

News from the Jersey Employment Trust

Neurodiversity in the workplace: Don't get stuck at the first hurdle



■ Emma Burns

Neurodiversity champion Emma Burns calls on employers to consider how accessible and inclusive their recruitment process is. By Jersey Employment Trust fundraising and relationships manager **Caroline Spencer**

NEURODIVERSITY Celebration Week (17-23 March) provides the chance for us to celebrate the strengths of neurodiverse individuals, and to showcase the strengths they can bring to the workplace.

Neurodiversity is an umbrella term for many conditions which includes, but is not limited to autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, OCD, as well as other neurological injuries. The term describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world in many ways, there being no "right" way of thinking, learning or behaving. Differences should not be seen as deficits.

Organisational development lead Emma Burns is the Neurodiversity Champion at JET. She has seen first-hand the difference employers can make.

"As a neurodiversity champion I want to raise awareness of neurodiversity and encourage and support employers to be a neuroinclusive workplace, where talking about neurodiversity is a safe and everyday occurrence," she said. "I am keen to challenge stigma and the assumptions

about how a neurodivergent person can be and promote the positive side of neurodiversity.

"Embracing it in the workplace is essential for creating an inclusive and productive working environment. Over the years, I have seen how much potential neurodiverse individuals have."

One thing employers could focus on is making changes to the recruitment process.

"We want to make workplaces more neurodiverse but often they are stuck at the first hurdle because many neurodivergent people don't interview well," she said. "But it's about getting the best out of people, of everyone really. Just normalise it for everyone."

"Employers need to think about reasonable adjustments that can be made. For example, could someone visit the workplace beforehand to see where they will be sitting, and meet the hiring manager? A small change of words can help, such as referring to an informal chat, rather than an interview. Interviews could take place

in a neutral location, which is less intimidating and on more equal terms. All this helps to reduce anxiety.

"Also, consider letting the candidate have the questions beforehand, 24 hours at least, and allow them to take notes in with them. Allow processing times. If someone is quiet, people often want to fill the space but it might be that the person is just thinking about their answer."

"And, as always, ask the individual what they need – because we are all different."

If you are an employer who requires support to help an employee who has a disability or long-term health condition meet their full potential, please get in touch with Emma by emailing emma.burns@jet.co.je.

■ JET employment co-ordinator Kate Fry was a guest panellist at All Matters Neurodiverse Jersey's lunch and learn Neuroinclusion in the Corporate World on 14 March, where delegates learned practical strategies to make a workplace more neuroinclusive.

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Emma Burns

Acorn's burning ambition achieved

THE Acorn Woodshack has a new briquette machine, and we are now processing sawdust from other workshops too.

The Woodshack makes kindling for winter sales year-round, and a few years ago it identified the need for a briquette machine to make use of sawdust created by the wood workshop. Our original machine has been replaced with a bigger and better one, which will mean we can produce more briquettes.

The process provides work and training for Islanders who have a disability or long-term health condition.

It also turns a waste product into renewable energy and



■ Acorn technical team leader Ian Florence with the briquette machine

creates an environmentally-friendly alternative to coal.

The compacted 50mm briquettes burn well and can produce more intense heat than other fuel as they have

the same calorific value as a piece of coal.

They are longer lasting than firewood and create no smoke, soot or carbon deposits, and do not emit

gases or toxic chemicals.

■ We are very grateful for the support of Ports of Jersey Community Boost Fund, Skipton Community Fund and RBC.

Acorn branches out to horticultural training programme

A HORTICULTURAL training programme has started at Acorn in conjunction with Highlands Adult & Community Education.

The new training and work experience programme will be aimed at young people who have a disability or long-term health condition and who show great potential in horticulture and gardening.

It will offer work experience, training and part-time employment in a supported garden environment. It will be based at the Philip Maurant Centre in Trinity, conveniently just over the road from Acorn. It is Highlands' satellite centre used specifically for Adult & Community Education. Coincidentally, it began life as the college's horticultural and agricultural training centre.

Acorn Training & Development client services manager Fiona Scott said: "We see this as an extension of our own allotment at Acorn, for those who are not quite ready to be totally independent. The programme will include training followed by a period of work experience, leading to some paid part-time hours."

"We have trialled a similar format in Acorn Reuse, where we have had



■ Some of the clients and staff who are starting on the programme, including Steve Ball on the right, who suggested the project

cohorts of clients gaining retail experience. The outdoor area is somewhat neglected and overgrown and yet could be a lovely, more accessible space for community groups and schools. Jersey Men-cap's art group, or a forest school area.

"We are grateful to the Rotary Club of Jersey for some funding which will

include costs for equipment such as strimmers and lawnmowers, and from the Education Department.

"If this programme works well, the model could extend to other educational establishments, helping create a pathway for those with disabilities and health conditions towards horticultural

further training and employment. We could work with garden companies who could take on some of our clients as interns and partnering with Highlands College to support more young people. For those who do well on the scheme, we are looking into it leading to a qualification, ultimately with the goal of paid work."



■ Left: The Lieutenant-Governor having a laugh with his Chief of Staff in the Woodshack, watched by JET executive officer Penny Shurmer and the Woodshack technical lead Ian Florence

■ Below: His Excellency hears all about the Gearing Up bike-building project from Tim Le Breuilly



■ Left: Having a look at some of the more valuable items donated to Acorn, which are being sorted by Chris Le Guern



■ Right: His Excellency was presented with an Acorn-made wheelbarrow for his garden, which had been stencilled by Tracey Monet

