, the presence of a supportive supervisor and friendly colleagues initially created a positive and productive environment. Unfortunately, the later withdrawal of support due to personnel changes caused considerable difficulties, underlining the need for consistency in providing accommodations and understanding in professional settings.

The successful transition to SRH further emphasizes the value of specialized institutions with experience in supporting autistic individuals. With the right guidance, tailored accommodations, and a welcoming social environment, he was able to thrive both academically and socially. These experiences highlight the critical role that informed educators and employers play in creating opportunities for autistic individuals to reach their full potential.

Katarina and her father

Authors: Industrijsko-obrtnička škola Slavonski Brod

Katarina is a 15-year-old autistic girl with 4th degree of disability, the youngest of three daughters.

This year she started attending secondary vocational school, occupation assistant cook and pastry chef, with an assistant helping her along the way.

The journey:

Shortly after a normal delivery, she had very strong hypoxia and ended up in intensive care, which, as a consequence, brought about many conditions along with autism. The father is uncle of an adult autistic non-verbal person.

Katarina actively avoids sensory stimuli and is a GLP (Gestalt language processing) child, uses language at levels 1-4, also uses echolalia, makes occasional spontaneous sentences with many grammatical errors and mixes pronouns.

At the age of 3 Katarina and her parents started going to kindergarten interviews. Not all kindergartens were welcoming once they heard of the diagnosis, so they chose a kindergarten that they knew would take care of the child and where she would be accepted as she was. When she started attending kindergarten, she would only go occasionally for two hours. 1 year she had an assistant, 1 year her father went with her, and the last year she didn't go at all because it was easier for her father to take care of her at home.

At the time, therapists worked with the parents, and did ABA and Floor therapy with Katarina; later on they decided to go with Son-rise therapy. The parents realized that Katarina was much more cheerful when she was in control of the game and decided to join her in this. It took the father a long time to adopt this way and adapt to her level.

Katarina started school a year late, but it wasn't too different from her classmates because she was born in January.

The elementary school allowed her father to be with her, so for the first 3 years, the father was the assistant. He had the opportunity to see how the system and the special department with partial integration functioned. As it was a department for grades 1 to 8, he had an overview of the material and the way it was taught.

At the end of the 3rd grade, the school requested a retest of her education program, and Katarina was transferred to another school to a special department. There she had an assistant funded by the city, and there was usually a different assistant each year.

In the 5th grade they asked for a retest again, but by the decision of the committee they remained in that school until the end.

When it was time to enroll Katarina in high school, the parents researched the options and decided on a career based on Katarina's interests. They researched everything in advance and went to school for interview. The father arranged with the class teacher

that during the school summer holidays he will come to school with his daughter for adaptation.

The class teacher is a social pedagogue/special education teacher by profession and played a key role in the preparatory part. She enabled Katarina's adaptation at school - informed other teachers about Katarina's arrival, worked with the teachers on how to adapt the tasks to Katarina's abilities and she regularly monitors Katarina's progress and consults with the parents. She is of great help to Katarina and the parents.

The school has a kitchen where Katarina does practical classes. At first there was resistance to completing tasks, but it's getting better. Katarina is liking the occupation more with each day.

The learning process and interventions taken by the father:

At the age of 2 or 3 Katarina began to show interest in letters and numbers by pointing to license plates, so they learned that way, but she did not start reading on her own until they started using a simple visual method where the child is shown a card with a word and the word is read to them. In this way she mastered reading by the time she was in school, but understanding what she read was much more difficult; and remains difficult to this day.

They later found out that she was hyperlexic and that such children often have learning problems.

For years now the father has been in contact with Mrs. Ellen Doman from the American National Association for Child Development, who monitors them and suggests developmental tasks and also has a lot of experience with home schooling. The father believes that homeschooling should be allowed with regular monitoring of progress by institutions.

To aid the learning process, they used visual methods for visual memory; logical and word assignments were much more difficult, however. To keep her attention span longer, they used nursery rhymes from children's television, and later songs she heard on the radio. Katarina has problems opening and closing communication circles, she can hardly complete 3 circles.

Since the father is an IT expert, he soon realized that visual learning is easy to implement through computer games, so they have been using this method since she started school. As the existing games were not compatible and new content could not be added, the father decided it would be better to create the games himself to help with knowledge acquisition.

It took a few years of research to figure out what suits her and what doesn't. The games are played on a tablet or a computer; they look like worksheets Katarina would do at school. It's easier to correct a mistake here, the colors are more accurate, the images are better and it's easier to add multimedia. The videos and rhymes are used as a motivator in the game, but they also help with language acquisition and communication. The games are created in HTML and JavaScript because it is the most practical way to implement them. The games themselves are open source and free and can easily be adapted to individual needs There are 3 basic games and the content

is changed. They play 2 times a day for an hour at a time, every day. The goal of these games is to create a way for cognitive growth in a safe environment.

