AUTISM FORWARD CIO

England & Wales · Charity number 1171704

Details

Other names	AUTISM EMPLOYMENT FOUNDATION CIO
Status	Registered
Legal form	CIO
Registered	2017-02-20
Register	View on the Charity Commission register

Contact

Address	37 Granville Park London SE13 7DY
Phone	07545370828
Email	info@autismforward.org.uk
Website	www.autismforward.org.uk

Activities

Objects: THE OBJECTS OF THE CIO ARE THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT AMONGST PEOPLE AGED EIGHTEEN OR OVER WHO ARE EXCLUDED FROM SOCIETY, OR PARTS OF SOCIETY, DUE TO AN AUTISM SPECTRUM CONDITION, TO RELIEVE THE NEEDS OF SUCH PEOPLE AND ASSIST THEM TO INTEGRATE INTO SOCIETY AND ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL AS INDIVIDUALS AFTER THEY LEAVE EDUCATION, IN PARTICULAR BUT NOT EXCLUSIVELY THROUGH FUNDING THE PROVISION OF:(A) PRE-EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT, INCLUDING SOCIAL SKILLS AND OTHER RELEVANT TRAINING WHICH ENHANCES EMPLOYABILITY;(B) COACHING, MENTORING, ADVICE AND SUPPORT IN RELATION TO EMPLOYABILITY;(C) PROVIDING SPECIALIST SKILLS AND AWARENESS TRAINING AND WORKSHOPS RELATING TO EMPLOYABILITY; AND(D) ACTION TO INCREASE PUBLIC AND EMPLOYER AWARENESS OF SUCH DISABILITIES AND CONDITIONS AND PROMOTE STEPS THAT CAN BE TAKEN TO FACILITATE SUCH SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH EMPLOYMENT.

Activities: Supporting adults with an autism spectrum condition to achieve their potential as individuals and facilitate their social inclusion by funding specialist mentoring from appropriate providers on a one to one basis to help them obtain and retain employment and by funding their participation in training activities which are relevant to improving their employability.

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Classification

- **How:** Makes Grants To Individuals, Provides Advocacy/advice/information
- **What:** Education/training, Disability, Economic/community Development/employment, Human Rights/religious Or Racial Harmony/equality Or Diversity
- **Who:** People With Disabilities

Geography

- Throughout England And Wales

Finances

Period end	Income	Expenditure	Assets	Employees
2025-03-31	£188,996	£159,521	-	-
2024-03-31	£93,755	£114,442	-	-
2023-03-31	£83,422	£116,998	-	-
2022-03-31	£122,102	£40,173	-	-
2021-03-31	£52,355	£67,170	-	-

Trustees

Name	Role	Appointed
ANN LEVERETT	Chair	2017-01-23
Dr ELIF GOKCEN also known as GOGCEN		2017-01-23
Helen Needham		2020-11-01
JANE PIERCE		2017-01-23

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AUTISM FORWARD CIO

England & Wales - Charity number 1171704

Accounts

Charity registration number: 1171704

AUTISM FORWARD

ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

AUTISM FORWARD

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AUTISM FORWARD

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Trustees	Ms A Leverett Ms J Pierce Dr E Gokcen Ms H Needham
Principal Office	37 Granville Park London SE13 7DY
Charity Registration Number	1171704
Website	www.autismforward.org.uk
Bankers	Metro Bank PLC One Southampton Row London WC1B 5HA
Independent Examiner	Rotherham Taylor Limited 21 Navigation Business Village Navigation Way Ashton-on-Ribble Preston PR2 2YP

TRUSTEES' REPORT

The trustees present the annual report together with the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2025.

The financial statements have been prepared on an accruals basis in accordance with the accounting policies set out in the notes to the financial statements and comply with the charity's constitution, Charities Act 2011 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their financial statements in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland published on 16 July 2014. The financial statements have been examined by an Independent Examiner.

THE TRUSTEES

The trustees who served the charity during the period were as follows:

Jane Pierce (Chair and Secretary)

Ann Leverett (Treasurer)

Elif Gokcen

Helen Needham

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The charity is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered number 117104 and is constituted under a Foundation Constitution which came into force on 20 February 2017. Ann Leverett, Jane Pierce and Elif Gokcen were the three co-founders of the charity and were all reappointed for a further period of 3 years commencing on 23 January 2023. Helen Needham was appointed as a trustee on 20 October 2020 and was reappointed for a further period of 3 years commencing on 1 November 2023.

At the AGM on 3 July 2024 the Trustees accepted the resignation of Ann Leverett as Chair of the charity and approved the appointment of Jane Pierce as Chair with effect from 1 September 2024. Ann Leverett confirmed that she would continue her roles as Trustee and Treasurer of the charity.

New trustees are appointed by the existing trustees and in selecting individuals for appointment as charity trustees, the trustees must have regard to the skills, knowledge and experience needed for the effective administration of the charity. The Constitution provides for a minimum of 3 trustees and there is no maximum. Trustees are eligible for reappointment at the end of their term.

As the charity is primarily a grant-making charity, it does not have any paid employees and all fundraising and administrative work is undertaken by the trustees. The trustees attend external training courses as necessary and appropriate for their responsibilities and roles within the charity.

All trustees are required to read the Charity Commission's guidance "The Essential Trustee: What you need to know" and the new Charity Commission Governance Code.

The trustees aim to meet at least once every quarter to discuss fundraising, finances, governance issues, events, new mentor partnerships or initiatives with other autism charities or potential corporate sponsors and to confirm approval of grants. The day to day administration of grants and the processing of applications is handled by the Chair and Secretary. A Grant Approval Sub-Committee was established by unanimous agreement of the trustees on 20 October 2020 and currently comprises three trustees (Ann Leverett, Jane Pierce and Elif Gokcen) which approves grant applications and grant extensions in accordance with its terms of reference (as amended in writing and approved by the trustees from time to time). Details of all grants and grant extensions approved by the Grant Approval Sub-Committee are made available to all trustees and are presented at each board meeting.

All trustees give their time freely and no trustee remuneration was paid in the year and no expenses were claimed by them. Trustees are required to disclose all relevant interests and register them with the charity secretary in accordance with the charity's Conflict of Interest Policy and withdraw from any decisions where a conflict of interest arises. No disclosures have been made by the Trustees since the charity was constituted.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The trustees have considered the major risks to which the charity is exposed and have reviewed those risks and established systems and procedures to manage those risks which are set out in the charity's Risk Management Strategy which is reviewed by the Treasurer annually. This contains procedures to ensure the Charity is complying with the Charity Commission guidance in relation to due diligence procedures in relation to beneficiaries, donors and partners.

The charity is primarily a grant making charity and it raises funds to provide grants for specialist employment related mentoring and workshops for autistic adults who are actively seeking paid or voluntary employment. The mentoring and workshops are provided by independent specialist mentors who have proven experience of providing employment related mentoring to autistic adults. The mentor partners are entirely independent of the charity and the charity carries out due diligence in relation to each proposed mentor partner in accordance with the Charity Commission "Know Your Partner" guidelines to verify their experience, good standing and suitability. The charity also enters into a Referral Agreement with each proposed mentor partner which sets out the process for referring grant applications to the charity and the rights and obligations of the mentor partner and the charity in relation to the mentoring services which are funded by grants provided by the charity.

The charity has put in place processes to obtain regular feedback from grant holders and mentors in relation to the mentoring provided and their progress to monitor the use of the charity's funds and outcomes and demonstrate the public benefit derived from the funding of the specialist mentoring and workshops. The charity also reviews each mentor partner annually to check they continue to meet the good standing and other relevant requirements of the "Know Your Partner" guidelines.

The charity is currently working with thirteen independent specialist mentor partners across the country. We have added two new mentor organisations to our network this financial year to expand our geographical reach.

The charity's surplus funds are divided between the charity's business saving account at Metro Bank plc, the charity's business saving account with the Nationwide Building Society account, the charity's deposit account with United Trust Bank and a new 31 day Business Notice Account with Cambridge & Counties Bank in order to benefit from the FSCS compensation scheme with all four financial institutions, minimising the charity's financial exposure. All payments made by the charity from its bank and building society accounts require authorisation by two trustees (except where withdrawals can only be made into the Metro Bank account, which requires authorisation by two trustees for any withdrawal).

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT

The objects of the charity are the promotion of social inclusion for the public benefit amongst people aged eighteen or over who are excluded from society, or parts of society, due to an autism spectrum condition, to relieve the needs of such people and assist them to integrate into society and achieve their potential as individuals after they leave education, in particular but not exclusively through funding the provision of:

(a) pre-employment support, including social skills and other relevant training which enhances employability;

(b) coaching, mentoring, advice and support in relation to employability;

(c) providing specialist skills and awareness training and workshops relating to employability;

(d) facilitating access to a range of social and leisure activities; and

(e) action to increase public and employer awareness of such disabilities and conditions and promote steps that can be taken to facilitate such social inclusion through employment.

The trustees confirm that they have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the charity's aims and objectives and planning future activities and setting the grant making policy for the charity.

The charity carries out these objects by:

(a) providing grants to autistic adults to allow them to access specialist mentoring and/or workshops to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and to improve their social inclusion by accessing clubs, groups, workshops and work placements;

(b) providing information and resources for autistic people and employers on its website, including details of specialist mentors offering one-to-one support and/or workshops to autistic people to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and links to other websites and resources;

(c) raising awareness among employers of the needs and strengths of autistic employees and providing advice and signposting services with the aim of increasing access to employment for autistic people and creating more inclusive workplaces; and

(d) liaising with universities and colleges to raise awareness of the charity's services for autistic students upon graduation and other initiatives which can improve employment outcomes for autistic students.

Our approach ensures that mentoring support is provided on a one to one basis, with regularity and consistency by a mentor who has lived and/or professional experience supporting autistic people into employment with the right adjustments. Support is also given to help access benefits, social activities, training and navigate social expectations at work. We do not have a set timeframe or timetable for support, the mentor will tailor this to the needs of the individual. We can generally extend support until the individual has achieved their employment goals or is equipped to pursue them without further support and often our clients continue to work with the same mentor once they are in employment, funded by Access to Work or the employer.

The Buckland Review of Autism Employment, which we contributed to last year, stated that the estimated cost to the UK economy of the autism employment gap is around £14.5 billion per year, with the Labour Force Survey showing that only 3 in 10 working age autistic people are in employment. This is a tragic waste of talent and leads to social isolation and financial hardship for so many autistic people. The current Labour government has also identified the lack of support available to help disabled and neurodivergent people into work and has set up a formal review panel to report on this later this year. However, as yet no specific funding or plan has been put in place, so our work remains as important as ever. We hope that the renewed focus on support to help disabled and neurodivergent people into work and also on what employers can and should be doing to make workplaces more accessible for disabled and neurodivergent people will benefit our grant holders and autistic people across the country.

The specialist mentoring funded by the charity enables autistic people to prepare for, find and maintain suitable employment which improves their independence and social inclusion. On average, over the last seven years, including the two years when covid restrictions applied, 81% of the autistic job seekers we have supported have secured paid or voluntary employment (60% paid and 21% voluntary), maintaining the excellent results achieved last year. The impressive outcomes for our beneficiaries, as set out in further detail in section 8 of this report, demonstrate the effectiveness of the specialist mentoring support we fund. The qualitative feedback shows the broad nature of the support which goes above and beyond employment related support, helping our clients to access benefits, training, social activities and to develop strategies to help them cope with the barriers they face in a world that is not yet adapted for autistic people.

We always seek to ensure that the support we fund is in line with the requirements and values of the autistic community and we recognise the importance of including autistic people at all levels of our organisation. Helen Needham, who is autistic herself, joined our Board of Trustees in 2020 and an increasing number of the specialist employment mentors we work with are also neurodivergent. We seek regular feedback from the autistic job seekers we support to ensure that the support we fund is of value to them. We also use our social media and newsletters to promote the work and events of autistic and neurodivergent led organisations. We also fund regular Peer Support meetings which are run by our mentor partner, AS Mentoring and continue to fund the successful Culture Club (previously called the Movie Club) for Autism Forward clients in Brighton run by our mentor partner Karen-Anne Manghan of ASC Key Mentoring, who meet on a weekly basis to discuss a wide range of topics selected by the group. Three members of the group secured paid employment recently, with their mentor noting that their self-confidence had improved considerably due to being part of the group.

We liaise with employers, universities and colleges to raise awareness of the strengths and needs of autistic people, promoting employment opportunities for autistic people across the UK. We have created a network of employers and continue to participate in events with employers, universities and researchers. We are actively involved with the Legal Neurodiversity Network and are also a member of GAIN (Group for Autism, Insurance, Investment and Neurodiversity) and Autism Action (formerly Autism Employment Network) launched by the Autism Centre for Excellence.

PRO BONO CONTRIBUTIONS

The charity has no paid employees and the expenses of the charity are kept to a minimum as the charity has no office space or fixed overheads. All of the grant administration, record keeping, data analysis, fundraising, event organisation, employer roundtable events, universities and communication is carried out by the trustees on a pro bono basis, drawing on their professional experience, networks and resources. All of the charity's awareness raising events and roundtables to date have been hosted by corporate supporters at no cost to the charity or attendees. This maximises the use of the charity's funds for its beneficiaries and ensures its awareness raising events reach a wide audience.

GRANT MAKING POLICY

The charity has established its grant making policy with the aim of promoting the social inclusion of autistic people and assist them to integrate into society and achieve their potential by providing grants for funding specialist one-to-one mentoring to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment or for training activities which are relevant to improving employability.

The charity currently works with thirteen specialist mentoring organisations across the country and has carried out due diligence checks and entered into Referral Agreements with the organisations listed below which between them cover London, Surrey, Essex, Suffolk, Brighton, Birmingham, Manchester, Bedfordshire, Devon, East Midlands, Northampton, Plymouth, Hull, Liverpool, Chester, Bristol, Poole, Cambridgeshire and Nottingham. All our mentors now offer remote mentoring services, which extends their geographical reach and increases the number of clients they are able to support.

Autistic Nottingham

Autism East Midlands

AS Mentoring Limited

ASC Key Mentoring (Karen Manghan)

Autism Success Formula Limited

Connect Coaching

Faraday Fearnside

Matthew's Hub

Responsa Coaching

Spectrum Career Coach

Think Musique

Track NN Limited

WayMakers Devon CIC

The charity has further expanded its reach this year with two new mentor partners, Connect Coaching and Responsa Coaching.

The charity accepts applications from grants via its mentor partners and directs enquiries from its website to the mentor partners listed on its website. All grant applications must be made via an approved mentor partner and all grant payments are made directly to the mentor partner. The charity awards initial grants for up to one year of weekly or fortnightly one-to-one mentoring support and will consider requests for grant extensions where the grant holder is making good progress towards employment and is engaging well with the mentoring support.

The applicants must be aged 18 or over and must have a diagnosis of an autism spectrum condition or evidence that they are actively seeking such a diagnosis. They must also provide evidence that they live and are entitled to work in the United Kingdom and priority is given to applicants in financial need and those who have not previously had any employment related mentoring support. While many of our applicants are looking for their first role after leaving education, we also support many people who are late diagnosed, long term unemployed or who have struggled to find a suitable role or an employer who is willing to offer the adjustments necessary for them to succeed at work.

The charity requires regular feedback from the mentors on the progress of the beneficiaries and feedback from the beneficiaries on the mentoring they receive in order to monitor the use of the charity's funds and outcomes.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

(a) Grants for Mentoring Support

In the financial year ending 31 March 2025, the charity awarded grants for specialist mentoring support to 97 autistic people around the country with the aim of improving their social inclusion and helping them to secure paid or voluntary employment. The charity also continued to fund mentoring support for 121 of the grant holders from previous financial years, thus providing support for a total of 218 autistic job seekers during the financial year ended 31 March 2025, 120 of whom were still receiving support at the end of the financial year. This was the largest ever cohort supported by the charity and we continue to see a rise in applications from all areas of the country.

The average age of our 2024-25 grant holders is 31 years old, with 54% male, 45% identifying as female and 1% non-binary. The qualifications held by the grant holders range from no formal qualifications to Masters and PhD level degrees and professional qualifications. The sectors in which the applicants have secured or are seeking employment are incredibly varied, including education, health and care sector, research, game design, pharmacy, IT, hospitality, horticulture, film, music, accountancy and retail. The wide variety of careers pursued by our grant holders dispels common preconceptions of the types of roles that are suitable for autistic people and demonstrates that autistic people can pursue any career choice which matches their interest and skills with the right guidance and support. Some are also given support to pursue self-employment, including publishing novels or freelance photography, which can be an attractive option for autistic people given the challenges some workplaces can present.

In addition to supporting our beneficiaries into employment, the mentors help with anxiety, communication, sensory and also practical issues they may be facing, which improves their autonomy, well-being and social inclusion. For example, our mentors have helped beneficiaries with anxiety, travelling on public transport, relationship issues and organisational skills. On a practical level, our mentors have helped beneficiaries deal with benefits claims, tenancy problems, debt problems and referrals to appropriate health and mental health services. The mentors have also facilitated participation in new clubs, groups and social activities as well as workshops and training to improve their employability, social inclusion and well-being.

(b) Outcomes from Mentoring Support

The Government stated in the Buckland Review of Autism Employment that fewer than 3 in 10 autistic people are in work, so the results achieved by our beneficiaries are particularly impressive, demonstrating the effectiveness of the specialist mentoring support that we fund.

