



INFORMATION SHEET

Age Group: **Adults**

Sheet Title: **Employment**

Adults with Asperger's Syndrome are among the most vulnerable and socially excluded groups in British society, discriminated against in employment, further education and access to social services.

Research shows that fewer than 6% of adults suffering from an autistic spectrum disorder are in full-time work, a figure falling to 2% for the less capable.

Those that are in employment complain of widespread prejudice surrounding their condition. Almost half still live at home, with a large number of those unknown to the social services.

The result is a widespread prevalence of mental illness and depression, with a third of parents reporting that their son or daughter had experienced mental health problems – a figure rising to over 50% for those whose son or daughter was diagnosed after the age of 30.

Of those experiencing mental health problems, more than half had suffered from depression, while 8% had reported suicidal feelings or had attempted suicide.

Despite the prevalence of a condition that costs health and education services £1 billion a year (largely for school-age children), adults with Asperger's Syndrome become "invisible" after leaving school.

Many parents say that most of the serious problems appeared in the transition between school and either university or seeking work.

"Thousands of people are just falling through the net", says Catherine Burkin, director of Prospects, a group for people with autism or Asperger's Syndrome which attempts to place them in work. "The problem is particularly bad as soon as you get outside London, then the barriers just come down. The problem is a lack of



understanding. People feel threatened because people with autistic spectrum disorders seem different.”

A typical example of the problems faced by even the most capable of those with Asperger's Syndrome is illustrated by the experiences of Mr A, an intelligent, largely independent 34-year-old. *“The difficulty that I have is with social skills. I have difficulty making eye contact with people. I also sometimes find it hard to understand from people's tone or body language whether they are joking.”*

Despite having a degree in economics, Mr A has struggled to find anything other than manual work. Even then, he has been faced with considerable discrimination. *“I was working for a while at a book factory. I was keen to get on, and applied in writing for a warehouseman's job that would have involved driving a forklift truck. The company rejected my application on the grounds that I **might have a fit and kill someone**. I have never had a fit. The symptoms of Asperger's Syndrome do not include fits.”*

Despite applying for jobs through Prospects, which helps employers understand the condition, Mr A has found himself in a Catch 22 situation. *“If I put on a job application form that I have Asperger's Syndrome, I don't get an interview,”* he said *“If I don't tell people about my AS, when I go for the interview, they cannot understand what is wrong with me.”*

The hardest period for many people with Asperger's Syndrome is the period of early adulthood, especially entering the world of university or work. Mr A missed a year at university because of his feelings of isolation, but has managed to complete his degree.

The same was sadly not true for Mrs B's daughter *“She was keen to go to university, but she only lasted a couple of weeks,”* says Mrs B, who runs a local support group, *“She found fitting in extremely hard, and had a serious breakdown. Because she was different, people would ignore her or stare and giggle when she came into a room.”*

One of the lucky ones is Mr C, who has recently got a job working for the NHS. He admits that it has not been easy to find work. *“I am not a big fan of using the word **disability**, because, for most people, that means **inability**, and that is rubbish! I am just like everybody else, but there are just some things that are a little different.”*