Communication and socialization:

There were no major problems with other children. During the first 3 grades, the children mostly communicated with Katarina through the father. Some of the children came to hang out with Katarina at her home by parent arrangement or they would socialize outdoors because there was not enough time for socialization at school. It is crucial to provide the child with as much socialization opportunities as possible as long as the child is interested.

Teachers showed interest and desire to work with Katarina, but teachers are mostly dedicated to teaching and lecturing, so children mostly rely on assistants. When the skills of teachers are concerned, the father believes that the most important thing is to have patience and follow the child's interests and strengths.

Final remarks:

There are several very important elements that make this a success story and a good practice example. As always, it all starts with the unreserved support of the family. Then the father's innovation in developing games for Katarina and other people on the spectrum who independently can adapt them to their individual needs. Also the timely actions taken by the family throughout the education journey that facilitated the activities of both the child and the teachers at school and finally the active participation of the secondary school through the class teacher who helped with Katarina's adaptation to the school, to the teachers and the material that needs to be mastered. In other words, cooperation of all the parties involved for the welfare of the child. Although Katarina has just started secondary school, everyone believes in the positive outcome.

POGLED (VIEW) - association for autism

Authors:
Industrijsko-obrtnička škola Slavonski Brod

POGLED - Udruga za autizam is a Croatian non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to supporting individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families. The organization is based in Nedelišće, a town located in the Međimurje County of Croatia with around 85 users aged 2 to 27. They have been in operation since June 2009. Its primary mission is to raise awareness about autism, provide resources, and improve the quality of life for people on the spectrum.

Here are some key aspects of the organization:

Advocacy and Awareness: POGLED works to increase understanding of autism within the broader community, aiming to reduce stigma and promote inclusivity.

Support for Families: It provides practical and emotional support to families dealing with the challenges of autism. This includes offering advice, information, and resources on how to best care for individuals with ASD.

Educational Support: The organization often focuses on providing tailored educational and developmental programs for individuals with autism, ensuring that they receive appropriate care, attention, and opportunities to thrive.

Workshops and Training: POGLED organizes various educational workshops for parents, caregivers, teachers, and other professionals. These workshops often cover topics such as autism diagnosis, communication strategies, behavioural techniques, and other approaches to autism care.

Therapeutic Services: The association provides access to therapies such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and behavioural therapy, all tailored to the needs of people with autism.

Social Integration and Activities: The group organizes social events, recreational activities, and therapeutic programs aimed at fostering social interaction and integration for individuals with ASD.

POGLED places a strong emphasis on building a supportive community for families dealing with autism. This can include creating support networks where families can share experiences, resources, and advice.

The association also partners with local authorities, schools, healthcare providers, and other NGOs to improve services and raise awareness.

Like many NGOs, POGLED relies on donations and fundraising events and campaigns to support its programs and activities. These efforts help to ensure that services are accessible to families and that the organization can continue its advocacy and outreach work.

Although based in Nedelišće, POGLED is active in the larger Međimurje County. Given the relatively small size of the town, the organization's work has a significant regional impact on local communities and schools.

POGLED often collaborates with other organizations, governmental bodies, and international autism groups to further its mission. These partnerships help expand the scope of services and advocacy efforts available for people with autism.

While their main emphasis is on advocacy, awareness, and providing support to families, they also recognize the importance of physical activity and social integration for autistic individuals. Sports and recreational activities can play a key role in improving physical health, social skills, and self-confidence. This is precisely why the association has created socialization and recreation program.

The members are taught basic socialization skills like waiting in lines, following directions and working according to orders. As far as the recreational program goes, they offer a variety of sports, one of them being futsal (indoor football). For the last 5 years they have been participating in the Super Power League organised by the Academy of healthy living in the scope of which they go to tournaments four times a year.

Another sport that has sparked interest in their members is judo - in spite of it being a contact sport. A lot of children have overcome their issues with physical contact through it, so it also has a rehabilitation effect to it. They even do belt promotions and take part in tournaments.

Swimming is also one of the sports they offer, for both children and their family members.

The sport that has been most popular lately is bowling. they have their own league in which they compete throughout 4 to 6 months and at the end they declare a winner.

They are planning to add handball to the list next.

The association find that autistic children are often excluded from physical education in schools so it is important to give them the opportunity to develop their skills and stay healthy.

Association members have also formed a music band. It is important to point out that this was not intentional, but rather a happy by-product of music workshops where talents have spontaneously emerged and decided to form a band. They perform at different association events, anniversaries and such.

POGLED also collaborates with educational institutions to help integrate autistic children into mainstream schools and kindergartens. This support includes the provision of assistants or aides who help these children navigate the school environment and participate in educational activities. They have been providing assistants in mainstream schools for the last 9 years through a program in collaboration with The Ministry of Education.

They are one of the founders of the *Prvi korak (First step) Alliance* in the scope of which they provide assistants in kindergartens. This was started 5 years ago and they were the first ones in Croatia to offer such a service. All children with difficulties have a right to an assistant for each year they attend kindergarten. It is funded by the town and residential districts of the users.