The outcomes for grant holders awarded grants during the financial year 2024-25 who have had between 3 and 12 months' support were as follows:

92% made job applications

73% attended job interviews

36% joined new clubs or groups

47% undertook some form of training or placement

26% secured voluntary roles

48% secured paid employment

We anticipate that our beneficiaries will continue to move into employment, improving the employment outcomes for our 2024-25 grant holders, as has happened with all previous cohorts.

The total employment figure for our 2024-25 grant holders is 71% (48% paid; 23% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2023-24 grant holders is 86% (70% paid; 16% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2022-23 grant holders is 75% (56% paid; 19 % voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2021-22 grant holders is 75% (58% paid; 17% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2020-21 grant holders is 81% (67% paid; 14% voluntary).

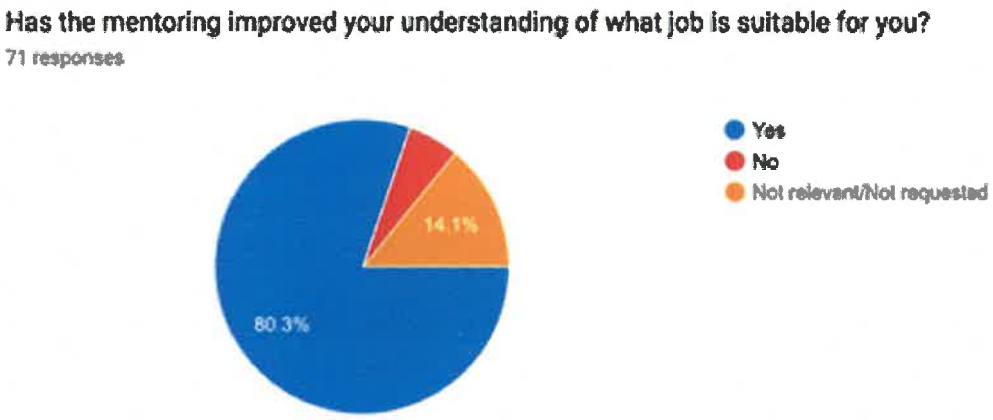
The total employment figure for our 2019-20 grant holders is: 90% (65% paid; 25% voluntary).

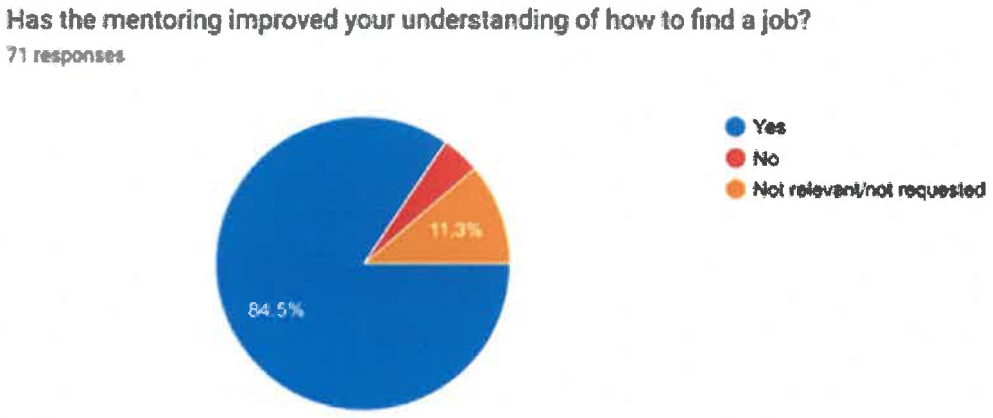
The total employment figure for our 2018-19 grant holders is: 90% (58% paid; 32%voluntary).

The above figures for all financial years include clients whose support was ended early due to health or other issues and clients whose grants have been temporarily paused. The figures for the current financial year include only grant holders who have had between 3 and 12 months' support. Some of the grant holders who were awarded grants in previous financial years have had more than 12 months' support.

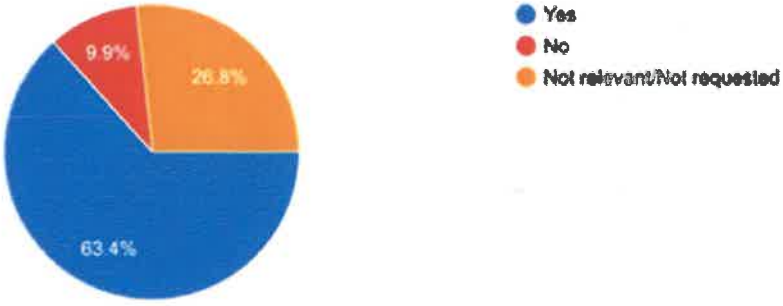
(c) Feedback from our Beneficiaries

We introduced a new format for the regular feedback from our grant holders in 2021 which enables us to assess the value of the support we fund in more detail. The results of the feedback from grant holders who have had at least 6 months' mentoring support during the financial year ended 31 March 2025 are set out in the charts below. This includes grant holders who were awarded grants in previous financial years and who continued to receive support this year. The responses demonstrate the wider impact and value of the specialist mentoring support we fund, beyond employment outcomes.

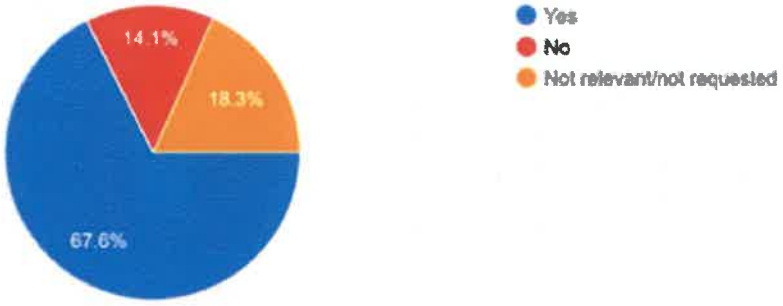




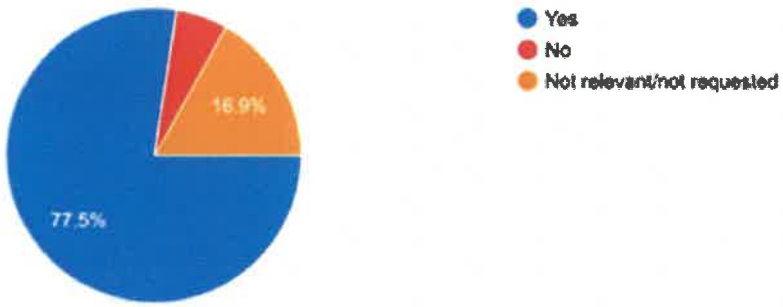
Has the mentoring helped you draft or update your CV?
71 responses



Has the mentoring made you more confident about disclosing your diagnosis?
71 responses

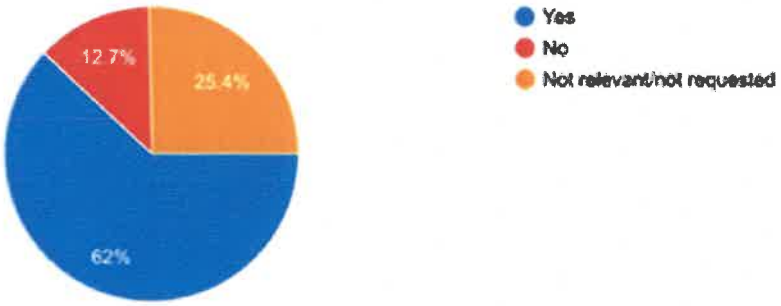


Has the mentoring given you a better understanding of the "reasonable adjustments" you can request from an employer to help you in the workplace?
71 responses



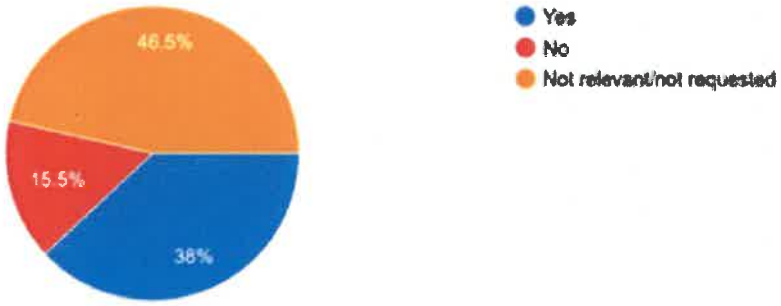
Has the mentoring helped you prepare for interviews?

71 responses



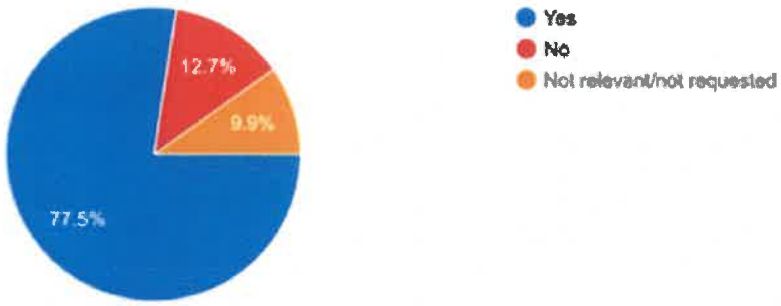
Has the mentoring improved your social contact, eg helped you join groups, make friends, participate in activities?

71 responses

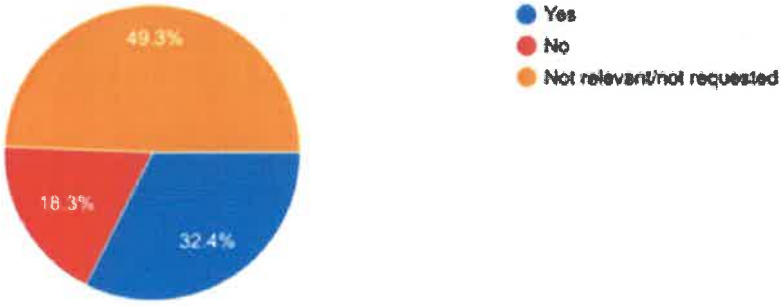


Has the mentoring improved your self-confidence?

71 responses

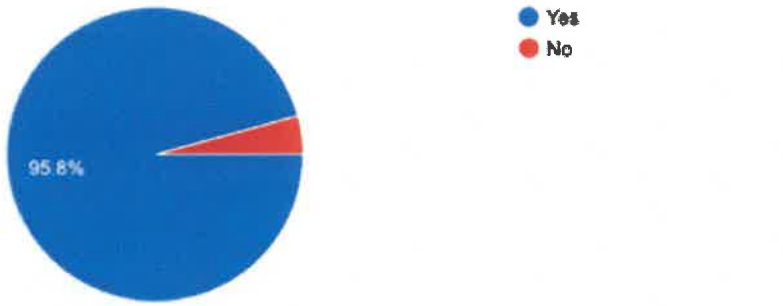


Has the mentoring helped you access benefits, health care or other public services?
71 responses



Has the mentoring helped you access training, workshops or further education?
71 responses

Would you recommend mentoring support to other autistic jobseekers?
71 responses



The qualitative feedback responses below from some of the autistic job seekers we have supported this year provide further evidence of the value of the specialist support we fund, including the workshop programmes and our employer roundtables. This support enables people not only to find paid or voluntary employment, but also to improve their independence, social inclusion, confidence and self-esteem, to understand better how their autism affects them and to develop strategies to address issues which may be holding them back. This is beneficial not only to the individuals and their families, but also benefits the public purse as it reduces the need for reliance on benefits and public services such as mental health provision and leads to a more inclusive and cohesive society and diverse workforce.

The feedback also highlights the gap in support for autistic people when they leave education, or obtain a late diagnosis, that is so often needed to enable them to fulfil their potential in the workplace and beyond.

Autistic Nottingham Client

The help and input I have received from Phil has been incredibly helpful. I am making progress that seemed impossible to me six months ago. I also tried approaching the local careers service, and a key worker from the group who diagnosed me - both were significantly lacking. In the former case they clearly had no idea how to handle my being autistic and so it was up to me to 'mask', to appear as non-autistic as possible - this inevitably gets in the way of actually getting help. In the latter case, they treated me as they'd been trained, having no appreciation of, or interest in, individual experience. It has been vital to speak with someone who has been where I find myself, and who understands the difficulties from the inside. I wish careers etc organisations at large had some autistic (or at least neurodivergent) people among their staff, to allow for that common understanding of difficulties. Until then, I am incredibly grateful that this service exists, and to Phil in particular.

AS Mentoring Client (London)

My heartfelt appreciation to Autism Forward for your initiative and support with mentoring, education and providing resources to employers and employees, raising awareness and building bridges.

I'm specifically grateful for the opportunity to be able to access mentoring during a time of economic hardship and being unemployed, whilst being in the process of becoming more aware of my neurodiverse traits and needs - learning to verbalise them, to navigate the process of getting back into work, and to find balance in more sustainable and inclusive ways.

It's been quite a journey to get here, and it's a lot to get my head around, and I'm still working on my confidence - so I'll keep it short for now with a huge - Thank you so much, the mentoring is very helpful!

Faraday Fearnside Client (Plymouth)

It has been really helpful for me to have some extra support on a regular basis. My husband has commented that I am getting my 'spark' back. I really like Faraday's holistic approach: she views you as a whole person and considers the bigger picture. It is not quite what I expected when I applied to have a work mentor. It is so much more! She gives me much-needed emotional support because she realises that that is what I need. When you haven't worked for a long time (because you have been traumatised by the world of work), starting to look for work again can bring up a lot of emotions. Faraday realises that neurodivergent people can often have a bumpy road to finding the right work for them.

I have sometimes found the process difficult but that's because making changes (even positive ones) can be overwhelming for me as an autistic person. Faraday has identified that I may have ADHD in addition to autism, which may explain why the diagnosis of autism doesn't seem to cover the full range of challenges that I experience. It is her extensive experience of working with neurodivergent people that allowed her to quickly notice that something else might be going on with me.

I find that Faraday is just the right combination of encouraging and no-nonsense and sensitive and perceptive. She gives me the push that I sometimes need but knows when I am feeling overwhelmed and when we need to slow down a bit. She has helped me to start volunteering again which is helping with my confidence and helping me to feel like a useful member of society again. She is helping me to learn how to be patient with myself and that big changes cannot be made overnight (especially if you are autistic!!). I was feeling hopeless and stuck and now I feel empowered to make positive changes in my life. She is helping me to change my life for the better and I feel so grateful.

Autistic Nottingham Client

I had the privilege of being mentored by Phil, whose exceptional guidance significantly enhanced my workplace soft skills and job-seeking strategies. His insightful advice improved my interactions with colleagues and clients, while his support in refining my job search approach was invaluable. Phil's kindness and dedication created a comfortable environment for growth, and I wholeheartedly recommend his mentorship to anyone seeking professional development.

Spectrum Career Coach Client (Bedfordshire)

It's really helpful, in terms of improving my CVs and to know what employers are looking for. Understanding what I'm good at and broadening my perceptions and awareness. Also Sonya has forwarded me some really helpful resources and opportunities. Sonya is a really nice person, very positive, truthful and easy to connect with as well. I don't think I could have mustered up the confidence to go in person to the solicitors or to the bookshop if it hadn't been for the mentoring. It has helped to dispel the fears that I have of making a fool of myself.

WayMakers (Devon) Client

Mentoring has helped me to build my confidence, particularly with setting boundaries and advocating for myself and my needs/adjustments. Since starting mentoring last year, I have completed a Level 2 Admin course via Free Courses for jobs, have started a fitness class once a week and am about to start volunteering.

Mentoring helped me to make the initial email contact and plan what to say when I had a face to face meeting about volunteering. I am more comfortable sharing about my diagnosis if needed to help me to access and support that may help me thrive/stay in a role.

Mentoring has also helped me with planning and time management skills, something that was an issue for me with my neurodiversity - I have learnt about specific tools/techniques that can help with this. I am now looking at going back into self-employment or a part-time role in the future.

Think Musique Client (Manchester)

The mentoring has helped me through the difficult challenges of attending interviews following distressing previous work situations and get around the feelings of PTSD that have been brought up. It's difficult as although I have applied/interviewed for many jobs, at the moment I have been rejected a lot. The mentoring has also supported me with processing that and finding ways to keep trying.

AS Mentoring Client (London)

I have had a fantastic experience with my mentor. On my own, I struggled for a year and a half to secure a role, but after joining AS Mentoring, I was able to secure a position in just five months, thanks to my mentor's incredible guidance and support.

ASC Key Mentoring Client (Brighton)

My mentor has been a fantastic support for both my ongoing difficulties at my job with implementing reasonable adjustments and with helping me find new jobs to apply for. One of the areas I struggle with in life is accessing healthcare because of the stress this causes me, and she has been an invaluable source of information as well as support in this area too.

ASC Key Mentoring Client (Brighton)

Thanks to the support of my mentor, I have been gradually able to understand my AuDHD brain, and start building a life that is sustainable for it. Without that support, I was unable to really function in society, let alone attempt to contribute! I am hugely grateful for the mentoring I receive, it is integral to both my personal well-being and my ability to find and retain employment.

Faraday Fearnside Client (Plymouth)

My confidence has vastly improved working with Faraday over time as well as my own organisational skills. I've found a job and am hoping to start in the next few weeks with the help of Faraday to move back into employment.

Autism East Midlands Client

The mentoring I have received thus far has been exceptional due to the fact that I felt listened to and understood by my advisor. I felt very comfortable talking about the kind of work I want to do without judgement and was given all the necessary support to get to the point that I was able to publish my own book, including having support in getting my book into libraries and bookshops in the future.

