

PRESS RELEASE

March 2014

Autism and work. Together we can.

This World Autism Awareness Day, Autism-Europe is putting the spotlight on companies that are discovering the mutual benefits of employing people with autism.

Studies have shown that between 76¹ and 90² per cent of adults with autism are unemployed.

This is one of the many reasons why World Autism Awareness Day was declared by the United Nations General Assembly as an annual day to draw attention to the urgent needs of people with autism around the world.

Autism is a complex disorder that affects the brain. It impairs an individual's social and communication abilities and often causes them to display unusual or repetitive behaviours.

Today between 1 in 100 and 1 in 150³ children are diagnosed with autism – totalling around 3.3 million people in the European Union. In most regions of Europe, these children grow up to face widespread unemployment and little or no support as adults.

Autism can certainly affect a person's ability to interact in the workplace, yet the biggest barriers to employment that they face are a lack of support to find and maintain a job and social stigma about their autism.

Throughout Europe and around the world, innovative companies are now beginning to employ the unique strengths of people with autism to help them achieve their goals.

Danish IT company, Specialisterne, for example, is working towards its goal of creating jobs for one million people with autism around the world. Created in 2004 by the father of a young man with autism, the company employs a majority of people with autism who work on tasks such as software testing, programming and data-entry for corporate clients. Specialisterne sees the unique traits of people with autism such as attention to detail, enjoying repetitive tasks, lack of tolerance for errors, persistence and loyalty, as skills that may be harnessed to produce a high quality of work, making them a valuable asset to their employer. Now operating in 10 countries around the world, the company has already helped several hundred people with autism to find jobs. Specialisterne is also working with multinationals such as Nokia, Deloitte, Cisco, Microsoft and Oracle, to create even more jobs for people with autism.

In Italy, cosmetic company L'Oréal has begun a long-term project to facilitate the employment of people with autism throughout their company. Aiming to integrate young adults in particular into their workforce, in roles such as working with databases and archiving, as well as packaging cosmetics, quality checking and security. The company has created training for employees with autism, other staff and managers and designated specific staff members to act as coaches for employees with autism.

Providing people with autism the right support enables them, and the business, to succeed.



In fact, research has shown that companies that have employees with disabilities also report better staff retention rates, reducing the high cost of staff turnover⁴.

President of Autism-Europe, Zsuzsanna Szilvasy, encourages other organisations to follow in the footsteps of Specialisterne and L’Oral: “We are so pleased to see more and more organisations, public and private, begin initiatives to employ people with autism. “

“It is not only that people with autism have the right to employment – as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – it’s also an investment that public and private organisations can benefit from making,” continues Ms Szilvasy.

Employment is more than just a job for people with autism – it enables them to live more fulfilling and independent lives. Companies around the world are also realising that employing people with autism goes beyond philanthropy and corporate social responsibility; utilising their skills and creating a more diverse workforce can help companies succeed, benefiting everyone involved.

This year, Europeans will join others around the world in calling for increased awareness of autism throughout the month of April with a range of events and activities.

In cities across Europe many prominent buildings will be lit up in blue on the night of April 2, as part of the ‘Light It Up Blue’ initiative.

For more information and interviews, please do not hesitate to contact Aurelie Baranger, Director of Autism-Europe, in Brussels. Tel: +32 (0)2 675 75 05 Email: aurelie.baranger@autismeurope.org

Information on autism and employment:

<http://www.autismeurope.org/campaigns/autism-and-employment/>

Events and activities throughout Europe for World Autism Awareness Day 2014:

<http://www.autismeurope.org/activities/world-autism-awareness-day/>

‘Light It Up Blue’ buildings lit up in blue at night to raise awareness about autism:

<http://lightitupblue.org/Markslist/waysToLight.do?pagelD=361>

The United Nations Secretary-General’s message on World Autism Awareness Day:

<http://www.un.org/en/events/autismday/>

Sources:

¹ [The National Autistic Society](#) via the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services.

² [Autism Speaks](#); [Specialisterne](#); [Aspiritech](#); United Kingdom Office for National Statistics (2001), *Census Report*

³ [Autism-Europe](#), 2010, *Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Identification, Understanding, Intervention*.

⁴ Unger, D. D., 2002, ‘Employer’s attitudes toward persons with disabilities in the workforce: myths or realities? Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities’.

⁵ [Aspiritech](#), [Autism Speaks](#), [Specialisterne](#) / [The National Autistic Society](#) (NAS) via the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services.

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Published with the support of the Directorate-General Justice of the European Commission, under the [European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity, PROGRESS](#). The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or opinion of the European Commission.

