



Experiences of YP with SEND on their journey towards employment

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Introduction

Between September 2018 and March 2019 I have been going to different groups to capture young people's voice and have also shared my own personal experience. I have interviewed 10 young people for this report from Amaze, Team Dominica and St Johns in a variety of different settings that include 1 to 1, focus and steering groups.

They young people have been at various stages of employment, some still students, some on work experience and some employed.

Being a disabled young person with experience of life after college and the Job Centre, I was able to facilitate these conversations and discussions as I have shared experiences. Teachers at St John's said their students gained a lot from these conversations as learners welcomed space and time said to reflect in and talk about their aspirations when they leave college.

To increase readability, I have identified and summarised the main themes of the barriers but full individual stories are available. Some are fuller than others due to different levels engagement but when I met with groups I made sure to give everyone a chance to share their insight.

I have added my own personal experiences to add depth to the report and provide some additional understanding of the barriers.

1) Issues identified by young people as barriers to work

a) Transport

Travelling to and from work can be very hard for someone with SEND. It is unlikely they own a car so the options are public transport or parents or carers. Within Amaze there has been success in referring young people to the Grace Eyre travel buddies' scheme, as it supports young people 1 to 1 to learn a journey.

All the young people I spoke to had concessionary bus passes and were frustrated with the morning time they can be used from.

Joanna 23 said 'The times I work 10-2, are not busy bus times it's annoying I can't use my disabled concessionary bus pass before 9:30 am as I am in West Sussex but when I lived in Brighton I could use it from 9 am so I choose to start work later.'

It can also be a barrier in looking for work as with Autism it is easy to get into a fixed way of thinking and concessionary bus passes only working after 9 am makes it hard to imagine working before that time.

Unexpected things can happen while taking public transport and it is hard to manage change like if you miss your stop or there are road works, I have to use google maps a lot to predict buses and it helps me feel less anxious when travelling

There are also physical barriers when travelling such as train gaps as if you have shorter legs or are in a wheelchair it can be impossible to travel that way even with booking assistance due to its unreliability.

b) Communication

Employers may need to adapt their communication. The way they communicate may cause anxiety in people with SEND.

Hayley 22 said 'It was really stressful waiting to hear back from people, I was constantly checking my email address to see if any employers had written back to me. I also checked my phone all the time and didn't feel able to leave the house. I'm not very confident talking on the phone so I was scared that the phone would suddenly ring when I'm having a panic attack.'

Employers don't always give feedback or even say no so it is hard to know if you are underqualified for the job.

Employers sometimes do or say things that suggest they can't accommodate a person with SEND.

When asked what might you find difficult in the workplace Nathaniel 22 said he worries about asking too many questions as he wants to get the job done right but that employers will be annoyed as its unprofessional.

c) Applications

Applications are often very long and not always clear as lots of the questions seem similar.

Also, there is a big difference between CVs and job application forms and it can be difficult to know what is required. When I was job searching, I spent a long time making several CVs for different types of jobs but when I went to apply for a job on the council website, I found out they instead have you do an application form online

‘Other jobs wanted me to fill out application forms and I found them quite confusing and stressful.’ One young person I spoke too strongly prefers jobs that only require a CV as they find application forms confusing and stressful, while I personally prefer them now I understand them better now, and you can put lots of detail in them.

Some volunteering forms are more complicated than job applications and it’s hard to access organisations that will help. I really wanted to volunteer in the library as I liked books but I really struggled with the application form and the Job Centre said it was up to me to do it and they didn’t have the capacity to do application forms with me. I was on the supported employment waiting list for almost a year.

There are very few accessible applications.

‘It’s really hard to find jobs in the first place because it’s all online and the websites are hard to navigate. Also, lots of jobs want to experience so it’s hard for young people to start a new career journey if they only been in education. Lots of jobs, unfortunately, want people to have “one years-experience” so I’m hoping that there will be jobs that want me with less than one year’s experience.’

d) Staying resilient

One theme that has come up in my conversations with young people is resilience, in this case managing the unexpected in the workplace.

‘What really stood out to me was one week I broke a jar of marmalade and my job coach was in a different aisle of the store, my co-workers supported me very calmly and were not angry at all apparently it happens lots. I feel more confident knowing this.’

This is a big blow to a YP as it’s easy to be put off by events that are upsetting. Loud noises are especially scary.

‘I felt really stressed when the fire alarm went off for a fire drill. So many people work in my building, so I felt really claustrophobic and anxious because we were all clustered around the doors to get out of the building. I feel embarrassed about being worried by the fire drill and I didn’t want to let anyone know that It made me stressed so I pretended to be fine. It would be good if I could somehow know when the fire drill will go off because then I could be prepared for it or even take that day off work.’