(d) Employer Network

Autism Forward has created a network of employers, autistic employees and professionals to discuss and implement initiatives to improve opportunities and inclusion for autistic people. By sharing best practice, we can drive change forward more effectively and ensure that the changes autistic people require to access employment and thrive in the workplace are implemented.

Our network includes a wide range of employers including law firms, accountancy firms, management consultants, banks, investment banks, technology companies, telecoms companies, insurers, asset management firms, universities and other autism charities.

This year we were fortunate to be selected as charity partner of the year for IDEX Consulting, who are award winning, independent, talent and business growth consultancy specialising in the General Insurance, Financial Services and Legal professions. Through a range of events, the IDEX team raised over £29,000 for the charity over the year, which will enable us to fund support for many more autistic job seekers. We also held awareness raising sessions for the IDEX team and two of their team are presenting to the autistic job seekers peer support group that we fund.

The series of roundtables we previously held have now largely been replaced by peer networks within law (Legal Neurodiversity Network and Neurodiversity in Law) and insurance, investment and banking (GAIN) as well as Neurodiveristy in Business, who now hold their own regular events which are driving change forward at an impressive rate across many employment fields.

We continue to see impressive initiatives resulting from our roundtables and introduction of our corporate contacts to our mentor partners such as AS Mentoring. This year, Publicis Groupe have launched their first internship for a neurodivergent candidate and Invesco are continuing to run their successful neurodiversity internship programme, both with support from AS Mentoring.

(e) Peer support groups for Autistic Adults

We have continued to fund a series of online support groups, which are an excellent way to provide cost effective and peer to peer support for autistic adults. Our mentor partner, AS Mentoring, runs a number of programmes which we have committed to fund in line with agreed costing proposals. The current programmes that the charity supports are as follows:

(i) AS Mentoring Peer Support Groups

AS Mentoring runs regular peer support groups for autistic job seekers and for neurodivergent people who are or wish to be self-employed. They also run a peer support group for autistic women as well as regular Lunch & Learn workshops on a variety of topics including reasonable adjustments, managing anxiety, burnout and understanding your diagnosis.

(ii) Culture Club

Autism Forward funds a peer support group, known as the Culture Club (previously the Movie Club), for the autistic job seekers supported by our mentor partner in Brighton, Karen-Anne Manghan, to enable them to meet up socially. The club is proving a great success and several group members have been successful in securing employment over the last year, partly due to the increase in self-confidence from being part of this supportive group.

(f) Neurodiversity Awareness Raising Events

In addition to our work with employers, this year we were again invited to present a session on neurodiversity at work to the current cohort of young people on the excellent 20/20 Levels "I Am Change" programme covering declaring a diagnosis, Equality Act rights, reasonable adjustments, Access to Work and other support available for neurodivergent people in the workplace. 20/20 Levels is a social mobility organisation, empowering Black and racially underrepresented young people through opportunities to maximise their potential. Their programmes have transformed the lives of over a thousand young people across London, with over 60% of their candidates gaining new employment within 3 months of completing their programme.

In July 2024 we teamed up with Avatar Jo to produce a webinar aimed at helping employers learn how to support autistic candidates at interviews through simple changes to the environment and communication style. The webinar included a role play between an autistic candidate (played by an autistic actor) and an interviewer, modelling first a difficult interview for the candidate, then showing how simple changes to the structure of questions and attitude of the interviewer can help the autistic candidate to perform at their best.

We were also invited to take part as a panel member alongside other professionals and alumni for the first ever neurodivergent careers event for students, focusing on what it means to be neurodivergent in work environments and professional spaces at the University of Southampton in March 2025. The panel spoke about their experiences and advice in relation to looking for work or becoming self-employed and answered questions on a wide range of topics including reasonable adjustments at interview and at work, sharing your diagnosis with an employer, strategies for time management, rights under the Equality Act and support and resources available to neurodivergent job seekers.

(g) Fundraising

We are extremely grateful to our supporters and regular donors who have enabled us to continue to provide vital support to autistic job seekers throughout this challenging time and ensure that we have certainty of funds for the coming financial year so that we can continue to increase the number of autistic job seekers we are able to support across the country. Autism Forward is registered with the donation platforms Just Giving and Charities Aid Foundation and we rely mostly on individual donors to support our work. This year we have had some magnificent fundraising events, including the following:

Autism Forward Sponsored Cycle - 100km Kent Loop

On a bleak Sunday morning in September, five teams of cyclists turned out to cycle a 100km loop into Kent to raise funds for Autism Forward. This was Autism Forward's first large sponsored event post-Covid and our funding levels were at an all time low. The hard work of the organisers and team captains and the tremendous efforts of everyone involved paid off and the day was a great success. After a night of torrential rain, the roads and skies were drier than expected and all teams completed the challenging routes commendably.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of the cyclists and their sponsors, the ride raised over £100,000, which was an absolutely fantastic achievement and has put the charity on a healthy financial footing for the coming year.

We are also very grateful to the cyclists from local club Blackheath Velo who helped organise the ride and our friends who provided back up support for the riders.

Brighton Marathon

On April 6th, Neil, his son Charlie, and three of Charlie's friends—James, Joe, and Kamil—took on the Brighton Marathon in support of Autism Forward. The Brighton crowd, known for their enthusiasm, played a crucial role in keeping spirits high, cheering on runners as they made their way through the scenic coastal course. The team's dedication paid off, as all five successfully completed the marathon, a testament to their preparation and determination. Running for Autism Forward added a deeper purpose to the challenge, making every mile more meaningful.

The event itself was part of the larger Brighton Marathon Weekend, which saw over 12,500 participants taking on the 26.2-mile course, celebrating endurance, community, and charitable causes. With the support of the vibrant Brighton atmosphere and each other, the Autism Forward team crossed the finish line, not just achieving a personal milestone but also contributing to a cause close to their hearts. The day was one of camaraderie, achievement, and shared joy—a marathon

Manchester 100 Mile Cycle Challenge

In another epic cycling event, David Hargreaves, partner of one of our mentors, Sarah Musique, completed the gruelling Manchester 100 Mile Cycle Challenge to raise funds for Autism Forward in September 2024.

IDEX Consulting - Charity Partner of the Year

IDEX Consulting, a business growth consultancy advising the Financial Services, Legal and General Insurance sectors chose Autism Forward as their charity of the year in a successful partnership for both IDEX and Autism Forward. Autism Forward provided webinars for the IDEX team to help them understand how better to support autistic candidates with job seeking, interviews and in the workplace. These were very interactive sessions, building better awareness within the teams and resonating on both a professional and personal level. In turn, members of the IDEX team are presenting to the AS Mentoring job seeker groups, providing professional guidance and feedback.

We are incredibly grateful to IDEX for all their fundraising efforts for Autism Forward throughout the year, raising over £29,000 in total. Two members of the team have signed up for sponsored skydives which have raised several thousand pounds, one of the team took part in the 100km Kent Loop Sponsored Cycle in September 2024 and they held charity cricket matches and raffles to support our work.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

At the end of the financial year ending 31 March 2025, the charity had reserves of £161,785 available. The charity awarded 97 new grants for mentoring support and provided funding for various workshop programmes and peer support groups run by our mentors for the benefit of autistic job seekers and self-employed people. We also continued to support 121 grant holders from previous financial years, making this our largest ever cohort of autistic job seekers.

This financial year, the initial grant amount for all clients increased from £1,500 to £1,800, with extensions of £900 being awarded where appropriate, up to a maximum total grant of £3,600. This is to ensure that clients are still getting sufficient hours of support and reflects the effect of inflation over the last seven years.

During the financial year ending 31 March 2025, the charity received donations totalling £159,701 and £24,250 in gift aid receipts. None of the donations received by the charity had any conditions attached.

The charity's grant making function is entirely reliant on funds that are raised through donations and sponsored events, employer match funding of donations and trust or foundations grants. The trustees are extremely grateful to all the individual donors, fundraisers and corporate supporters who have enabled the charity to provide so many autistic people with the support they need to access employment and fulfil their potential. The cost of fundraising has increased this year to £3,527, due to the increase in fees payable to Just Giving and the cost of cycling shirts for the Sponsored Cycle and entry fees and shirts for the Brighton Marathon runners.

The charity only makes grants available if it has sufficient funds available to be able to fund the entire grant which ensures its financial stability. When the charity awards a grant, it designates funds in relation to the full amount of the grant awarded at the time the grant is approved, even though the grant will generally be paid out at regular intervals over the course of the grant period rather than in one upfront payment. If the grant is curtailed for any reason, for example if the beneficiary finds paid employment or no longer wishes to continue with the mentoring, any funds designated for that grant but not used will be reallocated to the charity's general funds and be available to fund other grants.

The charity keeps designated funds to cover the full amount of any grant awarded which ensures that its obligations to grant holders can always be met in full. All of the charity's grant administration, record keeping, data analysis, fundraising, event organisation and awareness raising with employers and universities is carried out by the charity trustees on a pro bono basis.

As the charity relies largely on individual donations which can be unpredictable, based on current levels of expenditure and in order to ensure that the charity is able to renew and continue making grants through periods where donations are lower, the trustees have agreed that appropriate level of reserves should be kept at the level of at least £20,000, to be reviewed at the end of each financial year or more frequently if requested by the Treasurer. The charity currently has a higher than usual level of reserves that will enable it to continue to award new grants and grant extensions without having to seek new sources of funding for the upcoming financial year, but trustees will continue to review the financial situation on a monthly basis to ensure that the charity can continue to operate effectively.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The charity is currently funding specialist one-to-one support for around 120 autistic job seekers to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and to improve their social inclusion, support which they would not otherwise have been able to access. This financial year we have supported 218 autistic job seekers, which is our largest ever cohort. We will continue to extend grants for existing beneficiaries who are engaging well with support and making progress towards employment. We are continuing to see successful outcomes for our job seekers across a wide range of sectors and continue to be actively sought out by employers to signpost services to support and attract neurodivergent talent.

We work with specialist mentors covering a wide area of the country and continue to seek out experienced mentors in new geographical areas. In addition to this, our current mentors all offer remote support so that we can support autistic job seekers in all areas of England and Wales. This year we have welcomed two new mentor partners to our network, Responsa Coaching and Connect Coaching, which has further expanded our reach.

Over the last financial year, the charity has continued to grow its network of employers who are keen to improve inclusion and support for autistic employees. We were delighted to have been nominated Charity of the Year by the recruitment consultancy, IDEX Consulting and enjoyed working with them to improve recruitment procedures and neurodiversity inclusion, as well as helping them better support neurodivergent candidates. IDEX employees also volunteered to speak at the workshops for autistic job seekers run by our partner, AS Mentoring. In addition, the IDEX team raised over £29,000 for the charity through a number of events including skydives, cricket matches and participating in our 100km Kent Loop sponsored cycle ride.

We are also continuing to expand our connections and to work with other charities and to promote the work of neurodivergent led groups such as Employment Autism, the Legal Neurodiversity Network, GAIN and Autism Action (formerly the Autism Employment Network) to improve inclusion and employment outcomes for autistic people. This year has seen the creation of a new internship with Publicis Groupe and a continuation of the Invesco internship programme.

The outcomes and feedback from the autistic job seekers we support demonstrate the value of the specialist support we fund and we are pleased to see more employers recognising the value of a neurodiverse workforce and a continuing increase in neurodivergent led support groups. While the government has recognised the need for more support to help autistic and disabled people into work to help address the woeful employment gap, at present there are no tangible plans or spending commitments for this, so our work remains as important as ever.

TRUSTEES' REPORT

The annual report was approved by the trustees of the charity on ..... and signed on its behalf by:

SIGNED SECURELY
Ann Leverett
18/06/2025 at 6:41:13 PM UTC

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Jane Pierce
18/06/2025 at 6:57:59 PM UTC

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Elif Gokcen
18/06/2025 at 6:32:51 PM UTC

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Helen Needham
18/06/2025 at 6:40:47 PM UTC

.....
Ms H Needham
Trustee

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

The trustees are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with the United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) and applicable law and regulations.

The law applicable to charities requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charity for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the applicable Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations, and the provisions of the constitution. The trustees are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Approved by the trustees of the charity on ..... and signed on its behalf by:

SIGNED SECURELY
Ann Leverett
18/06/2025 at 6:41:13 PM UTC

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Jane Pierce
18/06/2025 at 6:57:59 PM UTC

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18/06/2025 at 6:32:51 PM UTC

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Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Helen Needham
18/06/2025 at 6:40:47 PM UTC

.....
Ms H Needham
Trustee

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF AUTISM FORWARD

I report to the trustees on my examination of the financial statements of Autism Forward ('the charity') for the year ended 31 March 2025 which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities, the Balance Sheet and related notes, which are set out on pages 24 to 31.

This report is made solely to the charity's trustees, as a body, in accordance with section 145 of the Charities Act 2011. My work has been undertaken so that I might state to the charity's trustees those matters I am required to state to them in this report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, I do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charity and the charity's trustees as a body, for my work, for this report, or for the opinions I have formed

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

As the trustees of Autism Forward you are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the financial statements of Autism Forward carried out under section 145 of the Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

An independent examination does not involve gathering all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently does not cover all the matters that an auditor considers in giving their opinion on the financial statements. The planning and conduct of an audit goes beyond the limited assurance that an independent examination can provide. Consequently I express no opinion as to whether the financial statements present a 'true and fair' view and my report is limited to those specific matters set out in the independent examiner's statement.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of Autism Forward as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the financial statements do not accord with those records; or
3. the financial statements do not comply with the accounting requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the financial statements give a 'true and fair view' which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF AUTISM FORWARD

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

.....
Mr N P Smith
FCCA

Rotherham Taylor Limited
21 Navigation Business Village
Navigation Way
Ashton-on-Ribble
Preston
PR2 2YP

Date: 16/6/25

AUTISM FORWARD

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Total 2025 £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies	2	183,951	183,951
Investment income	3	5,045	5,045
Total income		188,996	188,996
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds		(3,527)	(3,527)
Charitable activities		(154,028)	(154,028)
Support costs	6	(1,966)	(1,966)
Total expenditure		(159,521)	(159,521)
Net income		29,475	29,475
Net movement in funds		29,475	29,475
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward		132,310	132,310
Total funds carried forward	12	161,785	161,785

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Total 2024 £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies		90,319	90,319
Investment income	3	3,436	3,436
Total income		93,755	93,755
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds		(779)	(779)
Charitable activities		(112,042)	(112,042)
Support costs	6	(1,621)	(1,621)
Total expenditure		(114,442)	(114,442)
Net expenditure		(20,687)	(20,687)
Net movement in funds		(20,687)	(20,687)
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward		152,997	152,997
Total funds carried forward	12	132,310	132,310

The notes on pages 26 to 31 form an integral part of these financial statements.

AUTISM FORWARD

(REGISTRATION NUMBER: 1171704)
BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 MARCH 2025

	Note	2025 £	2024 £
Current assets			
Debtors	9	10,975	10,275
Cash at bank and in hand	10	278,152	219,420
		289,127	229,695
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	11	(127,342)	(97,385)
Net assets		161,785	132,310
Funds of the charity:			
Unrestricted income funds			
Unrestricted funds		161,785	132,310
Total funds	12	161,785	132,310

The financial statements on pages 24 to 31 were approved by the trustees, and authorised for issue on ..... and signed on their behalf by:

SIGNED SECURELY
Ann Leverett
18/06/2025 at 6:41:13 PM UTC

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Jane Pierce
18/06/2025 at 6:57:59 PM UTC

.....
Ms J Pierce
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Elif Gokcen
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.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Helen Needham
18/06/2025 at 6:40:47 PM UTC

.....
Ms H Needham
Trustee

1 ACCOUNTING POLICIES

Statement of compliance
The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Charities Act 2011.

Basis of preparation
Autism Forward meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102. Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant accounting policy notes.

The financial statements have been prepared to give a 'true and fair' view and have departed from the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 only to the extent required to provide a 'true and fair' view. This departure has involved following Accounting and Reporting by Charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) issued on 16 July 2014 rather than the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of a Recommended Practice effective from 1 April 2005 which has since been withdrawn.

Going concern
The trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

Income and endowments
Voluntary income including donations, gifts, legacies and grants that provide core funding or are of a general nature is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the income, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured with sufficient reliability.

Donations and legacies

Donations and legacies are recognised on a receivable basis when receipt is probable and the amount can be reliably measured.

Gift aid

Gift Aid receivable is included in income when there is a valid declaration from the donor. Any Gift Aid amount recovered on a donation is considered to be part of that gift and is treated as an addition to the same fund as the initial donation unless the donor or the terms of the appeal have specified otherwise.

Investment income

Income from interest, royalties and dividends are included in the accounts when receipt is probable and the amount received can be measured reliably.

Expenditure and liablities

Grant expenditure

Grants are recognised in the financial statements as liabilities after they have been approved by the trustees, the recipients have been notified and there are no further terms and conditions to be fulfilled within the control of the charity. In these circumstances there is a valid expectation by the recipients that they will receive the grant.

Liability recognition

Liabilities are recognised where it is more likely than not that there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to pay out resources and the amount of the obligation can be measured with reasonable certainty.

Support costs

Support costs have been allocated between governance costs and other support. Governance costs comprise all costs involving public accountability of the charity and its compliance with regulation and good practice.

Creditors

The charity has creditors which are measured at settlement amounts less any trade discounts.

Provisions for liablities

A liability is measured on recognition at its historical cost and then subsequently measured at the best estimate of the amount required to settle the obligation at the reporting date.

Financial instruments

The charity accounts for basic financial instruments on initial recognition as per paragraph 10.7 FRS 102 SORP. Subsequent measurement is as per paragraphs 11.17 to 11.19, FRS 102 SORP.