POGLED is very involved in projects, both regional and European. They participate in an average of 5-8 projects yearly. They are planning an Interreg project and are also

thinking about getting involved in Erasmus+ projects. Some of their funding comes from the projects, but they also have their own business activities. They are also funded by the national trust, the ministries, local community and private entrepreneurs in the area.

A couple of weeks ago they have been awarded with funds in the program called *Leave a good mark* (Ostavi dobar trag) initiated by the Erste bank in cooperation with different trusts where they are trying to foster financial independence of NGOs and help them raise funds for their programs. Their plan is to activate young autistic people (also low functioning ones, if possible) and give them opportunity to be employed and strengthen their work skills by growing micro-herbs. Beginning of 2025 they will start equipping the work space and later on start production. The work will be carried out daily and funds for salaries and state contributions will be provided partly through a crowd-funding campaign and partly through the Croatian Employment Service and Centre for professional rehabilitation.

The association are very aware of the fact that employment of young autistic people outside the association is still very difficult, so they are planning to create a mentoring program for employers where they would try to adjust the working process to their users as much as possible and then try to pass it further and also show the employers all the benefits that autistic employees can bring to the work place. They would even help with adjustments and be present at the work place for a while to help ease the process.

To summarize, POGLED association for autism is a crucial figure in the autism community as it plays an essential role in improving the lives of individuals with ASD in their area and further. They exemplify best practices by focusing on person-centred care and advocacy for a more inclusive and supportive society. Their holistic approach, which combines education, family support, and social inclusion, makes them a leader in the field and a model for other autism support organizations.

Good practice in Hungary: administrative employee at Toyota

Autors: Learn Virtual Europe



"My name is Balázs Dénes, I have been working for Toyota Financial Plc. for a year, I feel great as an administrator, I managed to fit into the office community and I really like what I do here. I got here with the help of the Aura association. I used to work in healthcare and at a nonprofit foundation, where I was constantly doing jobs that were mentally very demanding. They were quite stressful years. Here at Toyota I feel supported in my job and everything else, I get along well with colleagues and I am very happy to participate in joint activities, such as Christmas parties. I would highly recommend Toyota to anyone because it is a stable company with a long history, a good working atmosphere and great colleagues."



Zsolt Kühne Managing Director, Toyota Financial Zrt: It started with Toyota International making diversity and inclusion in its strategic objectives. We are starting to think about how we can meet this objective here in Hungary. We decided that I would like to add some of our people with altered working capacity to the team. By

coincidence, while I was waiting in my daughter's ballet class for it to end, a group of wheelchair users came to the same room for her next session. I asked the coach how to contact the association and foundation helping people with disabilities, and he recommended the AURA association.

We involved the collective in the decision,

as I expected to make a bigger difference in our team, as no one had ever had personal experience with such a person. Since we also have a colleague who has a young son living with autism, we thought that if we had to choose from already altered working capacity types, we would have some kind of emotional connection with people with autism

We thought

this was a joint journey, a common challenge,

which not only the management or our HR team must meet, but the whole company must accept such colleagues. Everyone responded very positively to this. The inclusion strengthened the cohesion in our small team of 20 people by the fact that Balázs is now one of my colleagues. Balázs was able to fully meet the expectations, as we expected that people with autism do not like variety, but rather it is easier for them if they have to perform repetitive tasks in a familiar environment. For example, we ensured that Balázs could always work at the same desk at the same workstation, thus helping him to fit in, and we selected tasks with repetitive elements for him, where there are no surprise challenges. Although I think that as Balázs gets used to this environment, he understands the operation of the company more and more, I would not rule out that we would entrust him with several tasks requiring creativity, of course, with his consent.

So far, I have only received positive feedback from our colleagues about Balázs, so I think that this cannot be called a mistaken decision by any means. Everyone turns to Balázs with great love, it can be said that this is a success with this company, Toyota Financial Zrt. has become more, better and stronger.



My name is Virág Erdő, Deputy Chief Financial Officer of Toyota Financial Plc. From Aura association, we received a list of employees who could be suitable for tasks at

Toyota. We reviewed this and invited some candidates for oral interviews based on this. Based on the interview, Balázs was very convincing and therefore we selected him for the position.

Our expectation was that the employees would be given a very good and independent helping hand in certain tasks after the training. Balázs met this expectation perfectly well. The tasks were selected by colleagues and trained by them. Balázs learned these tasks very skillfully and quickly, so he fully fulfilled the hopes attached to him.

I think the hardest thing for me was to overcome my own fears, and I was very focused on being able to tell Balázs the things he needed properly and well, and so that he could learn it well. Fortunately, I was able to overcome this initial fear quite quickly, because I saw that Balázs is skillful and learns quickly.

Everyone has assumptions that people with autism behave differently, think differently, and doubt how quickly they can learn things. Balázs was a pleasant surprise and we were able to entrust him with even more things than we had originally planned in the beginning.

My personal relationship has definitely changed.

I have met people with autism before, but now that I know Balázs more closely, I have a much better insight into how they live their everyday lives, what problems they may have, and thus I have become much more understanding, empathetic and compassionate. In my experience, such a worker is very good for the workplace, they make people absolutely open and even more accepting. There are only positive effects in a company if you employ someone with disabilities.

