



3 April 2024

[Blog article](#) by **Geraldine McGahey, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission NI**

Autism Acceptance Week, 2-8 April 2024

Imagine this is your son. He has a BSc in Computer Science and he lives with Autism Spectrum Disorder, ASD. With some specialised support, he applies for a job and was called for a pre-employment assessment. So, you can imagine how excited and pleased he was to be offered a full-time job when the call finally came, over a year later. He mentioned he would need reasonable adjustments due to his ASD and was told he would have them. He was offered a block booking of three months and got an email giving details of the start date, induction and training, and details of his duties.

He was delighted. He went shopping for new clothes for his new job. However, the day he arrived to start his new job, he was told the offer of employment had been withdrawn because Occupational Health had advised that reasonable adjustments were required, and these could not be facilitated.

Within five or ten minutes of his dad dropping him off at his new place of work, he had to ring his mother and tell her the job offer was withdrawn. His father had to drive back to collect him again. When he got home, he asked his mother what the point was of having to keep fighting for everything - he had to fight for his education, fight for benefits and fight for employment. He felt that the whole system was against him, and no one was prepared to give him a chance.

The young man said that he could perform almost all the duties outlined in the email he got. Nobody talked to him about what he could or could not do, or what help he needed. He felt that assumptions were made about his abilities and he was cast aside.

Another true story concerns a young woman with autism who worked, happily and without incident as far as she was concerned, in a coffee shop. She was unaware of any problems at work until she was called in and told that it would be better for her to leave because she did not get on with other staff members. No one spoke to her about any issues at work and her dismissal came as a very hurtful shock.

And finally, another young man with ASD had been working part time in a chip shop for a couple of months, again, as he thought, without incident. He was called in and says he was told that the coming months would be quiet and there wasn't enough work to justify him coming in. He was told to come in, leave off his uniform and pick up his pay packet, but not told that he was dismissed. At the same time, the shop

advertised a job, and a month later was looking for weekend staff. He asked if he could be considered and was told he had been dismissed - there had been customer complaints about him and that they had tried him in different roles in the shop without success.

Again, no one had spoken to him about any problems, and he became very distressed when he realised he was not going to return to work. He had no idea what, if anything, he had done wrong and no chance to learn or improve.

These stories all came to our discrimination advice line. One person's experience of autism is very different to another's. It's absolutely necessary to talk to any employee with a disability about their work, including any difficulties, and try to address them. These employers all failed in the simplest of communications tasks, and what I find worst about these stories is that they have all happened to young people with autism, knocking them back before they really get going, and making work a place of fear.

It's Autism Acceptance Week from 2 – 8 April 2024. There are employers who are open to the concept of neurodiversity. These are the employers who will often work to accommodate the needs of employees with autism and give them the same opportunity as everyone else to get and keep a job, with the independence that brings. If you are one of them, well done and keep going!

If you are not, there is no special magic involved, and there is plenty of help and guidance available – [contact us](#) for advice or download our guide for employers on [Employing people with autism](#) (*pdf*)