Fund structure

Unrestricted income funds are general funds that are available for use at the trustees's discretion in furtherance of the objectives of the charity.

Debtors

Debtors are measured on initial recognition at settlement amount after any trade discounts or amount advanced by the charity. Subsequently, they are measured at the cash or other consideration expected to be received.

Gift Aid receivable is recorded as accrued income at the reporting date.

2 INCOME FROM DONATIONS AND LEGACIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Donations and legacies;		
Appeals and donations	159,701	159,701
Gift Aid reclaimed	24,250	24,250
Total for 2025	183,951	183,951
Total for 2024	90,319	90,319

3 INVESTMENT INCOME

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Interest receivable and similar income;		
Interest receivable on bank deposits	5,045	5,045
Total for 2025	5,045	5,045
Total for 2024	3,436	3,436

4 EXPENDITURE ON RAISING FUNDS

A) COSTS OF GENERATING DONATIONS AND LEGACIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Donations	3,527	3,527
Total for 2025	3,527	3,527
Total for 2024	779	779

5 EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Grant funding of activities	154,028	154,028
Total for 2025	154,028	154,028
Total for 2024	112,042	112,042

6 SUPPORT COSTS

	Note	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Independent examiner fees			
Examination of the financial statements	7	1,326	1,326
Marketing and publicity		93	93
Administrative expenses		547	547
Total for 2025		1,966	1,966
Total for 2024		1,621	1,621

7 INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REMUNERATION

	2025 £	2024 £
Examination of the financial statements	1,326	1,260

8 TAXATION

The charity is a registered charity and is therefore exempt from taxation.

9 DEBTORS

	2025 £	2024 £
Accrued income	10,975	10,275

10 CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS

	2025	2024
	£	£
Cash at bank	278,152	219,420

11 CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR

	2025	2024
	£	£
Other creditors	126,016	96,125
Accruals	1,326	1,260
	127,342	97,385

12 FUNDS

	Balance at 1 April 2024	Incoming resources	Resources expended	Balance at 31 March 2025
	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted funds				
General	132,310	188,996	(159,521)	161,785

	Balance at 1 April 2023	Incoming resources	Resources expended	Balance at 31 March 2024
	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted funds				
General	152,997	93,755	(114,442)	132,310

13 ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds at 31 March 2025 £
Current assets	289,127	289,127
Current liabilities	(127,342)	(127,342)
Total net assets	161,785	161,785

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds at 31 March 2024 £
Current assets	229,695	229,695
Current liabilities	(97,385)	(97,385)
Total net assets	132,310	132,310

AUTISM FORWARD

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES BY FUND FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

	Total Unrestricted Funds 2025 £	Total Unrestricted Funds 2024 £
Income and Endowments from:		
Donations and legacies	183,951	90,319
Investment income	5,045	3,436
Total income	188,996	93,755
Expenditure on:		
Raising funds	(3,527)	(779)
Charitable activities	(154,028)	(112,042)
Other expenditure	(1,966)	(1,621)
Total expenditure	(159,521)	(114,442)
Net income/(expenditure)	29,475	(20,687)
Net movement in funds	29,475	(20,687)
Reconciliation of funds		
Total funds brought forward	132,310	152,997
Total funds carried forward	161,785	132,310

AUTISM FORWARD CIO

England & Wales - Charity number 1171704

Accounts

Charity registration number: 1171704

AUTISM FORWARD

ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

AUTISM FORWARD

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AUTISM FORWARD

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Trustees	Ms A Leverett Ms J Pierce Dr E Gokcen Ms H Needham
Principal Office	37 Granville Park London SE13 7DY
Charity Registration Number	1171704
Website	www.autismforward.org.uk
Bankers	Metro Bank PLC One Southampton Row London WC1B 5HA
Independent Examiner	Rotherham Taylor Limited 21 Navigation Business Village Navigation Way Ashton-on-Ribble Preston PR2 2YP

TRUSTEES' REPORT

The trustees have pleasure in presenting their report and the unaudited financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2024.

The financial statements have been prepared on an accruals basis in accordance with the accounting policies set out in the notes to the financial statements and comply with thecharity's constitution, Charities Act 2011 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities:Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their financial statements in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland published on 16 July 2014. The financial statements have been examined by an Independent Examiner.

1. STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The charity is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered number 117104 and is constituted under a Foundation Constitution which came into force on 20 February 2017. Ann Leverett, Jane Pierce and Elif Gokcen were the three co-founders of the charity and were all reappointed for a further period of 3 years commencing on 23 January 2023. Helen Needham was appointed as a trustee on 20 October 2020 and was reappointed for a further period of 3 years commencing on 1 November 2023.

New trustees are appointed by the existing trustees and in selecting individuals for appointment as charity trustees, the trustees must have regard to the skills, knowledge and experience needed for the effective administration of the charity. The Constitution provides for a minimum of 3 trustees and there is no maximum. Trustees are eligible for reappointment at the end of their term.

As the charity is primarily a grant-making charity, it does not have any paid employees and all fundraising and administrative work is undertaken by the trustees. The trustees attend external training courses as necessary and appropriate for their responsibilities and roles within the charity.

All trustees are required to read the Charity Commission's guidance "The Essential Trustee: What you need to know" and the new Charity Commission Governance Code.

The trustees aim to meet at least once every quarter to discuss fundraising, finances, governance issues, events, new mentor partnerships or initiatives with other autism charities or potential corporate sponsors and to confirm approval of grants. The day to day administration of grants and the processing of applications is handled by the Chair and Secretary. A Grant Approval Sub-Committee was established by unanimous agreement of the trustees on 20 October 2020 and currently comprises three trustees (Ann Leverett, Jane Pierce and Elif Gokcen) which approves all grant applications and grant extensions in accordance with its terms of reference. Details of all grants and grant extensions approved by the Grant Approval Sub-Committee are made available to all trustees and are presented at each board meeting.

All trustees give their time freely and no trustee remuneration was paid in the year and no expenses were claimed by them. Trustees are required to disclose all relevant interests and register them with the charity secretary in accordance with the charity's Conflict of Interest Policy and withdraw from any decisions where a conflict of interest arises. No disclosures have been made by the Trustees since the charity was constituted.

2. RISK MANAGEMENT

The trustees have considered the major risks to which the charity is exposed and have reviewed those risks and established systems and procedures to manage those risks which are set out in the charity's Risk Management Strategy which is reviewed by the Treasurer annually. This contains procedures to ensure the Charity is complying with the Charity Commission guidance in relation to due diligence procedures in relation to beneficiaries, donors and partners.

The charity is primarily a grant making charity and it raises funds to provide grants for specialist employment related mentoring and workshops for autistic adults who are actively seeking paid or voluntary employment. The mentoring and workshops are provided by independent specialist mentors who have proven experience of providing employment related mentoring to autistic adults. The mentor partners are entirely independent of the charity and the charity carries out due diligence in relation to each proposed mentor partner in accordance with the Charity Commission "Know Your Partner" guidelines to verify their experience, good standing and suitability. The charity also enters into a Referral Agreement with each proposed mentor partner which sets out the process for referring grant applications to the charity and the rights and obligations of the mentor partner and the charity in relation to the mentoring services which are funded by grants provided by the charity.

The charity has put in place processes to obtain regular feedback from grant holders and mentors in relation to the mentoring provided and their progress to monitor the use of the charity's funds and outcomes and demonstrate the public benefit derived from the funding of the specialist mentoring and workshops. The charity also reviews each mentor partner annually to check they continue to meet the good standing and other relevant requirements of the "Know Your Partner" guidelines.

The charity is currently working with twelve independent specialist mentor partners across the country and we are actively seeking out more potential mentor partners in new geographical areas of the country. We have added two new mentor organisations to our network this financial year to expand our geographical reach.

The charity's surplus funds are divided between the charity's business saving account at Metro Bank plc, the charity's business saving account with the Nationwide Building Society account and the charity's deposit account with United Trust Bank in order to benefit from the FSCS compensation scheme with all three financial institutions, minimising the charity's financial exposure. All payments made by the charity from its bank and building society accounts require authorisation by two trustees.

3. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT

The objects of the charity are the promotion of social inclusion for the public benefit amongst people aged eighteen or over who are excluded from society, or parts of society, due to an autism spectrum condition, to relieve the needs of such people and assist them to integrate into society and achieve their potential as individuals after they leave education, in particular but not exclusively through funding the provision of:

(a) pre-employment support, including social skills and other relevant training which enhances employability;

(b) coaching, mentoring, advice and support in relation to employability;

(c) providing specialist skills and awareness training and workshops relating to employability;

(d) facilitating access to a range of social and leisure activities; and

(e) action to increase public and employer awareness of such disabilities and conditions and promote steps that can be taken to facilitate such social inclusion through employment.

The trustees confirm that they have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the charity's aims and objectives and planning future activities and setting the grant making policy for the charity.

The charity carries out these objects by:

- providing grants to autistic adults to allow them to access specialist mentoring and/or workshops to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and to improve their social inclusion by accessing clubs, groups, workshops and work placements;
- providing information and resources for autistic people and employers on its website, including details of specialist mentors offering one-to-one support and/or workshops to autistic people to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and links to other websites and resources;
- raising awareness among employers of the needs and strengths of autistic employees and providing advice and signposting services with the aim of increasing access to employment for autistic people and creating more inclusive workplaces; and;
- liaising with universities and colleges to raise awareness of the charity's services for autistic students upon graduation and other initiatives which can improve employment outcomes for autistic students.

In March 2024 we attended the launch of the Buckland Review of Autism Employment initiated by Sir Robert Buckland KC MP, having been invited to contribute to the Review alongside the Legal Neurodiversity Network. We welcome the recommendations of the Review and the attention it brings to the pressing need to remove barriers to employment for autistic people. It highlights many of the issues that Autism Forward was set up to address, in particular:

- The lack of specialist coaches and support for autistic people seeking employment in many areas of the country.

-The difficulties in obtaining DWP Access to Work funded support, which is only available once in paid employment. It often takes months to put in place after employment is secured, so does not aid the crucial transition into work.

-Many people are unaware of their right under the Equality Act to request "reasonable adjustments" in the workplace, or indeed exactly what adjustments they might need.

-People are often unwilling to request "reasonable adjustments" due to perceived stigma or are denied the adjustments by their employer.

-Lack of awareness among employers of the benefit of employing more autistic people and the adjustments they can offer to make their recruitment processes and workplace more accessible for autistic people.

-Lack of guidance and awareness training for colleagues and line managers.

The report has some excellent recommendations for employers and will be piloting schemes such as an "adjustments passport" designed to make it easier for people to request and maintain reasonable adjustments in the workplace. There is also an intention to improve the ability of job centre work coaches to assist autistic job seekers. However, very few such work coaches have an in-depth understanding of autism and are incentivised to get people into work as quickly as possible, rather than helping the individual identify the best role for them and the adjustments they need to thrive at work. The report also mentions referrals by DWP to Work Psychologists, but there are very few of those across the country and the support is often in groups and limited in frequency and duration.

Our own approach ensures that mentoring support is provided on a one to one basis, with regularity and consistency by a mentor who has lived and/or professional experience supporting autistic people into employment with the right adjustments. Support is also given to help access benefits, social activities, training and navigate social expectations at work. We do not have a set timeframe or timetable for support, the mentor will tailor this to the needs of the individual. We can generally extend support until the individual has achieved their employment goals or is equipped to pursue them without further support and often our clients continue to work with the same mentor once they are in employment, funded by Access to Work. This point is missing in the Review, which focuses on the changes employers need to make rather than the support autistic people need to prepare for and secure employment.

The Buckland Review states that the estimated cost to the UK economy of the autism employment gap is around £14.5 billion per year, with the latest Labour Force Survey showing that only 3 in 10 working age autistic people are in employment. This is a tragic waste of talent and leads to social isolation and financial hardship for so many autistic people. Our work is therefore more important than ever. While the Buckland Review does not offer much in the way of pre-employment support for autistic job seekers and certainly no additional funding, we hope that the renewed focus on what employers can and should be doing to make workplaces more accessible for autistic people will benefit our grant holders and autistic people across the country.

The specialist mentoring funded by the charity enables autistic people to prepare for, find and maintain suitable employment which improves their independence and social inclusion. On average, over the last six years, including the two years when covid restrictions applied, 81% of the autistic job seekers we have supported have secured paid or voluntary employment (59% paid and 22% voluntary) (up from 72% average last year, of which 54% was paid employment). The impressive outcomes for our beneficiaries, as set out in further detail in section 8 of this report, demonstrate the effectiveness of the specialist mentoring support we fund. The qualitative feedback shows the broad nature of the support which goes above and beyond employment related support, helping our clients to access benefits, training, social activities and to develop strategies to help them cope with the barriers they face in a world that is not yet adapted for autistic people.

We always seek to ensure that the support we fund is in line with the requirements and values of the autistic community and we recognise the importance of including autistic people at all levels of our organisation. Helen Needham, who is autistic herself, joined our Board of Trustees in 2020 and an increasing number of the specialist employment mentors we work with are also autistic. We seek regular feedback from the autistic job seekers we support to ensure that the support we fund is of value to them. We also use our social media and newsletters to promote the work and events of autistic and neurodivergent led organisations. We also fund regular Peer Support meetings which are run by our mentor partner, AS Mentoring and have recently started funding a Movie Club for Autism Forward clients in Brighton run by our mentor partner Karen-Anne Manghan of ASC Key Mentoring, who meet on a weekly basis to discuss films selected by the group.

We liaise with employers, universities and colleges to raise awareness of the strengths and needs of autistic people, promoting employment opportunities for autistic people across the UK. We have created a network of employers and continue to hold roundtables for employers, which have been attended by representatives from over 80 different organisations, including employers, universities and researchers. These provide a forum for HR and Diversity & Inclusion teams to meet with autistic employees and professionals to discuss how employers can improve recruitment processes and implement initiatives to improve opportunities and inclusion for autistic people. We are actively involved with the Legal Neurodiversity Network and are also a member of GAIN (Group for Autism, Insurance, Investment and Neurodiversity). We have also just signed up to the new Autism Employment Network launched by the Autism Centre for Excellence.

4. PRO BONO CONTRIBUTIONS

The charity has no paid employees and the expenses of the charity are covered by donations by the trustees. All of the grant administration, record keeping, data analysis, fundraising, event organisation, employer roundtable events, universities and communication is carried out by the trustees on a pro bono basis, drawing on their professional experience, networks and resources. All of the charity's awareness raising events and roundtables to date have been hosted by corporate supporters at no cost to the charity or attendees. This maximises the use of the charity's funds for its beneficiaries and ensures its awareness raising events reach a wide audience.

5. GRANT MAKING POLICY

The charity has established its grant making policy with the aim of promoting the social inclusion of autistic people and assist them to integrate into society and achieve their potential by providing grants for funding specialist one-to-one mentoring to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment or for training activities which are relevant to improving employability.

The charity currently works with twelve specialist mentoring organisations across the country and has carried out due diligence checks and entered into Referral Agreements with the organisations listed below which between them cover London, Surrey, Essex, Suffolk, Brighton, Birmingham, Manchester, Bedfordshire, Devon, East Midlands, Northampton, Plymouth, Hull, Liverpool, Chester, Bristol, Poole, Cambridgeshire and Nottingham. All our mentors now offer remote mentoring services, which extends their geographical reach and increases the number of clients they are able to support.

Autism Bedfordshire
Autistic Nottingham
Autism East Midlands
AS Mentoring Limited
ASC Key Mentoring (Karen Manghan)
Autism Success Formula Limited
Faraday Fearnside
Matthew's Hub
Spectrum Career Coach
Think Musique
Track NN Limited
WayMakers Devon CIC

The charity accepts applications from grants via its mentor partners and directs enquiries from its website to the mentor partners listed on its website. All grant applications must be made via an approved mentor partner and all grant payments are made directly to the mentor partner. The charity awards initial grants for up to one year of weekly or fortnightly one-to-one mentoring support and will consider requests for grant extensions where the grant holder is making good progress towards employment and is engaging well with the mentoring support.

The applicants must be aged 18 or over and must have a diagnosis of an autism spectrum condition or evidence that they are actively seeking such a diagnosis. They must also provide evidence that they live and are entitled to work in the United Kingdom and priority is given to applicants in financial need. While many of our applicants are looking for their first role after leaving education, we also support many people who are late diagnosed, long term unemployed or who have struggled to find a suitable role or an employer who is willing to offer the adjustments necessary for them to succeed at work.

The charity requires regular feedback from the mentors on the progress of the beneficiaries and feedback from the beneficiaries on the mentoring they receive in order to monitor the use of the charity's funds and outcomes.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

(a) Grants for Mentoring Support

In the financial year ending 31 March 2024, the charity awarded grants for specialist mentoring support to 77 autistic people around the country with the aim of improving their social inclusion and helping them to secure paid or voluntary employment. The charity also continued to fund mentoring support for 107 of the grant holders from previous financial years, thus providing support for a total of 184 autistic job seekers during the financial year ended 31 March 2024, 120 of whom were still receiving support at the end of the financial year. This was the largest ever cohort supported by the charity and we are continuing to see a rise in applications from all areas of the country.