Source: Aura Association: <https://www.auraegyesulet.hu/english>

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=poJ_xgcX5aY

András and Ádám Started Working at Airmax Cargo Budapest

Authors: Learn Virtual Europe



Németh Norbertné, “Mama” HR Manager:

We hadn't had an employee with autism before. It was my colleague Marcsi, who is personally connected to this issue, who suggested hiring an employee with autism, and that's how this story began.

The idea was positively received. Our colleagues are very open-minded, and we have a young team that helped the new employees integrate. There were no significant difficulties, and both colleagues have performed admirably in their positions. The new employees handle administrative tasks, which significantly lightens the operators' workload. Everyone wants to be useful and add value to their work, and these two colleagues fully meet these expectations.

Both young men are interesting and open-minded, cheerful, and they love sweets. They have integrated very well into the community. They complete every task entrusted to them to the fullest extent. For us, it's also a valuable experience to work with people who see the world a bit differently, and we're truly happy to have them with us.



Mária Mentés, Chief Accountant and Internal Mentor:

We sought and hired colleagues with reduced work capacity because, as “Mama” mentioned, I am personally affected through my child. During the summer, we typically employ student workers for administrative tasks, which are now being handled by these two young men. This opportunity occurred to me when our student worker, who happened to be “Mama’s” daughter, left in the fall. We connected with Aura (an organization) and requested candidates whom we could integrate smoothly—someone not too loud or intense, as our operations staff are quite bustling.

Initially, I asked for someone extremely quiet, who wouldn’t be overly opinionated, wouldn’t question what we asked of them, and could handle repetitive, monotonous work well. That’s how we met



him. Since “Mama’s” daughter helped us in the first week, I didn’t have much to do with Ádám initially. Over time, we had to provide detailed process descriptions and regularly check on his progress. After a few months, Ádám became a professional in his tasks. While he still needs weekly guidance, he knows most of it by heart, but reviewing the schedule with him acts as a useful support tool.

When Ádám proved to be excellent, a new need arose: we urgently needed to clear out items that had been sitting in the warehouse for ten years and could legally be discarded. This led us to hire another colleague for sorting in the warehouse. Once again, I asked Aura for a candidate with the same criteria. That’s how we met András, who differs from Ádám. András doesn’t need tasks structured for him. He quickly grasps what needs to be done and approaches tasks constructively.

I spent a day with each of them in the warehouse and realized they are perfectly suited to their respective roles—Ádám upstairs and András downstairs. My only concern is ensuring they don’t overwork themselves and take breaks when needed.

In terms of raising awareness, I simply sent an email to the entire company, explaining that two colleagues with slightly different behaviors would be joining us. I encouraged everyone to communicate any issues directly with me rather than making complaints or comments to the new hires. It’s rewarding to note that no complaints have arisen. On the contrary, colleagues have found them delightful and helpful. One colleague recently mentioned during lunch that they hope I’ll go to heaven someday for bringing such wonderful and beneficial colleagues into the company. I replied that it’s a joint effort—the boys wouldn’t have such a good workplace without us, and we wouldn’t have made such strides without them.

András Szabó, Administrator:

I hadn't been able to find a job for a long time, and this is my first workplace. I enjoy working here because, despite not completing university, I can still be useful. While the work is sometimes monotonous, it requires attention and keeps me engaged. I started in late September, sorting ten-year-old files in the warehouse. It was simple—just come in and do the job. Later, they got me a document shredder, and I started using that as well.



Colleagues also asked me to assemble cages for transporting dogs, as the company ships animals too. I took on everything gladly because I was just happy to have something to do. I hadn't worked for years and thought I might never be good at anything. Now I know that's not true. If I need help, I can turn to any colleague. My life and outlook have completely changed. I have a stable job, new prospects, and, most importantly, I earn money for my work—not living on benefits.

Ádám Harstein, Administrator:

I like working here because my colleagues are helpful. I'm a general administrator, filing documents in the financial department. I can ask anyone for help when needed. My life has changed in that I now have a weekly routine and need to wake up on time every day.



Another benefit is that I live in the same district, so commuting is easy. While the work is different from my geography degree, I feel that having a steady job gives me purpose and fulfillment.

FROM SCHOOL TO WORK – PETAR ČOP

Authors: Association STRUKA

Introduction

This example of good practice will cover the educational journey of Petar Čop, an eighteen-year-old on the autism spectrum, and the way his family secured him a job.

The goal is to show, on the one hand, how with the help of the local community, enthusiasm, activity and support of the family and educational institutions, a path can be found for the employment of people on the autism spectrum. On the other hand, the goal is to point out that certain legal provisions related to employment prevent people on the autism spectrum from employment and self-employment.

Overview of the educational journey

Diagnosis

Petar was diagnosed with autism at the age of 4 and a half, when he began to say his first words and when he was already in kindergarten.