It is very hard to stay motivated and focused when your mental health is poor. Working has massively improved my mental health

2) What helps young people on their journey towards employment?

Having **positive role models** really helped me when I felt very low about not having a job, seeing my other friends with SEND succeed made me realise it wasn't impossible. We often met at our local library to go through our research into jobs and did practise interviews together, we also shared our worries about claiming benefits and the future, this really motivated us all to try and overcome our worries.

Lots of young people said that getting lots of **different experiences** is vital in understanding what you want to do and trying to get there. It is important to try things as otherwise it can lead to unrealistic expectations and pursuing an unachievable goal.

When thinking about employment it can be hard to **think realistically** as you are told by the school to look at what you enjoy and look for jobs related to your interests. This can be counterproductive in my experience as often these interests are often quite narrow, I spent a year volunteering at my local museum and applied for every job that came up with no success. I realised that this path was going nowhere when I spoke to the museum shop assistant and found out she had a master's in museum studies and was applying to the same jobs I was. It wasn't a total waste of time as I learned lots of skills and gained a better idea of my interests and skills.

One young woman I spoke to want to work in a nursery but has never volunteered in one and has no knowledge of what it entails, her understanding is you get to play with children all day.

What helped me get **realistic expectations** of work was **volunteering** in lots of different places which gave me a better idea of my interests and skills and also what I didn't want to do as a job which is just as valuable.

What I think is key in work experience and volunteering is having a **clear idea of what you are getting out of it**. I found it easy to 'stagnate' in an unpaid position after I had out grown it and there was no chance of paid work and I only noticed when I realised I was dreading doing it due to boredom. What would have prevented this would be having someone who could check in after a period of time to see if it was still aiding my development.

It is important to talk about **how a young person manages their time**. Knowing when to leave to get to work is a very important skill that needs to be learned. It can be complicated to know when to leave to catch the bus to arrive on time, let alone account for complications.

Similarly, complicated is **knowing when to leave work**. I was very lucky as in my first job my line manager would, as soon as I arrived, write out when I should leave on a sticky note in the corner of my screen as she knew I struggled to work it out. I now use an app to clock in and out for myself but in the beginning, I easily lost track as I struggle with analogue clocks and can only manage my time on a digital 24-hour clock.

Being employed was the first time I had to turn up reliability and plan my weeks ahead of time which I found very hard. I had to use an app on my phone called Worklog in the end in which it's easy to plan how long to work each day.

Joe 22 at St John's suggested that having a designated **mentor in the workplace** would make getting a job less scary as he would know whom to talk to if he wasn't sure about something. 'I'm still in training at the moment so I have been shadowed by another member of my team and he is helping me get used to the job.'

Some of the young people I spoke to that had **work coaches** while on placement said they helped them stay on track and not get distracted.

'It really helps if there is a quiet area to take breaks in.'

'There are a lot of people, so it can be hard to get away if I need some time to be by myself to help with my anxiety.'

'What's working really well is that I get 5 min breaks whenever I need them and my job coach is always present while I work so I feel less anxious.'

Parents and carers play a vital role in a young person's job search. Hayley said they had found out about her job 'Through my family, they helped to support me a lot.' and 'They had their own experience about applying for jobs, so they knew what things I should write on my CV and other applications.'

Jo 22 said when asked about what his plans for finding employment after college were: 'I could go back to my old job at the local hospital if I wanted to and my parent will help me find a job too if I need help looking. My dad always read any application before I sent it off to check grammar and anything I wasn't clear on and always empowered me to keep applying as it's easy to be disheartened.'

Sometimes a parent's worry about their young person's future can transfer to them and can impact them negatively and make them second guess their abilities. One young person I spoke to said how after one job interview her mum told her she wouldn't be hired as it was her first ever job interview. It really knocked their confidence and really stuck in their mind even 6 months afterwards.

From discussion with YP, there seems to be a general view that young people find it more useful than not for their parents to be involved in meetings. It helps provide their history and makes them feel more confident.

One worry that has been expressed is **not fitting into the workplace** and as a result **being excluded** from social events, like Christmas parties, and not being treated equally.

Having an **induction checklist** was good as it broke the ice with my new co-workers and made me less nervous to ask for help when I needed it as I felt more familiar with them.

Joanna said 'I'm allowed to wear whatever I want but I prefer to wear the uniform they gave me as it makes me feel like part of the team, I really appreciate having the option.' It is a big worry for young people and their families, I think it's important to be aware of and to know what **adaptions** will help you. Joanna said 'I wasn't allowed time off for important hospital appointments despite giving plenty of notice so I had to leave. Another time I was told to work unpaid in my break between shifts, peeling potatoes. Lucky I could recognise I was being taken advantage of and left.'