The average age of our 2023-24 grant holders is 30 years old, with 51% identifying as female, 48% male and 1% non-binary. It is the first year that our percentage of female clients has exceeded that of male clients. The qualifications held by the grant holders range from no formal qualifications to Masters and PhD level degrees and professional qualifications. The sectors in which the applicants have secured or are seeking employment are incredibly varied, including education, health and care sector, research, game design, pharmacy, IT, hospitality, horticulture, film, music, accountancy and retail. The wide variety of careers pursued by our grant holders dispels common preconceptions of the types of roles that are suitable for autistic people and demonstrates that autistic people can pursue any career choice which matches their interest and skills with the right guidance and support. Some are also given support to pursue self-employment, which can be an attractive option for autistic people given the challenges some workplaces can present.

In addition to supporting our beneficiaries into employment, the mentors help with anxiety, communication, sensory and also practical issues they may be facing, which improves their autonomy, well-being and social inclusion. For example, our mentors have helped beneficiaries with anxiety, travelling on public transport, relationship issues and organisational skills. On a practical level, our mentors have helped beneficiaries deal with benefits claims, tenancy problems, debt problems and referrals to appropriate health and mental health services. The mentors have also facilitated participation in new clubs, groups and social activities as well as workshops and training to improve their employability, social inclusion and well-being.

(b) Outcomes from Mentoring Support

The Government stated in the Buckland Review of Autism Employment that fewer than 3 in 10 autistic people are in work, so the results achieved by our beneficiaries are particularly impressive, demonstrating the effectiveness of the specialist mentoring support that we fund.

The outcomes for grant holders awarded grants during the financial year 2023-24 who have had between 3 and 12 months' support were as follows:

89% made job applications

79% attended job interviews

50% joined new clubs or groups

50% undertook some form of training or placement

50% secured voluntary roles

50% secured paid employment

The total employment figure for our 2023-24 grant holders is 80% (52% paid; 28% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2022-23 grant holders is 72% (52% paid; 20% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2021-22 grant holders is 75% (58% paid; 17% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2020-21 grant holders is 81% (67% paid; 14% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2019-20 grant holders is: 90% (65% paid; 25% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2018-19 grant holders is: 90% (58% paid; 32% voluntary)

The above figures for all financial years include clients whose support was ended early due to health or other issues and clients whose grants have been temporarily paused. The figures for the current financial year include only grant holders who have had between 3 and 12 months' support. Some of the grant holders who were awarded grants in previous financial years have had more than 12 months' support. We anticipate that our beneficiaries will continue to move into employment, improving the employment outcomes for our 2023-24 grant holders, as has happened with all previous cohorts.

(c) Feedback from our Beneficiaries

We introduced a new format for the regular feedback from our grant holders in 2021 which enables us to assess the value of the support we fund in more detail. The results of the feedback from grant holders who have had at least 6 months' mentoring support during the financial year ended 31 March 2024 are set out below. This includes grant holders who were awarded grants in previous financial years and who continued to receive support this year. The responses demonstrate the wider impact and value of the specialist mentoring support we fund, beyond employment outcomes.

Every one of the metrics below has improved since last year, some by as much as 20%. We are particularly proud that 100% said they would recommend the support funded by the charity to other autistic job seekers, demonstrating the consistently high level of support provided by all our mentor partners. Furthermore, some clients commented that they had responded "no" to questions such as "helping prepare for interviews" because that support was not relevant to them. Following their suggestion, going forward the forms will be revised to include a "not relevant" option to get a more accurate picture of the impact of the support.

99% said the support improved their understanding of their strengths and challenges.

95% said the support improved their understanding of what job is suitable for them.

89% said the support improved their understanding of how to find a job.

79% said the support helped them draft or update their CV.

85% said the support made them more confident about disclosing their diagnosis and

93% said the support made them more confident about requesting "reasonable adjustments"

73% said the support helped them prepare for interviews.

67% said the support helped them join groups, make friends or participate in other activities.

94% said the support improved their self-confidence.

63% said the support helped them access benefits, health care or other public services.

63% said the support helped them access training, workshops or further education.

100% said that they would recommend the support funded by the charity to other autistic job seekers.

The qualitative feedback responses below from some of the autistic job seekers we have supported this year provide further evidence of the value of the specialist support we fund, including the workshop programmes and our employer roundtables. This support enables people not only to find paid or voluntary employment, but also to improve their independence, social inclusion, confidence and self-esteem, to understand better how their autism affects them and to develop strategies to address issues which may be holding them back. This is beneficial not only to the individuals and their families, but also benefits the public purse as it reduces the need for reliance on benefits and public services such as mental health provision and leads to a more inclusive and cohesive society and diverse workforce.

The feedback also highlights the gap in support for autistic people when they leave education, or obtain a late diagnosis, that is so often needed to enable them to fulfil their potential in the workplace and beyond.

Client of Ros Evans (Surrey)

Ros has supported me through one of the most difficult periods of my life. When we first met, I felt utterly lost and defeated. Lacking confidence following my autism diagnosis, Ros has helped me to rediscover my strengths and passions. I am now regularly applying for jobs and feel confident that, in time, I will be back in employment. Furthermore, I now have a much better understanding of which types of work are suitable for me and the workplace accommodations that I can ask for. Ros is an incredibly supportive and caring mentor, and I look forward to every session with her. I am so incredibly grateful to have received this grant from Autism Forward - thank you!

ASC Key Mentoring Client (Brighton)

I cannot overstate the importance of the mentoring I've received. It has been an essential component to my understanding of myself as an autistic adult, my needs, abilities and skills as well as how to set myself up to thrive. Within the context of work, having a safe space where I can share, feel listened to and seen and to have an advocate, someone with the knowledge, experience and skills to support me to better understand the work environment and how I can thrive rather than just survive has been life changing. Further, I feel far more confident moving from a position of isolation and loneliness to finding like minded people, a community and find the social interactions that I'm so keen to experience on my terms. The benefits for me have been far reaching, massively meaningful and are deep rooted.

AS Mentoring client (London)

I feel that during each session I have really grown in confidence, and it is helpful to discuss ideas for how to find new employment, and improve interview skills.

Autism East Midlands Client

Samantha has been a big help for me, she's helped me feel confident in my diagnosis and comfortable acknowledging that I need extra support in the workplace. Understanding my challenges has helped me feel more comfortable in finding a job and asking for help when I need it.

Autism Success Formula Client (Essex)

Mentoring has helped me focus on what I would specifically be interested in. It has helped me by directing me to a specific course on data analytics and therefore got a foot in the door for an IBM course. I was applying for jobs whilst studying and I am updating my CV further having done the course and will apply for more jobs in 2024. I have made progress in my job searching and professional development.

ASC Key Mentoring Client (Brighton)

Karen has helped me to become more self aware and accepting of my autistic self in many different areas of my life. I feel listened to, understood and respected which is very refreshing as an autistic person. I am looking forward to working on new ideas for 2024.

Autism Bedfordshire Client

I have been supported to get a job with Autism Bedfordshire as an expert with experience and also I run workshops in photography.

ASC Key Mentoring Client (Brighton)

This mentoring has been vital to my transition from university into the workplace. Whilst I am still struggling, I feel it would be completely impossible without this support.

AS Mentoring (London)

Siobhan is an amazing mentor and has been very helpful throughout the process. I am now focusing on applying for jobs thanks to her support and assistance.

WayMakers (Devon) CIC Client

It has helped me gain more confidence in getting myself around in public transport, increased confidence and the process for my mental health and in job process in general. Knowing the right environment and right job for me e.g. sensory, heavy lifting, hours, travel and distance. It has been an enjoyable process.

Faraday Fearnside Client (Plymouth)

It has helped me get into voluntary work, which is providing valuable experience to help me move onto the next step of gaining paid employment. The mentoring has also supported me in moving into a more independent way of living, finding information about supported housing, contacting social services, and getting all my benefits sorted. It is very valuable in developing confidence and awareness of jobs that are suitable for me, and other training that is available.

AS Mentoring Client (London)

Working with my mentor has been incredibly valuable for my confidence, acceptance of my autism diagnosis, and ability to ask for accommodations. With this support I feel more optimistic that I will be able to find work and have the right support while working so I can succeed.

Faraday Fearnside Client (Plymouth)

The mentoring has been extremely helpful for me, I would not have been able to access most of the resources I am now using without it. I've been able to understand and work through certain issues I've had with applying for jobs in the past. I would absolutely recommend the mentoring to other autistic jobseekers and know my own future career progression would not have happened without it.

ASC Key Mentoring Client (Brighton)

The mentoring I have received has been a vital support for me while I apply to jobs and try to work out what supports I might need in a workplace. The benefits of speaking to a mentor who shares your neurotype really can't be understated. My mentor is excellent and I am incredibly grateful.

WayMakers (Devon) CIC Client

The mentoring has helped me make lots of positive steps in the right direction after being made redundant. I'm in the process of setting myself up as a self-employed virtual assistant, which is something I hadn't considered until accessing this support.

(d) Employer Network and Recruitment Roundtables

Autism Forward has created a network of employers, autistic employees and professionals who meet regularly to discuss and implement initiatives to improve opportunities and inclusion for autistic people. By meeting regularly and sharing best practice, we can drive change forward more effectively and ensure that the changes autistic people require to access employment and thrive in the workplace are implemented.

Our network includes a wide range of employers including law firms, accountancy firms, management consultants, banks, investment banks, technology companies, telecoms companies, insurers, asset management firms, universities and other autism charities and is continuing to grow. In May 2023, the global PR company MSL hosted a roundtable with Autism Forward, AS Mentoring and the specialist inclusive communications consultancy, Untapped, for their teams and also a number of the clients they work with. The roundtable was focused on communicating internally and externally as an inclusive organisation.

In June 2023 we attended the Employment Autism, Care Trade and LSBU Conference focused on Transition into Employment for autistic adults which gave us the opportunity to connect with other organisations working to improve employment outcomes for autistic people.

We were invited by the Legal Neurodiversity Network to present at a roundtable with Sir Robert Buckland QC MP and representatives of the DWP as part of the Buckland Review of Autism Employment. We used the opportunity to highlight the current gap in support that autistic people face when leaving education and transitioning to employment and the issues faced by late diagnosed adults who face challenges in the workplace.

We also attended a number of roundtable events held by the Legal Neurodiversity Network, including events at Linklaters, Weil Gotshal & Manges and BCLP and Allen & Overy, which included many firms we have worked with over the last 6 years. It was encouraging to see the Legal Neurodiversity Network singled out in the Buckland Review as an example of good practice. This dynamic network of over 50 organisations has adopted the roundtable approach that we have used successfully over the last 6 years to bring together employers and their neurodivergent staff to share best practice and promote inclusion and opportunities across various sectors including legal, insurance, banking, accountancy and media.

(e) Peer support groups for Autistic Adults

We have continued to fund a series of online support groups, which are an excellent way to provide cost effective and peer to peer support for autistic adults. Our mentor partner, AS Mentoring, runs a number of programmes which we have committed to fund in line with agreed costing proposals. The current programmes that the charity supports are as follows:

(i) AS Mentoring Peer Support Groups

AS Mentoring now runs regular peer support groups for Autistic Job Seekers and for neurodivergent people who are or wish to be Self-Employed. Autism Forward funds places on the support groups for those who meet our grant criteria.

(ii) Tuesday Night Movie Club

Autism Forward is funding a new Tuesday Night Movie Club for the autistic job seekers supported by our mentor partner in Brighton, Karen-Anne Manghan, to enable them to meet up socially. The club is proving a great success as the following feedback from one of the participants demonstrates:

"The Autism Forward Film Club has been a great opportunity to connect with other autistic people who share my interest in films (and neurodivergent representation in media). It's a novel experience for me to be part of a group entirely comprised of other autistic adults, and I find that it's both exciting and relaxing to feel that I'm truly amongst my peers. I also like that the format of our meetings is loosely structured because it ensures that those who are feeling shy can be involved as much as they are comfortable with, but also allows for those feeling more chatty to share too. It's really fun to get to watch movies that I might otherwise have missed and to hear everyone's thoughts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, someone always has a fun fact to share, and everyone is really welcoming! I always look forward to our meetings."

(f) Neurodiversity Awareness Raising Events

In addition to our work with employers, this year we were invited to present a session on neurodiversity at work to the current cohort of young people on the excellent 20/20 Levels "I Am Change" programme covering declaring a diagnosis, Equality Act rights, reasonable adjustments, Access to Work and other support available for neurodivergent people in the workplace.

20/20 Levels is a social mobility organisation, empowering Black and racially underrepresented young people through opportunities to maximise their potential. Their programmes have transformed the lives of over a thousand young people across London, with over 60% of their candidates gaining new employment within 3 months of completing their programme. We have been invited back to present to the next intake in June 2024.

(g) Fundraising

We are extremely grateful to our supporters and regular donors who have enabled us to continue to provide vital support to autistic job seekers throughout this challenging time and ensure that we have certainty of funds for the coming financial year so that we can continue to increase the number of autistic job seekers we are able to support across the country. Autism Forward is registered with the donation platforms Just Giving and Charities Aid Foundation and we rely mostly on individual donors to support our work.

We were delighted to be nominated as a charity beneficiary of the CVC 30th Anniversary Challenge, receiving a donation of over £17,000 through the efforts of two of the CVC teams. We are also very grateful to John Leverett, son of our Chair and Treasurer, Ann Leverett, who raised over £4,500 for Autism Forward by running the London Marathon in April 2023.

7. FINANCIAL REVIEW

At the end of the financial year ending 31 March 2024, the charity had reserves of £132,310 available. The charity awarded 77 new grants for mentoring support and provided funding for various workshop programmes and peer support groups run by our mentors for the benefit of autistic job seekers and self-employed people. We also continued to support 107 grant holders from previous financial years.

The initial grant amount generally awarded has been £1,500 since the charity was formed in 2017, with extensions of £750 being granted where a client is engaging well with support but has not yet reached their employment goals, up to a maximum total grant of £3,000. In past years, a total grant of £3,750 has been awarded in a couple of exceptional circumstances. Due to a gradual increase in mentor fees over the last six years, the trustees have unanimously agreed that in the coming financial year, the initial grant amount for all clients will be increased to £1,800 and extensions of £900 will be awarded where appropriate, up to a maximum total grant of £3,600. The new extension amount of £900 and cap of £3,600 will also apply to existing clients. This is to ensure that clients are still getting sufficient hours of support and reflects the effect of inflation over the last six years.

During the financial year ending 31 March 2024, the charity received donations totalling £78,895 and £11,424 in gift aid receipts. None of the donations received by the charity had any conditions attached.

The charity's grant making function is entirely reliant on funds that are raised through donations and sponsored events, employer match funding of donations and trust or foundations grants. The trustees are extremely grateful to all the individual donors, fundraisers and corporate supporters who have enabled the charity to provide so many autistic people with the support they need to access employment and fulfil their potential.

The charity only makes grants available if it has sufficient funds available to be able to fund the entire grant which ensures its financial stability. When the charity awards a grant, it designates funds in relation to the full amount of the grant awarded at the time the grant is approved, even though the grant will generally be paid out at regular intervals over the course of the grant period rather than in one upfront payment. If the grant is curtailed for any reason, for example if the beneficiary finds paid employment or no longer wishes to continue with the mentoring, any funds designated for that grant but not used will be reallocated to the charity's general funds and be available to fund other grants.

The charity keeps designated funds to cover the full amount of any grant awarded which ensures that its obligations to grant holders can always be met in full. All of the charity's grant administration, record keeping, data analysis, fundraising, event organisation and awareness raising with employers and universities is carried out by the charity trustees on a pro bono basis.

As the charity relies largely on individual donations which can be unpredictable, based on current levels of expenditure and in order to ensure that the charity is able to renew and continue making grants through periods where donations are lower, the trustees have agreed that appropriate level of reserves should be kept at the level of at least £20,000, to be reviewed at the end of each financial year or more frequently if requested by the Treasurer. The charity currently has a higher than usual level of reserves that will enable it to continue to award new grants and grant extensions without having to seek new sources of funding for the upcoming financial year, but trustees will continue to review the financial situation on a monthly basis to ensure that the charity can continue to operate effectively.

8. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The charity is currently funding specialist one-to-one support for around 120 autistic job seekers to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and to improve their social inclusion, support which they would not otherwise have been able to access. This financial year we have supported 184 autistic job seekers, which is our largest ever cohort. We will continue to extend grants for existing beneficiaries who are engaging well with support and making progress towards employment. We are continuing to see successful outcomes for our job seekers across a wide range of sectors and are now being actively sought out by employers to signpost services to support and attract neurodivergent talent.

We work with specialist mentors covering a wide area of the country and continue to seek out experienced mentors in new geographical areas. In addition to this, our current mentors all offer remote support so that we can support autistic job seekers in all areas of England and Wales. This year we have welcomed two new mentor partners to our network, Autistic Nottingham and Spectrum Career Coach, which has further expanded our reach.

Over the last financial year, the charity has continued to grow its network of employers who are keen to improve inclusion and support for autistic employees. We are delighted to have been nominated Charity of the Year by the recruitment consultancy, IDEX Consulting and look forward to working with them over the coming year to improve recruitment procedures and neurodiversity inclusion, as well as helping them better support neurodivergent candidates.

We are also continuing to expand our connections and to work with other charities and to promote the work of neurodivergent led groups such as Employment Autism, the Legal Neurodiversity Network and GAIN to improve inclusion and employment outcomes for autistic people. We contributed to the Buckland Review of Autism Employment and we hope that this leads to real and lasting improvement in the employment opportunities for autistic people. We have also been invited to join the new Autism Employment Network formed by the Autism Centre for Excellence, which aims to bring together organisations across the UK to drive forward change and support one another to improve employment opportunities for autistic people.