Kindergarten

Petar started kindergarten before he was diagnosed with autism. He went to a regular group of children. The educators and children accepted him well. He was in treatment individually. The activities he underwent with other children were based on learning through play, social games and the development of communication skills. An important role in this period was also played by his parents who, in addition to working individually with Petar, regularly spoke with the teachers and the assistant and established common educational goals.

Elementary school

In elementary school, he attended regular classes with neurotypical students. The transition to elementary school was without special preparatory programs or any other adjustments. Throughout his entire elementary education, he had a teaching assistant. From the first to the sixth grade, he had a female assistant, and from the seventh grade, a male assistant. His teaching process was adapted and individualized in relation to other students, but no new educational technologies were used in this process. Throughout his entire education, Petar had the support of his peers and was socialized in this way. The parents-teachers-teaching assistant team regularly assessed the results of the educational process and adjusted learning plans accordingly.

Secondary vocational school

During the coronavirus pandemic, the family planted hazelnuts (lat. *Corylus*) on their family farm and grew vegetables. Petar actively participated in the production and decided to enrol in secondary school as a gardener. Throughout his education at the vocational school, he had the support of his parents, teachers and teaching assistants. It should be noted that he had the same teaching assistant from the 7th grade of elementary school until he graduated from the vocational school. He attended a regular class with neurotypical students. Teachers and students gave him unreserved support throughout his education. He graduated from the gardening school with excellent results.

Job



After finishing secondary vocational school, Petar got a job in the family business. Namely, the whole family decided to invest in Petar and his business. Petar is a gardener. The main doubt was whether he would be able to execute the delivery of finished products in a timely manner, because fresh vegetables start to lose their properties after a few days and need to be picked up and sold quickly. The family's assessment was that it would be risky. The mother recalled the homemade green pasta (made from spinach and nettles) that her mother and grandmother used to prepare, and that's how they came up with the idea of combining gardening with pasta making. They bought a pasta making plant with their own funds (a loan). They mastered the production technology with an expert who transferred their knowledge to them on a voluntary basis. They also applied for

employment support funds granted by the state through the Croatian Employment Service, but this was rejected for some formal reasons, without taking into account that this support applies to a person on the autism spectrum. Regardless of the problems that arose, Petar today produces pasta that has been awarded multiple times.

Conclusions and recommendations

First of all, it should be emphasized that from kindergarten to work, Petar had constant support from his family, educators, and teachers, and that he had only three assistants on this path: one in kindergarten, an assistant in the 6th grade of elementary school, and assistants in the 7th and 8th grades of elementary school and throughout his entire vocational education.

Also, it should be borne in mind that from the kindergarten group until the end of his education, he was in groups or classes with neurotypical children.

With an individualized approach to the teaching material, Petar successfully completed the education process and acquired formal competences for a gardener and informal ones for making pasta.

He got a job in a family business thanks to the family, which independently built the necessary resources for making pasta without anyone's help.

What we could recommend from this example of good practice is:

1. From diagnosis to education, people on the autism spectrum must have constant and unreserved support. This is primarily the support of the family, then the support of the educational staff from kindergarten to vocational school, the support of colleagues from the school and the local community.
2. It is extremely important that there are as few external assistants as possible throughout this entire journey, i.e. teaching assistants. Namely, frequent changes of assistants lead to unnecessary stress for the autistic person, and also for the assistants.
3. In the Republic of Croatia, regardless of some positive regulations, the criteria for employing people on the autism spectrum should first be simplified, especially those relating to self-employment. The rigid application of regulations prevents most people on the autism spectrum from exercising their fundamental right - the right to work.
4. Companies that decide to employ people on the autism spectrum during the employment process must adapt. The first and perhaps most effective step would be to appoint a work assistant. This is a person who will adjust the conditions within the company for the person on the spectrum so that they can achieve their full working potential. Of course, a work assistant should be trained to work with people on the spectrum and could work with multiple people simultaneously, depending on their capabilities and functionality.

MECHANICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT – DOMAGOJ JURČIĆ

Authors: Association STRUKA

“An F (school mark) is just a short failure. It is just a thorn in the bush that you prick your finger on. As you walk the path of life, it is your choice whether you prick the rest of your hand while panicking, or be calm, take out your hand and take the flower that led you to the bush in the first place.”¹



(Domagoj Jurčić)²

Introduction

Domagoj Jurčić is a self-effacing, smart and cultured young man, a student at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in Slavonski Brod, Croatia with Asperger's syndrome.

His not-so-easy path from playrooms for toddlers to university, all in regular programs, a path of obstacles and success, is the topic of this example of good practice. The relatively late diagnosis of autism, bureaucratic obstacles, the lack of guidance from teaching staff in upper elementary school, support in high school and at university, are the components that define that path. His father is a role model, and his mother is a person for support and problem solving. Family is the foundation of continuous persistence in problem solving and support.

¹ The Thought of Domagoj Jurčić. Published by the Technical School of Slavonski Brod. Domagoj was in the 3rd grade at the time.

² Published in Glas Berlina, October 20, 2017.

