

Title: A Journey To Work

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This is Robert. And this is Connor. Two young men on their way to work, a journey performed by thousands of people every day in cities everywhere.

But these young men are on a much bigger journey than most.

They're on a journey from social misunderstanding to recognition and a successful career path.

It's also a journey to show corporate business it's been missing out on a key asset.

Connor: I follow into detail. I just have that eye for it. I can pick out the smallest mistakes within the largest bodies of text.

Robert: We are good at analysing and small details. We're good at picking up things really quickly. If you want someone who wants to do that, pick someone with Autism. We're pretty good at analysing.

Both Robert and Connor have Asperger's, a form of Autism characterised by high intellectual ability and usually poor social and communication skills.

It means people like Robert and Connor are more affected because of the way OTHER people respond to them.
And that makes it hard to get a job.

Robert: 'Cause we can still relate to people and talk to people but it's just that people need to understand that sometimes we may say something quite bluntly.

Connor: They'd be able to feel accepted rather than having every workplace just shaming and ignoring them, continually telling them, "No, we don't want you," or, "We don't care to learn about this thing that you have," when it's not something bad but everybody just understands that there's something bad because they don't know what it is. As soon as you know what it is, it is an advantage.

That's why in Adelaide Hewlett Packard started the Dandelion Program, a first in Australia, specifically hiring people with Autism to be involved in their software functional-testing program.

While there's a big benefit to business, the benefit to those who are given a chance is life changing.

Connor: This means that they may have a possibility to not only be socially accepted because they'll be able to find a work that fits them

better than almost any other workplace, but it also means that they'll get the financial support they need, they'll get the social support they need.

Robert: Yeah, it's opened up my job prospects quite a bit because this is something that I've never done before and knowing that I can do it has given me a bit more confidence to try anything new really. So it's a very big confidence builder for me. I can go out, I can try something I've never done before and if I keep my mind to it I'll be able to get through it.

And for families, it's a chance to see their kids moving forward in their lives.

Connor: Now I can actually benefit more and I can contribute more to the house. I pay extra towards the food, the water, the electricity, just to not only cover what I have and what I use but also to help out the rest of the family with everything else that may burden them.

Robert: I'm currently helping support my wife as she goes through university. So she's almost finished now too. And also my parents are very proud that I've got this job cause ... yeah it was good.

The way we look at things always needs challenging. Robert and Connor are showing that people with Asperger's not only have very special skills, but have a lot to offer as well.

(Silence)

This is programme one in a three part series.

Watch the others:

2. Integrating Autism in the Workplace
3. Testing and the Autism Advantage

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