The outcomes and feedback from the autistic job seekers we support demonstrate the value of the specialist support we fund and we are pleased to see more employers recognising the value of a neurodiverse workforce and the skills and different perspective that autistic employees bring, as well as an increase in neurodivergent led support groups both within and outside the workplace. We are very proud that 100% of the autistic people we have supported this financial year have said they would recommend the support we provide to other autistic job seekers and of the employment outcomes our clients have achieved.

9. DECLARATION

SIGNED SECURELY
27/06/2024
27/06/2024 at 10:42:03 AM UTC

The annual report was approved by the trustees of the charity on ..... and signed on its behalf by:

SIGNED SECURELY
Ann Leverett
27/06/2024 at 10:42:03 AM UTC

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Jane Pierce
18/07/2024 at 7:26:51 PM UTC

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Elif Gokcen
03/07/2024 at 7:20:16 PM UTC

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Helen Needham
03/07/2024 at 7:20:07 PM UTC

.....
Ms H Needham
Trustee

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

The trustees are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with the United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) and applicable law and regulations.

The law applicable to charities requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charity for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the applicable Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations, and the provisions of the constitution. The trustees are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

SIGNED SECURELY
27/06/2024
27/06/2024 at 10:42:03 AM UTC

Approved by the trustees of the charity on ..... and signed on its behalf by:

SIGNED SECURELY
Ann Leverett
27/06/2024 at 10:42:03 AM UTC

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Jane Pierce
18/07/2024 at 7:26:51 PM UTC

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Elif Gokcen
03/07/2024 at 7:20:16 PM UTC

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Helen Needham
03/07/2024 at 7:20:07 PM UTC

.....
Ms H Needham
Trustee

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF AUTISM FORWARD

I report to the trustees on my examination of the financial statements of Autism Forward ('the charity') for the year ended 31 March 2024 which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities, the Balance Sheet and related notes, which are set out on pages 20 to 27.

This report is made solely to the charity's trustees, as a body, in accordance with section 145 of the Charities Act 2011. My work has been undertaken so that I might state to the charity's trustees those matters I am required to state to them in this report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, I do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charity and the charity's trustees as a body, for my work, for this report, or for the opinions I have formed

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

As the trustees of Autism Forward you are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the financial statements of Autism Forward carried out under section 145 of the Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

An independent examination does not involve gathering all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently does not cover all the matters that an auditor considers in giving their opinion on the financial statements. The planning and conduct of an audit goes beyond the limited assurance that an independent examination can provide. Consequently I express no opinion as to whether the financial statements present a 'true and fair' view and my report is limited to those specific matters set out in the independent examiner's statement.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of Autism Forward as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records; or
3. the accounts do not comply with the accounting requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair view' which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF AUTISM FORWARD

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

.....

Mr N P Smith
FCCA

21 Navigation Business Village
Navigation Way
Ashton-on-Ribble
Preston
PR2 2YP

Date: 18/7/24

AUTISM FORWARD

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Total 2024 £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies	2	90,319	90,319
Investment income	3	3,436	3,436
Total income		93,755	93,755
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds		(779)	(779)
Charitable activities		(112,042)	(112,042)
Support costs	6	(1,621)	(1,621)
Total expenditure		(114,442)	(114,442)
Net expenditure		(20,687)	(20,687)
Net movement in funds		(20,687)	(20,687)
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward		152,997	152,997
Total funds carried forward	12	132,310	132,310

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Total 2023 £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies		82,574	82,574
Investment income	3	848	848
Total income		83,422	83,422
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds		(250)	(250)
Charitable activities		(115,187)	(115,187)
Support costs	6	(1,561)	(1,561)
Total expenditure		(116,998)	(116,998)
Net expenditure		(33,576)	(33,576)
Net movement in funds		(33,576)	(33,576)
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward		186,573	186,573
Total funds carried forward	12	152,997	152,997

The notes on pages 22 to 27 form an integral part of these financial statements.

AUTISM FORWARD

(REGISTRATION NUMBER: 1171704)
BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 MARCH 2024

	Note	2024 £	2023 £
Current assets			
Debtors	9	10,275	13,150
Cash at bank and in hand	10	219,420	231,851
		229,695	245,001
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	11	(97,385)	(92,004)
Net assets		132,310	152,997
Funds of the charity:			
Unrestricted income funds			
Unrestricted funds		132,310	152,997
Total funds	12	132,310	152,997

SIGNED SECURELY
27/06/2024
27/06/2024 at 10:42:03 AM UTC

The financial statements on pages 20 to 27 were approved by the trustees, and authorised for issue on ..... and signed on their behalf by:

SIGNED SECURELY
Ann Leverett
27/06/2024 at 10:42:03 AM UTC
.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Jane Pierce
18/07/2024 at 7:26:51 PM UTC
.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Elif Gokcen
03/07/2024 at 7:20:16 PM UTC
.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Helen Needham
03/07/2024 at 7:20:07 PM UTC
.....
Ms H Needham
Trustee

1 ACCOUNTING POLICIES

Statement of compliance
The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Charities Act 2011.

Basis of preparation
Autism Forward meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102. Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant accounting policy notes.

The financial statements have been prepared to give a 'true and fair' view and have departed from the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 only to the extent required to provide a 'true and fair' view. This departure has involved following Accounting and Reporting by Charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) issued on 16 July 2014 rather than the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of a Recommended Practice effective from 1 April 2005 which has since been withdrawn.

Going concern
The trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

Income and endowments
Voluntary income including donations, gifts, legacies and grants that provide core funding or are of a general nature is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the income, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured with sufficient reliability.

Donations and legacies

Donations and legacies are recognised on a receivable basis when receipt is probable and the amount can be reliably measured.

Gift aid

Gift Aid receivable is included in income when there is a valid declaration from the donor. Any Gift Aid amount recovered on a donation is considered to be part of that gift and is treated as an addition to the same fund as the initial donation unless the donor or the terms of the appeal have specified otherwise.

Investment income

Income from interest, royalties and dividends are included in the accounts when receipt is probable and the amount received can be measured reliably.

Expenditure and liablities

Grant expenditure

Grants are recognised in the financial statements as liabilities after they have been approved by the trustees, the recipients have been notified and there are no further terms and conditions to be fulfilled within the control of the charity. In these circumstances there is a valid expectation by the recipients that they will receive the grant.

Liability recognition

Liabilities are recognised where it is more likely than not that there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to pay out resources and the amount of the obligation can be measured with reasonable certainty.

Support costs

Support costs have been allocated between governance costs and other support. Governance costs comprise all costs involving public accountability of the charity and its compliance with regulation and good practice.

Creditors

The charity has creditors which are measured at settlement amounts less any trade discounts.

Provisions for liablities

A liability is measured on recognition at its historical cost and then subsequently measured at the best estimate of the amount required to settle the obligation at the reporting date.

Financial instruments

The charity accounts for basic financial instruments on initial recognition as per paragraph 10.7 FRS 102 SORP. Subsequent measurement is as per paragraphs 11.17 to 11.19, FRS 102 SORP.

Fund structure

Unrestricted income funds are general funds that are available for use at the trustees's discretion in furtherance of the objectives of the charity.

Debtors

Debtors are measured on initial recognition at settlement amount after any trade discounts or amount advanced by the charity. Subsequently, they are measured at the cash or other consideration expected to be received.

Gift Aid receivable is recorded as accrued income at the reporting date.

2 INCOME FROM DONATIONS AND LEGACIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Donations and legacies;		
Appeals and donations	78,895	78,895
Gift Aid reclaimed	11,424	11,424
Total for 2024	90,319	90,319
Total for 2023	82,574	82,574

3 INVESTMENT INCOME

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Interest receivable and similar income;		
Interest receivable on bank deposits	3,436	3,436
Total for 2024	3,436	3,436
Total for 2023	848	848

4 EXPENDITURE ON RAISING FUNDS

A) COSTS OF GENERATING DONATIONS AND LEGACIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Donations	779	779
Total for 2024	779	779
Total for 2023	250	250

5 EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Grant funding of activities	112,042	112,042
Total for 2023	115,187	115,187

6 SUPPORT COSTS

	Note	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Independent examiner fees			
Examination of the financial statements	7	1,260	1,260
Marketing and publicity		117	117
Administrative expenses		244	244
Total for 2024		1,621	1,621
Total for 2023		1,561	1,561

7 INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REMUNERATION

	2024 £	2023 £
Examination of the financial statements	1,260	1,260

8 TAXATION

The charity is a registered charity and is therefore exempt from taxation.

9 DEBTORS

	2024 £	2023 £
Accrued income	10,275	13,150

10 CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS

	2024 £	2023 £
Cash at bank	219,420	231,851

11 CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR

	2024	2023
	£	£
Other creditors	96,125	90,744
Accruals	1,260	1,260
	97,385	92,004

12 FUNDS

	Balance at 1 April 2023	Incoming resources	Resources expended	Balance at 31 March 2024
	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted funds				
General	152,997	93,755	(114,442)	132,310

	Balance at 1 April 2022	Incoming resources	Resources expended	Balance at 31 March 2023
	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted funds				
General	186,573	83,422	(116,998)	152,997

13 ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds at 31 March 2024 £
Current assets	229,695	229,695
Current liabilities	(97,385)	(97,385)
Total net assets	132,310	132,310

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds at 31 March 2023 £
Current assets	245,001	245,001
Current liabilities	(92,004)	(92,004)
Total net assets	152,997	152,997

AUTISM FORWARD

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES BY FUND FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

	Total Unrestricted Funds 2024 £	Total Unrestricted Funds 2023 £
Income and Endowments from:		
Donations and legacies	90,319	82,574
Investment income	3,436	848
Total income	93,755	83,422
Expenditure on:		
Raising funds	(779)	(250)
Charitable activities	(112,042)	(115,187)
Other expenditure	(1,621)	(1,561)
Total expenditure	(114,442)	(116,998)
Net expenditure	(20,687)	(33,576)
Net movement in funds	(20,687)	(33,576)
Reconciliation of funds		
Total funds brought forward	152,997	186,573
Total funds carried forward	132,310	152,997

AUTISM FORWARD CIO

England & Wales - Charity number 1171704

Accounts

Charity registration number: 1171704

AUTISM FORWARD

ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

AUTISM FORWARD

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AUTISM FORWARD

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Trustees	Ms A Leverett Ms J Pierce Dr E Gokcen Ms H Needham
Principal Office	37 Granville Park London SE13 7DY
Charity Registration Number	1171704
Website	www.autismforward.org.uk
Bankers	Metro Bank PLC One Southampton Row London WC1B 5HA
Independent Examiner	Rotherham Taylor Limited 21 Navigation Business Village Navigation Way Ashton-on-Ribble Preston PR2 2YP

TRUSTEES' REPORT

The trustees have pleasure in presenting their report and the unaudited financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2023.

The financial statements have been prepared on an accruals basis in accordance with the accounting policies set out in the notes to the financial statements and comply with thecharity's constitution, Charities Act 2011 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities:Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their financial statements in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland published on 16 July 2014. The financial statements have been examined by an Independent Examiner.

1. STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The charity is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered number 117104 and is constituted under a Foundation Constitution which came into force on 20 February 2017. Ann Leverett, Jane Pierce and Elif Gokcen were the three co-founders of the charity and were all reappointed for a further period of 3 years commencing on 23 January 2023. Helen Needham was appointed as a trustee on 20 October 2020.

New trustees are appointed by the existing trustees and in selecting individuals for appointment as charity trustees, the trustees must have regard to the skills, knowledge and experience needed for the effective administration of the charity. The Constitution provides for a minimum of 3 trustees and there is no maximum. Trustees are eligible for reappointment at the end of their term.

As the charity is primarily a grant-making charity, it does not have any paid employees and all fundraising and administrative work is undertaken by the trustees. The trustees attend external training courses as necessary and appropriate for their responsibilities and roles within the charity.

All trustees are required to read the Charity Commission's guidance "The Essential Trustee: What you need to know" and the new Charity Commission Governance Code.

The trustees aim to meet at least once every quarter to discuss fundraising, finances, governance issues, events, new mentor partnerships or initiatives with other autism charities or potential corporate sponsors and to confirm approval of grants. The day to day administration of grants and the processing of applications is handled by the Chair and Secretary. A Grant Approval Sub-Committee was established by unanimous agreement of the trustees on 20 October 2020 and currently comprises three trustees (Ann Leverett, Jane Pierce and Elif Gokcen) which approves all grant applications and grant extensions in accordance with its terms of reference. Details of all grants and grant extensions approved by the Grant Approval Sub-Committee are made available to all trustees and are presented at each board meeting.

All trustees give their time freely and no trustee remuneration was paid in the year and no expenses were claimed by them. Trustees are required to disclose all relevant interests and register them with the charity secretary in accordance with the charity's Conflict of Interest Policy and withdraw from any decisions where a conflict of interest arises. No disclosures have been made by the Trustees since the charity was constituted.

2. RISK MANAGEMENT

The trustees have considered the major risks to which the charity is exposed and have reviewed those risks and established systems and procedures to manage those risks which are set out in the charity's Risk Management Strategy. This contains procedures to ensure the Charity is complying with the Charity Commission guidance in relation to due diligence procedures in relation to beneficiaries, donors and partners.

The charity is primarily a grant making charity and it raises funds to provide grants for specialist employment related mentoring and workshops for autistic adults who are actively seeking paid or voluntary employment. The mentoring and workshops are provided by independent specialist mentors who have proven experience of providing employment related mentoring to autistic adults. The mentor partners are entirely independent of the charity and the charity carries out due diligence in relation to each proposed mentor partner in accordance with the Charity Commission "Know Your Partner" guidelines to verify their experience, good standing and suitability. The charity also enters into a Referral Agreement with each proposed mentor partner which sets out the process for referring grant applications to the charity and the rights and obligations of the mentor partner and the charity in relation to the mentoring services which are funded by grants provided by the charity.

The charity has put in place processes to obtain regular feedback from grant holders and mentors in relation to the mentoring provided and their progress to monitor the use of the charity's funds and outcomes and demonstrate the public benefit derived from the funding of the specialist mentoring and workshops. The charity also reviews each mentor partner annually to check they continue to meet the good standing and other relevant requirements of the "Know Your Partner" guidelines.

The charity is currently working with eleven independent specialist mentor partners across the country and we are actively seeking out more potential mentor partners in new geographical areas of the country.

The charity's surplus funds are divided between the charity's business saving account at Metro Bank plc, the charity's business saving account with the Nationwide Building Society account and the charity's new deposit account with United Trust Bank in order to benefit from the FSCS compensation scheme with all three financial institutions, minimising the charity's financial exposure. All payments made by the charity from its bank and building society accounts require authorisation by two trustees.

3. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT

The objects of the charity are the promotion of social inclusion for the public benefit amongst people aged eighteen or over who are excluded from society, or parts of society, due to an autism spectrum condition, to relieve the needs of such people and assist them to integrate into society and achieve their potential as individuals after they leave education, in particular but not exclusively through funding the provision of:

(a) pre-employment support, including social skills and other relevant training

which enhances employability;

(b) coaching, mentoring, advice and support in relation to employability;

(c) providing specialist skills and awareness training and workshops relating to

employability;

(d) facilitating access to a range of social and leisure activities; and

(e) action to increase public and employer awareness of such disabilities and

conditions and promote steps that can be taken to facilitate such social inclusion through employment.

The trustees confirm that they have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the charity's aims and objectives and planning future activities and setting the grant making policy for the charity.

The charity carries out these objects by:

- providing grants to autistic adults to allow them to access specialist mentoring and/or workshops to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and to improve their social inclusion by accessing clubs, groups, workshops and work placements;
- providing information and resources for autistic people and employers on its website, including details of specialist mentors offering one-to-one support and/or workshops to autistic people to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and links to other websites and resources;
- raising awareness among employers of the needs and strengths of autistic employees and providing advice and signposting services with the aim of increasing access to employment for autistic people and creating more inclusive workplaces; and;
- liaising with universities and colleges to raise awareness of the charity's services for autistic students upon graduation and other initiatives which can improve employment outcomes for autistic students.

The UK government has recently acknowledged the need for action to be taken to boost the employment prospects of autistic people, launching a review to be led by Sir Robert Buckland KC MP. The Buckland Review will consider how the Government can work with employers to help more autistic people realise their potential and get into work.

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, Tom Pursglove MP said:

"We know autistic people can face barriers moving into employment and staying there. This is often down to the employers themselves not having the tools to support autistic people, or truly understanding the value of a neurodiverse workforce.

This important review will provide us with vital information to remove these barriers and help more autistic people start, stay and succeed in work by ensuring more employers provide truly inclusive places to work. I look forward to seeing the recommendations from the review."

Rt Hon Sir Robert Buckland KC MP said:

"I am delighted to have been asked to lead this important Review. Our workplaces and businesses would benefit so much from the huge potential that autistic people represent.

If we close the employment gap for autistic people, it will not just mean individual fulfilment but a significant boost to employment and productivity for our country."

The Buckland Review of Autism Employment will consider issues including:

(a) how employers identify and better support autistic staff already in their workforce;

(b) what more could be done to prepare autistic people effectively for beginning or returning to a career

(c) and working practices or initiatives to reduce stigma and improve the productivity of autistic employees.

Through our work over the last five years, Autism Forward has been striving to address all of the issues being considered by the Buckland Review and are delighted that the Government is at last taking action to investigate how they can improve employment opportunities for neurodivergent people. We have offered to contribute to the Buckland Review and fully support its objectives, which are in line with our own objectives and work over the past 5 years.