Diagnosis

Although he had been seeing a speech therapist, special education teacher and sometimes a psychologist since early childhood due to speech problems, he was not diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome until the 7th grade of elementary school. The diagnosis was confirmed at the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation in Zagreb in the 3rd grade of high school.

Overview of his educational path

Preschool

Domagoj lives on a farm, surrounded by beautiful nature and many domestic animals that he particularly loves. At the age of 5, he learned to read and already then showed interests that are not typical of children of that age.

He went to playgroups for children of that age, which accepted him without any problems. His first childhood love was born. In order to adapt to school obligations, children in Croatia start so-called preschool education a few months before starting school. Domagoj completed this obligation without any problems.

Elementary school

Attendance at the eight-year elementary school will be divided into two periods.

The first four grades in his own village and from the fifth to the eighth grade in a neighbouring village.

First to fourth grade:

During this period, Domagoj did not have any significant problems. This period is characterized by friendship with a peer from the neighbourhood, from hanging out at home to attending school in the same grade. He differed from other children because of his difficulties in the basic elements of social interaction. The teacher noticed that he was the only one who stayed in the classroom during recess. After consulting with the family, they realized that he was bothered by the dynamics of children's group play, noise and pushing, which is typical of that age group. He also had a problem with homework, which he did in most cases, but did not want to hand it over to the teacher. This is confirmed by his basic characteristic in the learning process, which is careful attention to the lesson and immediate acquisition of knowledge. The teacher's live speech and explanations are a key part of his mastery of the material. Every other activity (taking notes, presentations, copying) interfered with his way of acquiring the learning material.

Fifth to eighth grade:

This is the most turbulent part of Domagoj's journey.

He had to travel by school bus to a school in a neighbouring village. He got new schoolmates, along with some who had been in the same class with him for the first four years.

His older brother also travelled on the same bus. Problems started in the seventh grade when his brother moved to high school. There was peer violence that was not noticed at school, but was discovered at home. In solving this problem and searching for individuals who did it, some facts were discovered through which he learned the difference between a "friend" and a real friend. He also learned who to trust and that the best and safest place to confide in is the family.

A child psychiatrist who diagnosed him with Asperger's syndrome also participated in solving this situation.

Even then, the family talked to him about enrolling in high school. Since Domagoj is interested in many things, he probably already studied the occupations that would suit him best. His choice was Computer Technician for Mechanical Engineering. After that interview, he also went for an interview and a test as part of career guidance, which showed that he could enrol in any high school. His selection remained the same.

And then a timely and successful action to collect documentation for his enrolment began. For his mother, there were no obstacles she couldn't jump.

Secondary Vocational School – Technical School Slavonski Brod, Croatia

Domagoj enrolled in the occupation he wanted: Computer Technician for Mechanical Engineering.

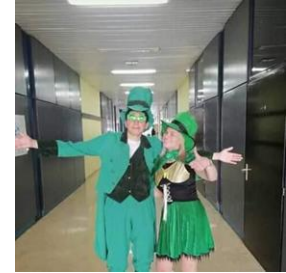
Before the start of classes, he met with the school's pedagogue and class teacher at his own request. He visited the classrooms and rooms for practical classes at the school and got acquainted with the curriculum. The class teacher introduced the teaching council to her new student and informed them of his difficulties. This was reflected in the inclusive approach of the teacher and adequate adjustments to the curriculum so that he could follow the processes from the beginning.

The technical school was already looking for an assistant for him in the first grade, to which he was entitled according to the attached documentation. The support of an assistant would enable him to participate more easily in the teaching process. The application submitted to the responsible body at the state level was rejected by an unreasonable and legally unfounded bureaucratic procedure. It was not until the third grade that he managed to exercise the right to an assistant who is still with him today. This helped him to raise his level of self-confidence and knowledge.

If we wanted to summarize his high school education in a few sentences, we could say that Domagoj was:

- satisfied with the support from his environment and peers, especially teachers,
- that his self-confidence level and the opportunity to expand his knowledge were significantly increased by the support of his assistant, and
- that by taking the state matura exam in adapted conditions, he achieved the opportunity to enrol in college, which was his primary goal.

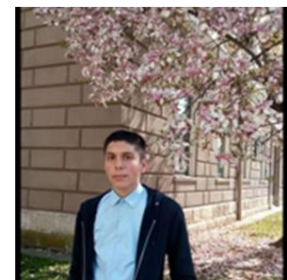
Of course, it should be noted that preparations for the matura exam and college began with collecting documentation, and this activity was again led by his mother. The first step was diagnostics at the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation in Zagreb, which confirmed Domagoj's diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome.



Faculty - Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in Slavonski Brod

Domagoj enrolled in the faculty of his choice.

As he was the first student on the autism spectrum at the faculty, during enrolment with the dean and vice-dean of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in Slavonski Brod, the teaching staff was trained with the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation in Zagreb.



The conditions for taking the exam were adapted for Domagoj. Personally, he prefers oral exams. He has a problem with the time frame in written exams. When he is given a deadline for the exam and if he is taking it in an environment with a large number of colleagues, his focus shifts to the completion time, which hinders him from solving the assigned tasks.

Domagoj and his family are very satisfied with the inclusion achieved at the faculty. He is progressing at his own pace and is about to complete his undergraduate studies. His desire is to work in endoprotheses, i.e. designing artificial joints that are used in medicine as a replacement for damaged or diseased joints.

So far, he has fulfilled everything he wanted.

Conclusions and recommendations

In this example, it can be concluded that active support from the family is the most important segment in the upbringing and education of people on the autism spectrum. Therefore, the family needs to compensate for all the activities that are necessary for each individual on the spectrum to exercise their rights. We should not beg bureaucratic structures, but rather educate, inform and ultimately obtain what is due to them.

What we could recommend from this example of good practice is:

1. Regardless of the diagnosis, the family must be a key actor and supporter in realizing the rights of all individuals on the autism spectrum, taking into account basic human rights (the right to education and the right to work). In this case, the family must be active and persistent.
2. Timely reactions and activities in transitional life periods will help in easier adaptation to the new situation. For example, preparing the necessary documentation for moving from a lower to a higher level of education, talking to the school or faculty administration in order to achieve inclusion in educational activities and the stay of a person on the autism spectrum in that environment.
3. Although people on the spectrum can be classified into three levels according to the severity of their condition, each person on the spectrum needs support. This is unquestionable. Support in teaching is one of the most important. Regardless of administrative obstacles, teaching assistants should be insisted on,
4. When choosing an occupation, regardless of the circumstances, if a child on the spectrum independently decides on one, they should be supported. Then the results of the educational process will fully confirm this support.

Success, not in spite of, but because of Autism

Authors: Virsabi

This example of best practices comes from a series of news articles about a successful leader at a financial institute, Peter Jensen, who has only recently become vocal about his Autism diagnosis, and speak about it on occasion, sharing his views on it and the world surrounding him.

Peter shares that he was lucky enough to get his diagnosis early as a child and receive the necessary support. He advanced through school with little issue and took a further education in engineering. At the time, he even believed that he had been misdiagnosed, since he did so well in school, but once he got his first full-time job, the real challenges started. Peter shares what these were, and how he was able to overcome them.

At first, he had to be part of a team of 12, which he describes as something he could “just about” manage, since they were few enough that he could get to know them, understand the professional, inter-personal, relationships, and how to manage them from his role. However, there were also the other departments to consider – HR, communication, lawyers, etc, and this added difficult complexities. The ability to adapt to change is something he shares that he struggles with, as it didn’t come naturally.

As Peter realized how he became pressured in a way that his colleagues didn’t seem to be, he sought the help of his superior. Central to Peter’s success story is the attitude this leader displayed. Peter first carefully approached the subject, asking how his leader in general felt about people with the kinds of abilities and traits people with Autism have. When he found his superior to be positive towards it, he shared that he himself, in fact, had Autism.

Together, the two of them started looking for courses that could help Peter’s everyday life and social aspects of work. He was given the opportunity to attend these during work hours, since they were hosted by the Union, and designed to help better the skills of employees. Peter attended many of these. For example, he learned theory related to collaboration and communication, since those were areas in which he personally struggled. A course in self-awareness was particularly insightful to him. He shares that a turning point was when he understood that:

"As a child, you are told to treat others the way you want to be treated. Since then, I've realized that this does not apply to me. I need to treat others the way they treat each other, and then tell them how I want to be treated"

From the courses, he got a number of models that described his way of thinking and seeing things, which he could use to describe his perspective to peers. With insight into himself, combined with an understanding and accepting work environment, Peter quickly started to excel in his role. He shares how his success in the workplace

came, not in spite of his Autism, but because of it. He became deeply knowledgeable in his field, with a great eye for detail and an analytical mind. He noticed patterns that others didn't, or he saw what they had deemed unimportant, from a different perspective and could put into new, opportune contexts.

Peter grew in his role and transitioned into a leadership position. This shift caused new challenges, which he had to learn to overcome. One of these was how he struggled to be social and show empathy outwards. To address a common misconception, it is not necessarily the case that people with Autism are lacking in emotion, but it can show itself in different ways. There can be an inability to notice or understand the cues which communicate the emotion of others. To intuitively recognize how others feel in a given moment, or to hear what is said between the lines, is something Peter shared that he struggled with, which made his leadership position difficult. Peter came across as direct and hard, without meaning to.

Also here, the communication and understanding from his peers made a huge impact. Peter had a few colleagues who he was particularly close to, and they could explain when he had "messed up", or what he could have done differently, without being afraid of offending him. He learned specific cues related to facial expressions, or how people were sitting on the chair. While he got better at analyzing these things, these details were particularly draining to pay attention to. From this, he also started delegating the work where he struggled to colleagues. In this is a certain level of self-acceptance; it is ok that these things are difficult for him, even though they seem easy for others – he is better at different things. It is reassuring that he can do these things, if need be, but also more resource-efficient if he most of the time does what he is better at, and which is less draining emotionally. Peter shared how he has made it a habit of mapping out the situation together with new colleagues and discussing with them how they can understand each other better and align expectations – something which is beneficial to do also between neurotypical people. When Peter got a new superior, the first thing he did was to book 2 hours meeting to do just this.