The specialist mentoring funded by the charity enables autistic people to prepare for, find and maintain suitable employment which improves their independence and social inclusion. On average, over the last five years, including the two years when covid restrictions applied, 72% of the autistic job seekers we have supported have secured paid or voluntary employment (54% paid and 18% voluntary). The impressive outcomes for our beneficiaries, as set out in further detail in section 8 of this report, demonstrate the effectiveness of the specialist mentoring support we fund. The qualitative feedback shows the broad nature of the support which goes above and beyond employment related support, helping our clients to access benefits, training, social activities and to develop strategies to help them cope with the barriers they face in a world that is not yet adapted for autistic people.

We always seek to ensure that the support we fund is in line with the requirements and values of the autistic community and we recognise the importance of including autistic people at all levels of our organisation. Helen Needham, who is autistic herself, joined our Board of Trustees in 2020 and an increasing number of the specialist employment mentors we work with are also autistic. We seek regular feedback from the autistic job seekers we support to ensure that the support we fund is of value to them. We also use our social media and newsletters to promote the work and events of autistic and neurodivergent led organisations such as Neurodiversity in Law, GAIN, AutAngel and Me.Decoded and Merseyside Autistic Adults Group. We also fund regular Peer Support meetings which are run by our mentor partner, AS Mentoring.

We liaise with employers, universities and colleges to raise awareness of the strengths and needs of autistic people, promoting employment opportunities for autistic people across the UK. We have created a network of employers and continue to hold roundtables for employers, which have been attended by representatives from over 80 different organisations, including employers, universities and researchers. These provide a forum for HR and Diversity & Inclusion teams to meet with autistic employees and professionals to discuss how employers can improve recruitment processes and implement initiatives to improve opportunities and inclusion for autistic people.

Our mentor partners also work with employers including MSL, Thames Water, Credit Suisse First Boston, Herbert Smith Freehills and Invesco to create internship opportunities for autistic candidates, which have benefited a number of our grant holders.

4. PRO BONO CONTRIBUTIONS

The charity has no paid employees and the expenses of the charity are covered by donations by the trustees. All of the grant administration, record keeping, data analysis, fundraising, event organisation, employer roundtable events, universities and communication is carried out by the trustees on a pro bono basis, drawing on their professional experience, networks and resources. All of the charity's awareness raising events and roundtables to date have been hosted by corporate supporters at no cost to the charity or attendees. This maximises the use of the charity's funds for its beneficiaries and ensures its awareness raising events reach a wide audience.

5. GRANT MAKING POLICY

The charity has established its grant making policy with the aim of promoting the social inclusion of autistic people and assist them to integrate into society and achieve their potential as individuals after they leave education by providing grants for funding specialist one-to-one mentoring to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment or for training activities which are relevant to improving employability.

The charity currently works with eleven specialist mentoring organisations across the country and has carried out due diligence checks and entered into Referral Agreements with the organisations listed below which between them cover London, Surrey, Essex, Suffolk, Brighton, Birmingham, Manchester, Bedfordshire, Devon, East Midlands, Northampton, Plymouth, Hull, Liverpool, Chester, Bristol and Poole. All our mentors now offer remote mentoring services, which extends their geographical reach and increases the number of clients they are able to support.

Autism Bedfordshire

Autism East Midlands

AS Mentoring Limited

ASC Key Mentoring (Karen Manghan)

Autism Success Formula Limited

Faraday Fearnside

Matthew's Hub

Ros Evans Coaching

Think Musique

Track NN Limited

WayMakers Devon CIC

The charity accepts applications from grants via its mentor partners and directs enquiries from its website to the mentor partners listed on its website. All grant applications must be made via an approved mentor partner and all grant payments are made directly to the mentor partner. The charity awards initial grants for up to one year of weekly or fortnightly one-to-one mentoring support and will consider requests for grant extensions where the grant holder is making good progress towards employment and is engaging well with the mentoring support.

The applicants must be aged 18 or over and must have a diagnosis of an autism spectrum condition or evidence that they are actively seeking such a diagnosis. They must also provide evidence that they live and are entitled to work in the United Kingdom and priority is given to applicants in financial need.

The charity requires regular feedback from the mentors on the progress of the beneficiaries and feedback from the beneficiaries on the mentoring they receive in order to monitor the use of the charity's funds and outcomes.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

(a) Grants for Mentoring Support

In the financial year ending 31 March 2023, the charity awarded grants for specialist mentoring support to 79 autistic people around the country with the aim of improving their social inclusion and helping them to secure paid or voluntary employment. The charity also continued to fund mentoring support for 59 of the grant holders from previous financial years, thus providing support for a total of 128 autistic job seekers during the financial year ended 31 March 2023, 105 of whom were still receiving support at the end of the financial year. We received more new applications for support this year than in any previous financial year and are continuing to see a rise in applications.

The average age of our 2022-23 grant holders is 33 years old, with 56% identifying as male, 43% female and 1% non-binary, which is a significantly higher percentage of female clients than in previous years. The qualifications held by the grant holders range from no formal qualifications to Masters and PhD level degrees and professional qualifications. The sectors in which the applicants have secured or are seeking employment are incredibly varied, including education, health and care sector, IT, estate management, film, music, accountancy and retail. The wide variety of careers pursued by our grant holders dispels common preconceptions of the types of roles that are suitable for autistic people and demonstrates that autistic people can pursue any career choice which matches their interest and skills with the right guidance and support.

In addition to supporting our beneficiaries into employment, the mentors help with anxiety, communication, sensory and also practical issues they may be facing, which improves their autonomy, well-being and social inclusion. For example, our mentors have helped beneficiaries with anxiety, travelling on public transport, relationship issues and organisational skills. On a practical level, our mentors have helped beneficiaries deal with benefits claims, tenancy problems, debt problems and referrals to appropriate health and mental health services. The mentors have also facilitated participation in new clubs, groups and social activities as well as workshops and training to improve their employability, social inclusion and well-being.

The mentors have also facilitated participation in new clubs, groups and social activities as well as workshops and training to improve their employability, social inclusion and well-being.

We have also increased our funding for workshops and programmes, as set out in more detail in section (e) below. This enables us to provide cost-effective support to a wider range of people across the country.

(b) Outcomes from Mentoring Support

The Government stated in the announcement of the Buckland Review of Autism Employment that fewer than 3 in 10 autistic people are in work, so the results achieved by our beneficiaries are particularly impressive, demonstrating the effectiveness of the specialist mentoring support that we fund.

The outcomes for grant holders awarded grants during the financial year 2022-23 who have had between 3 and 12 months' support were as follows:

75% made job applications

53% attended job interviews

36% joined new clubs or groups

55% undertook some form of training or placement

29% secured voluntary roles

36% secured paid employment

The total employment figure for our 2022-23 grant holders is 56% (36% paid; 20% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2021-22 grant holders is 67% (55% paid; 12% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2020-21 grant holders is 81% (67% paid; 14% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2019-20 grant holders is: 90% (63% paid; 27% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2018-19 grant holders is: 90% (58% paid; 32% voluntary)

The above figures for all financial years include clients whose support was ended early due to health or other issues and clients whose grants have been temporarily paused. The figures for the current financial year include only grant holders who have had between 3 and 12 months' support. Some of the grant holders who were awarded grants in previous financial years have had more than 12 months' support. We anticipate that our beneficiaries will continue to move into employment, improving the employment outcomes for our 2022-23 grant holders, as has happened with all previous cohorts.

(c) Feedback from our Beneficiaries

We introduced a new format for the regular feedback from our grant holders in 2021 which enables us to assess the value of the support we fund in more detail. The results of the feedback from grant holders who have had at least 6 months' mentoring support during the financial year ended 31 March 2023 are set out below. This includes grant holders who were awarded grants in previous financial years and who continued to receive support this year. The responses demonstrate the wider impact and value of the specialist mentoring support we fund, beyond employment outcomes.

88% said the support improved their understanding of their strengths and challenges.

78% said the support improved their understanding of what job is suitable for them.

81% said the support improved their understanding of how to find a job.

73% said the support helped them draft or update their CV.

76% said the support made them more confident about disclosing their diagnosis.

81% said the support made them more confident about requesting "reasonable adjustments" from a potential employer.

50% said the support helped them prepare for interviews.

50% said the support helped them join groups, make friends or participate in other activities.

78% said the support improved their self-confidence.

54% said the support helped them access benefits, health care or other public services.

57% said the support helped them access training, workshops or further education.

90% said that they would recommend the support funded by the charity to other autistic job seekers.

The case study and qualitative feedback responses below from some of the autistic job seekers we have supported this year provide further evidence of the value of the specialist support we fund, including the workshop programmes and our employer roundtables. This support enables people not only to find paid or voluntary employment, but also to improve their independence, social inclusion, confidence and self-esteem, to understand better how their autism affects them and to develop strategies to address issues which may be holding them back. This is beneficial not only to the individuals and their families, but also benefits the public purse as it reduces the need for reliance on benefits and public services such as mental health provision and leads to a more inclusive and cohesive society and diverse workforce.

The feedback also highlights the gap in support for autistic people when they leave education, or obtain a late diagnosis, that is so often needed to enable them to fulfil their potential in the workplace and beyond.

Autism Forward grant holder mentored by Amira Hassan (AS Mentoring)

I first started mentoring S during the "Steps Into Work" (SIW) programme, which was a 12 weeks course developed by AS Mentoring. Autism Forward fully funded the development of the programme, as well as funding 12 places for recent autistic graduates and final year students to attend the programme. The programme covered key topics to support autistic graduates into employment, such as: Transitioning into work from university; Identifying personal attributes and professional skills; how to search and apply for jobs; writing CV's and cover letters; how to disclose your diagnosis and interview skills for autistic people.

S at the time was finishing her Master's degree, and was unsure how/where to begin looking for employment. She stated that she decided to apply to the SIW programme to get some support, and it was only possible for her to attend thanks to AF fully funding her place on the programme.

S biggest fear was going into employment because of her own challenges navigating the neurotypical world as a neurodivergent individual, and hearing the challenging experiences from other autistic people who were in employment. These included the fact that a lot of workplaces were (and still are) inaccessible to autistic people, starting from the recruitment process, all the way to securing a role and maintaining it. For example, the language used in job descriptions, applications and in interviews is often vague, open ended and confusing- resulting in autistic candidates often left to feel unable to apply as they feel it doesn't represent them, which results in them being overlooked and often not even considered for an interview. During the interview autistic people can be misjudged as there is often little to no understanding how an autistic person can present. For S, an example of that was at an interview for an academic position, where she had a really strong technical performance, but the more "informal" and "interpersonal" aspect of interviews was challenging and cost her the position. No adjustments were put in place at the time and despite her disclosing her autism in the application form, it was not regarded (now S knows she has to tell them directly too!).

As we approached the end of the SIW programme, an opportunity came along to apply for a 6 months paid internship with an ASM's corporate partner, Invesco, and I thought S was a great candidate for it.

This Invesco internship has been developed in partnership with ASM with a very specific recruitment process. It was ringfenced to autistic applicants, and each stage was clearly defined. The adjusted process included revising the wording of the job description (removing vagueness and making it more specific), suitable candidates are asked to attend an interview, where the questions were shared with them in advance- each set of interview questions were revised by an ASM consultant to ensure they were put in the context of S experience and were not vague or open ended.

Finally, a consultant from ASM was present during the interview, as additional support if it were required by S (not to answer on her behalf but help bridge the communication between the interviewers and the candidate). S felt a mixture of emotions along the recruitment process. She was very apprehensive about the interview, and how she'd be perceived by the interviewers (now colleagues!) and stated that the adjusted recruitment process was instrumental in managing her anxiety, but also in enabling her to fully showcase her skills and abilities to the panel. The interviewers were impressed with her performance and knowledge and offered her the position on the internship.

During the internship itself I continued working with S and Invesco to provide workplace support. I supported S in identifying what suitable reasonable adjustments could be put in place to enable her to work to her abilities. Invesco were very open and flexible and keen to provide as much support as needed. The whole team attended an Autism Awareness training delivered by ASM, to help managers and colleagues understand and become more inclusive of an autistic colleague. In addition, S was able to use a separate quiet room when in the office, as well as being allowed to commute into the office later so to avoid rush hour and the sensory overload caused by it. S truly integrated into the culture of the company and soon became a valued team member and colleague. S joined the Invesco Neurodiversity Network, wrote an article for the internal Invesco forum on being a neurodivergent employee and was invited to present and speak of her experience at the latest Autism Forward Roundtable event where many corporates interested in Neurodiversity and inclusion attended.

S successfully completed her internship, and it was instrumental in developing her confidence, skills and gave her a true representation of what an inclusive workplace can be like- and that with simple adjustments and a kind team she would be able to integrate and be a key part of a workplace. The support she received from Autism Forward and AS Mentoring and every individual in her internship really enabled her to thrive and showcase the value and talent that a neurodivergent colleague can bring.

S reflections on the internship were:

"I was pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm displayed by all my colleagues to learn more about autism and neurodiversity. Everyone within my team is respectful and inclusive towards different identities. I have encountered some challenges along the way, in terms of trying to find appropriate reasonable adjustments that help me to work efficiently and effectively, adapting to changes, and so forth. I am enjoying my internship very much, and it's a bonus that I am part of such a supportive team. I love the fact that there is a ND committee, and that there is a huge effort in raising neurodiversity awareness across the workplace."

Autism Forward client mentored by WayMakers (Devon) CIC

This mentoring has helped me a lot. Being listened to and being helped to find strategies to do with my worries have made me feel less stressed. I've been able to make decisions independently that make me feel better about myself. I'm better at coping in the workplace and at finding ways that make things seem less negative. I'm not apologising as much as I used to, and if I do I'm more aware that I've done it. I've learned to be in the present more instead of in the past or the future because it takes away your joys otherwise. I've also been given weekly sheets that help me revisit sessions.

Autism Forward client mentored by Autism East Midlands

I feel very supported. I feel like I am moving forward with the restrictions that I have. I feel we are looking for the right job for me and not just ticking a box. If I have any issues I feel confident that my mentor will support me and help to resolve the issues.

Autism Forward client mentored by Autism East Midlands

I like that my mentor talks to me like a normal person. She doesn't see my diagnosis. She has had good ideas and suggested work / volunteer opportunities that I have now pursued. She has a lot of life / work experience and has been able to use this to help me.

Autism Forward grant holder mentored by Sarah Musique of Think Musique (Manchester)

This mentoring is definitely some of the best that I've had. Most others just don't seem to have understood my interests and my overall goals whereas Sarah does understand this. I'm not sure if it's because Sarah is more open minded or because of being more specialised in working with people with Autism but it makes a difference for me in that I know that there are more people out there that are willing to listen and understand.

Autism Forward grant holder mentored by AS Mentoring (London)

It demystified the job seeking process for me and gave me the skills to begin to move into those parts of young adulthood. Aeryn was exceptionally approachable, welcoming, informative and all round lovely! Thank you so much.

Autism Forward grant holder mentored by AS Mentoring (London)

I have been very unwell all round and had many things to unravel and get sorted prior to being ready to work again. The mentoring has been really supportive in putting practical things in place and understanding my new diagnoses and what the realistic possibilities are for me. My life is getting more structured gradually and I'm still sifting through options and preparing to get back to paid work slowly as my physical health is poor. I understand my autism and ADHD better. I'm starting to create again in a studio and am doing good voluntary work. Very grateful for this support, thank you so much.

Autism Forward grant holder mentored by Faraday Fearnside (Plymouth)

This process is a must for people on the Autistic spectrum. It helps with confidence, understanding and dealing with new or unexpected situations. Overall I am more prepared to undertake work and know my strengths and areas for opportunity. I feel more confident in my outlook and positive about the future. Faraday is a consummate professional that uses her unique journey to help others. She has allowed me to take on life and feel at peace with my limitations.

Autism Forward grant holder mentored by Ros Evans (Surrey)

Mentoring has been helpful in general. It has helped me put in structure to improve my work and productivity. It has helped me get things into perspective, to understand my barriers and challenges and to put strategies in place to deal with them. I have become more confident to tell people I'm autistic, which is difficult as I was only diagnosed recently at the age of 50. I know better when to ask for help or support and what to ask for. I feel less stigmatised by my autism diagnosis.

Feedback from Autism Forward grant holder mentored by Karen-Anne Manghan (Brighton)

The support I've received has been incredibly valuable. Working with Karen has changed my life for the better. I have found employment after a long term period out of work - and have gained in confidence unbelievably. Thrilled to have found such an intelligent and supportive mentor.

Feedback from Autism Forward grant holder mentored by Karen-Anne Manghan (Brighton)

Karen is a fantastic mentor and has really supported me throughout my university experience. I cannot recommend Karen enough, I really don't think I would be where I am today without her support. Having a mentor who is also autistic means they have insight into my experiences that others haven't understood. Highly recommend hiring more autistic mentors! They are brilliant and really make a difference!

Feedback from Autism Forward grant holder mentored by Karen-Anne Manghan (Brighton)

With my mentor, I talk about things that are worrying me or that I want advice with. Sometimes, she has helped me find out more about things, provided me with relevant resources, and helped me with filling out forms and applications. She has made it clear I can ask her if I need help.
It is good to have someone independent from my family and usual friends (although she is very friendly, and I feel we are friends of a sort) to talk to, since sometimes my issues relate to them and I want another perspective.

I also enjoy our casual conversation. My mentor is autistic, so she has a personal understanding - we discuss our personal experiences with their similarities and differences. I have understood some more about myself and my autism (and other people's autism) from the mentoring.

My mentor recommended job-seeking and employment-readiness resources aimed at autistic audiences, including a looking for work course, which helped with job-seeking, applications, CVs and cover letters, advice on deciding whether to disclose autism, and interviews. My mentor also gives me employment advice and answers questions about it.