Peter explains how he is thriving both personally and professionally today - largely because he has made peace with who he is and how he should tackle everyday life.

"Society has a lot of expectations for how ordinary people should behave. You need to have a lot of friends, a social life, and participate in social events. I've learned that it's okay to be selfish and say that they don't get to decide. It's perfectly fine to skip a Christmas lunch. People accept it, and I feel better myself [...] After learning to use methods to handle racing thoughts and worries through metacognitive therapy, I feel incredibly at peace with myself, and it takes more to knock me down or make me stressed."

Source: <https://ida.dk/raad-og-karriere/neurodivergent-paa-job/peter-er-klogere-end-de-fleste-men-kan-ikke-aflaese-ansigtsudtryk>

A successful programme for inclusion at Novo Nordisk

Authors: Virsabi

Novo Nordisk is one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in Denmark, and a global leader in innovation and development of new medicines. They produce more than 50% of the world's insulin, and as such, is a big employer in Denmark, in everything from lab personnel to factory workers.

Since 2013, Novo Nordisk has worked in close collaboration with the Danish organization Specialisterne to develop an employment programme tailored to include people with Autism. Specialisterne, started in 2004, is an organization which helps people with Autism find and maintain employment. They state that they “*fight for a job market where the potential in people weighs heavier than the challenges*”. For 20 years, they have offered seminars, courses and counselling, to help individuals with Autism better understand how to structure their personal and professional life and succeed in their goals. Today Specialisterne are collaborating with partners in 35 locations across 13 countries internationally. While Specialisterne could in itself be considered a success story, this report investigates the programme “Project Opportunity” that was started by Novo Nordisk and Specialisterne several years back, which has proved highly effective.

In an article published by Novo Nordisk, the VP of the company share some of the reasoning behind starting the programme:

“At Novo Nordisk, we are really good at looking at processes and strategic fit. But we need people who can do other things – perhaps from quirkier angles than we are used to [...] We can see that the people with autism who have been part of the project are really good at manoeuvring in the processes, but they can also see when something is unnecessarily cumbersome or obscure. They are a talent pool we don’t consider. They give us something we will not otherwise get ... If you have met one person with autism, you have met one person with Autism. But there are of course certain traits, behavioral traits they share. They are very detail-oriented, and great at spotting patterns.” (Liselotte Hyveled, VP at Novo Nordisk)

There is no doubt in her mind that the programme benefits the company, both socially and economically. She goes on to share how: *“After the two year programme period, the ones we hire permanently don’t work full time. But when they are here, they are so efficient. So we get a lot of value for our money so to speak.”*

What makes this programme a success story is that it is mutually beneficial. There are several testimonies of employees with Autism who are in the programme, or have been and are now permanently employed. So what does the programme actually entail, and why does it work so well? Looking into what these individuals share, they explain that once they start at Novo Nordisk, they receive a number of “SOPs”, which stands for “Standard Operating Procedures”. These, one of the participants in the

program describe as a manual for “this is how you do this”. It effectively covers the tasks expected of them in their role. These are written in explicit detail, including things that neurotypical employees might not consider tasks, but rather “something you just do”.

Additionally, Novo Nordisk takes in experts on Autism, which are used both as headhunters and for mentors in the everyday life of the employees. This is where Specialisterne comes into the programme – they are experts on Autism, and Novo Nordisk is of course experts on the industry they are in and the job at hand. Together they develop the material, but a big part of the programmes success also comes from the fact that Specialisterne are a separate entity from the employer. For example, the mentor provided can support challenges both at work, but also at home. Or they can be used as a sparring partner – also in topics the individual might not want to disclose to the employer. The employees are able to share things without “looking bad”, or discuss personal issues in interpersonal relationships, or things they struggle to understand or navigate.

Several participants in the programme have shared how it has positively impacted them. One of these, Alvin, shares how being in full-time employment has led to greater independence outside of work. The structure in his job is something that he could apply to his personal life. He shares:

“After I started working at Novo Nordisk I became much more structured in my personal life – I’m much more organised now,” he says. “Moving out of my parent’s home was a huge change for me; it would have been much harder without the experience from Novo Nordisk.”

Another participant, shares the impact it has had on him to find meaning and sense of belonging through his employment:

“I’m so pleased to be able to fully use my talents and qualifications, and have someone actually value what I do. Project Opportunity has kind of been my salvation. I used to suffer from a lot of anxiety and depression. I don’t anymore. This job has helped guide my life in the right direction.”

Sources:

[Including the excluded](#)

[What we do](#)

[Om os. Borgere med autisme tættere på arbejdsmarkedet](#)





metautism.eu

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.



Co-funded by
the European Union



AGENCIJA ZA
MOBILNOST I
PROGRAME EU