I feel I have definitely benefited from having the mentoring. My mentor listens to me and I feel comfortable talking to her.

Feedback from Autism Forward grant holder mentored by Karen-Anne Manghan (Brighton)

Every session with Karen is a gift. The world and my place in it are slowly starting to make sense and while I know I still have a long way to go, it is encouraging to see how far I have come. Karen's understanding, empathy and support are second to none and I will forever be grateful for the investment both she and Autism Forward have made in me.

(c) Employer Network and Recruitment Roundtables

Autism Forward has created a network of employers, autistic employees and professionals who meet regularly to discuss and implement initiatives to improve opportunities and inclusion for autistic people. By meeting regularly and sharing best practice, we can drive change forward more effectively and ensure that the changes autistic people require to access employment and thrive in the workplace are implemented.

Our network includes a wide range of employers including law firms, accountancy firms, management consultants, banks, investment banks, technology companies, telecoms companies, insurers, asset management firms, universities and other autism charities and is continuing to grow. Our latest roundtable was hosted by the global PR company MSL, with a focus on communicating internally and externally as an inclusive organisation. Media organisations have a unique role to play, as through their client work they have the reach and impact to change societal perceptions, so we are delighted to be working with this sector to improve their neurodiversity inclusion.

We are very encouraged to see the increasing number of peer led initiatives which also aim to share best practice and provide a forum for discussion. These include GAIN (Group for Autism, Insurance, Investment and Neurodiversity), Neurodiversity in Law and the Law Neurodiversity Network. We have also contributed to the new online ND Resource Hub recently launched by Neurodiversity in Business, which is available to everyone.

In November 2022 we organised a neurodiversity awareness event for the multinational finance and insurance corporation AIG, with speakers including Laurie Edmans, Co-founder of GAIN, Rachel Pearson, Senior Regional Employment Coach at AS Mentoring,and Dan Neill, MI Analyst at AXA Health and Neurodiversity Workstream Lead of the AXA ABLE employee group. We also participated in the inaugural Law Society Neurodiversity Event hosted by Herbert Smith Freehills in October 2022, a law firm we have worked closely with over the last four years to improve awareness and opportunities for autistic people.

(d) Workshops for Autistic Adults

We have continued to fund a series of online workshops, which are an excellent way to provide cost effective and peer to peer support for autistic adults. Our mentor partner, AS Mentoring, runs a number of programmes which we have committed to fund in line with agreed costing proposals. The current programmes that the charity supports are as follows:

(i) Peer Support Programme

Following on from a successful pilot scheme, AS Mentoring now runs regular peer support groups for Autistic Job Seekers and for neurodivergent people who are or wish to be Self-Employed. Autism Forward funds places on the support groups for those who meet our grant criteria.

(ii) Looking for Work Programme

AS Mentoring has now successfully run several "Looking for Work" programmes for autistic job seekers. Autism Forward funds places on the programme for people who meet our grant criteria.

The four month programme which comprises one to one support sessions, six workshops and "homework" tasks with the following objectives:

- Consider employment or further study options and achievable next steps
- Identify potential barriers that their autism presents
- Equip them with job search skills and preparation for interviews
- Give guidance and practical tools to disclose their diagnosis in the workplace, request reasonable adjustments and communicate effectively with managers and colleagues.
- Provide signposting of further sources of support

The benefit of the programme is that it combines tailored one to one support with workshops and peer support for the participants at a key transition stage in their lives, in a very cost effective way.

(f) Fundraising

We are extremely grateful to our supporters and regular donors who have enabled us to continue to provide vital support to autistic job seekers throughout this challenging time and ensure that we have certainty of funds for the coming financial year so that we can continue to increase the number of autistic job seekers we are able to support across the country.

We have not received any grants during this financial year, so have relied upon individual fundraisers and supporters. Autism Forward is registered with the donation platforms Just Giving, Charities Aid Foundation and Work for Good.

7. FINANCIAL REVIEW

At the end of the financial year ending 31 March 2023, the charity had reserves of £152,997 available. The charity awarded 79 new grants for mentoring support and provided funding for various workshop programmes and peer support groups run by AS Mentoring for the benefit of autistic job seekers and self-employed people. We also continued to support 59 grant holders from previous financial years.

During the financial year ending 31 March 2023, the charity received donations totalling £68,609 and £13,965 in gift aid receipts. None of the donations received by the charity had any conditions attached.

The charity's grant making function is entirely reliant on funds that are raised through donations and sponsored events, employer match funding of donations and trust or foundations grants. The trustees are extremely grateful to all the individual donors, fundraisers and corporate supporters who have enabled the charity to provide so many autistic people with the support they need to access employment and fulfil their potential.

The charity only makes grants available if it has sufficient funds available to be able to fund the entire grant which ensures its financial stability. When the charity awards a grant, it designates funds in relation to the full amount of the grant awarded at the time the grant is approved, even though the grant will generally be paid out at regular intervals over the course of the grant period rather than in one upfront payment. If the grant is curtailed for any reason, for example if the beneficiary finds paid employment or no longer wishes to continue with the mentoring, any funds designated for that grant but not used will be reallocated to the charity's general funds and be available to fund other grants.

The charity keeps designated funds to cover the full amount of any grant awarded which ensures that its obligations to grant holders can always be met in full. All of the charity's grant administration, record keeping, data analysis, fundraising, event organisation and awareness raising with employers and universities is carried out by the charity trustees on a pro bono basis.

As the charity relies largely on individual donations which can be unpredictable, based on current levels of expenditure and in order to ensure that the charity is able to renew and continue making grants through periods where donations are lower, the trustees have agreed that appropriate level of reserves should be kept at the level of at least £20,000, to be reviewed at the end of each financial year or more frequently if requested by the Treasurer. The charity currently has a higher than usual level of reserves that will enable it to continue to award new grants and grant extensions without having to seek new sources of funding for the upcoming financial year, but trustees will continue to review the financial situation on a monthly basis to ensure that the charity can continue to operate effectively.

8. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The charity is currently funding specialist one-to-one support for around 130 autistic job seekers to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and to improve their social inclusion, support which they would not otherwise have been able to access. The number of new grant applications from autistic job seekers has continued to increase, with the largest ever number being awarded this financial year. We will continue to extend grants for existing beneficiaries who are engaging well with support and making progress towards employment. We are continuing to see successful outcomes for our job seekers across a wide range of sectors and are now being actively sought out by employers to signpost services to support and attract neurodivergent talent.

We work with specialist mentors covering a wide area of the country and continue to seek out experienced mentors in new geographical areas. In addition to this, our current mentors all offer remote support so that we can support autistic job seekers in all areas of England and Wales.

Over the last financial year, the charity has continued to grow its network of employers who are keen to improve inclusion and support for autistic employees, including making changes to their recruitment procedures and workplaces, developing neurodiversity networks or putting in place specific recruitment programmes or internships for autistic candidates. We are extending our reach to new fields including PR, advertising, restaurant and entertainment businesses.

We are also continuing to expand our connections and to work with other charities and to promote the work of neurodivergent led groups such as Neurodiversity in Business, the Legal Neurodiversity Network and GAIN to improve inclusion and employment outcomes for autistic people. We have also offered to contribute to the Buckland Review of Autism Employment and we hope that this leads to real and lasting improvement in the employment opportunities for autistic people.

We are proud to be able to support both autistic job seekers and employers to drive change, reduce the autism employment gap, which has now been recognised at Government level as an important and pressing priority. The outcomes and feedback from the autistic job seekers we support demonstrate the value of the specialist support we fund and we are pleased to see more employers recognising the value of a neurodiverse workforce and the skills and different perspective that autistic employees bring, as well as an increase in neurodivergent led support groups both within and outside the workplace.

9. INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

A resolution to reappoint Mr NP Smith FCCA as independent examiner for the ensuing year will be proposed at the annual general meeting.

10. DECLARATION

SIGNED SECURELY
31/07/2023
31/07/2023 at 3:52:37 PM UTC

The annual report was approved by the trustees of the charity on ..... and signed on its behalf by:

SIGNED SECURELY
Ann Leverett
31/07/2023 at 5:23:56 PM UTC

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Jane Pierce
31/07/2023 at 3:52:37 PM UTC

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
09/08/2023 at 6:41:18 PM UTC

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Helen Needham
21/08/2023 at 1:02:40 PM UTC

.....

Ms H Needham
Trustee

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

The trustees are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with the United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) and applicable law and regulations.

The law applicable to charities requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charity for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the applicable Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations, and the provisions of the constitution. The trustees are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Approved by the trustees of the charity on ..... and signed on its behalf by:

SIGNED SECURELY
Ann Leverett
31/07/2023 at 5:23:56 PM UTC

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Jane Pierce
31/07/2023 at 3:52:37 PM UTC

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
[redacted]2023 at 6:41:18 PM UTC

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Helen Needham
21/08/2023 at 1:02:40 PM UTC

.....
Ms H Needham
Trustee

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF AUTISM FORWARD

I report to the trustees on my examination of the financial statements of Autism Forward ('the charity') for the year ended 31 March 2021 which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities, the Balance Sheet and related notes, which are set out on pages 20 to 27.

This report is made solely to the charity's trustees, as a body, in accordance with section 145 of the Charities Act 2011. My work has been undertaken so that I might state to the charity's trustees those matters I am required to state to them in this report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, I do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charity and the charity's trustees as a body, for my work, for this report, or for the opinions I have formed

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

As the trustees of Autism Forward you are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the financial statements of Autism Forward carried out under section 145 of the Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

An independent examination does not involve gathering all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently does not cover all the matters that an auditor considers in giving their opinion on the financial statements. The planning and conduct of an audit goes beyond the limited assurance that an independent examination can provide. Consequently I express no opinion as to whether the financial statements present a 'true and fair' view and my report is limited to those specific matters set out in the independent examiner's statement.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of Autism Forward as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records; or
3. the accounts do not comply with the accounting requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair view' which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF AUTISM FORWARD

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

.....

Mr N P Smith
FCCA

21 Navigation Business Village
Navigation Way
Ashton-on-Ribble
Preston
PR2 2YP

Date: 31/7/23

AUTISM FORWARD

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Total 2023 £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies	2	82,574	82,574
Investment income	3	848	848
Total income		83,422	83,422
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds		(250)	(250)
Charitable activities		(115,187)	(115,187)
Support costs	6	(1,561)	(1,561)
Total expenditure		(116,998)	(116,998)
Net expenditure		(33,576)	(33,576)
Net movement in funds		(33,576)	(33,576)
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward		186,573	186,573
Total funds carried forward	12	152,997	152,997

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Total 2022 £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies		121,994	121,994
Investment income	3	108	108
Total income		122,102	122,102
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds		(1,261)	(1,261)
Charitable activities		(37,369)	(37,369)
Support costs	6	(1,543)	(1,543)
Total expenditure		(40,173)	(40,173)
Net income		81,929	81,929
Net movement in funds		81,929	81,929
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward		104,644	104,644
Total funds carried forward	12	186,573	186,573

The notes on pages 22 to 27 form an integral part of these financial statements.

AUTISM FORWARD

(REGISTRATION NUMBER: 1171704)
BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 MARCH 2023

	Note	2023 £	2022 £
Current assets			
Debtors	9	13,150	5,300
Cash at bank and in hand	10	231,851	235,920
		245,001	241,220
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	11	(92,004)	(54,647)
Net assets		152,997	186,573
Funds of the charity:			
Unrestricted income funds			
Unrestricted funds		152,997	186,573
Total funds	12	152,997	186,573

SIGNED SECURELY
31/07/2023
The financial statements on pages 20 to 27 were approved by the trustees, and authorised for issue on ..... and signed on their behalf by:

SIGNED SECURELY
Ann Leverett
31/07/2023 at 5:23:56 PM UTC

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Jane Pierce
31/07/2023 at 3:52:37 PM UTC

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
[redacted]
03/08/2023 at 6:41:18 PM UTC

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Helen Needham
21/08/2023 at 1:02:40 PM UTC

.....
Ms H Needham
Trustee

1 ACCOUNTING POLICIES

Statement of compliance
The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Charities Act 2011.

Basis of preparation
Autism Forward meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102. Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant accounting policy notes.

The financial statements have been prepared to give a 'true and fair' view and have departed from the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 only to the extent required to provide a 'true and fair' view. This departure has involved following Accounting and Reporting by Charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) issued on 16 July 2014 rather than the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of a Recommended Practice effective from 1 April 2005 which has since been withdrawn.

Going concern
The trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

Income and endowments
Voluntary income including donations, gifts, legacies and grants that provide core funding or are of a general nature is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the income, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured with sufficient reliability.

Donations and legacies

Donations and legacies are recognised on a receivable basis when receipt is probable and the amount can be reliably measured.

Gift aid

Gift Aid receivable is included in income when there is a valid declaration from the donor. Any Gift Aid amount recovered on a donation is considered to be part of that gift and is treated as an addition to the same fund as the initial donation unless the donor or the terms of the appeal have specified otherwise.

Investment income

Income from interest, royalties and dividends are included in the accounts when receipt is probable and the amount received can be measured reliably.

Expenditure and liablities

Grant expenditure

Grants are recognised in the financial statements as liabilities after they have been approved by the trustees, the recipients have been notified and there are no further terms and conditions to be fulfilled within the control of the charity. In these circumstances there is a valid expectation by the recipients that they will receive the grant.

Liability recognition

Liabilities are recognised where it is more likely than not that there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to pay out resources and the amount of the obligation can be measured with reasonable certainty.

Support costs

Support costs have been allocated between governance costs and other support. Governance costs comprise all costs involving public accountability of the charity and its compliance with regulation and good practice.

Creditors

The charity has creditors which are measured at settlement amounts less any trade discounts.

Provisions for liablities

A liability is measured on recognition at its historical cost and then subsequently measured at the best estimate of the amount required to settle the obligation at the reporting date.

Financial instruments

The charity accounts for basic financial instruments on initial recognition as per paragraph 10.7 FRS 102 SORP. Subsequent measurement is as per paragraphs 11.17 to 11.19, FRS 102 SORP.

Fund structure

Unrestricted income funds are general funds that are available for use at the trustees's discretion in furtherance of the objectives of the charity.

Debtors

Debtors are measured on initial recognition at settlement amount after any trade discounts or amount advanced by the charity. Subsequently, they are measured at the cash or other consideration expected to be received.

Gift Aid receivable is recorded as accrued income at the reporting date.

2 INCOME FROM DONATIONS AND LEGACIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Donations and legacies;		
Appeals and donations	68,609	68,609
Gift Aid reclaimed	13,965	13,965
Total for 2023	82,574	82,574
Total for 2022	121,994	121,994

3 INVESTMENT INCOME

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Interest receivable and similar income;		
Interest receivable on bank deposits	848	848
Total for 2023	848	848
Total for 2022	108	108

4 EXPENDITURE ON RAISING FUNDS

A) COSTS OF GENERATING DONATIONS AND LEGACIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Donations	250	250
Total for 2023	250	250
Total for 2022	1,261	1,261

5 EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Grant funding of activities	115,187	115,187
Total for 2022	37,369	37,369

6 SUPPORT COSTS

	Note	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Independent examiner fees			
Examination of the financial statements	7	1,260	1,260
Marketing and publicity		57	57
Administrative expenses		244	244
Total for 2023		1,561	1,561
Total for 2022		1,543	1,543

7 INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REMUNERATION

	2023 £	2022 £
Examination of the financial statements	1,260	1,200

8 TAXATION

The charity is a registered charity and is therefore exempt from taxation.

9 DEBTORS

	2023 £	2022 £
Accrued income	13,150	5,300

10 CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS

	2023 £	2022 £
Cash at bank	231,851	235,920

11 CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR

	2023 £	2022 £
Other creditors	90,744	53,447
Accruals	1,260	1,200
	92,004	54,647

12 FUNDS

	Balance at 1 April 2022 £	Incoming resources £	Resources expended £	Balance at 31 March 2023 £
Unrestricted funds				
General	186,573	83,422	(116,998)	152,997

	Balance at 1 April 2021 £	Incoming resources £	Resources expended £	Balance at 31 March 2022 £
Unrestricted funds				
General	104,644	122,102	(40,173)	186,573

13 ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds at 31 March 2023 £
Current assets	245,001	245,001
Current liabilities	(92,004)	(92,004)
Total net assets	152,997	152,997

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds at 31 March 2022 £
Current assets	241,220	241,220
Current liabilities	(54,647)	(54,647)
Total net assets	186,573	186,573

AUTISM FORWARD

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES BY FUND FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

	Total Unrestricted Funds 2023 £	Total Unrestricted Funds 2022 £
Income and Endowments from:		
Donations and legacies	82,574	121,994
Investment income	848	108
Total income	83,422	122,102
Expenditure on:		
Raising funds	(250)	(1,261)
Charitable activities	(115,187)	(37,369)
Other expenditure	(1,561)	(1,543)
Total expenditure	(116,998)	(40,173)
Net (expenditure)/income	(33,576)	81,929
Net movement in funds	(33,576)	81,929
Reconciliation of funds		
Total funds brought forward	186,573	104,644
Total funds carried forward	152,997	186,573

AUTISM FORWARD CIO

England & Wales - Charity number 1171704

Accounts

Charity registration number: 1171704

AUTISM FORWARD

ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2022

AUTISM FORWARD

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AUTISM FORWARD

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Trustees	Ms J Pierce Ms H Needham Dr E Gokcen Ms A Leverett
Principal Office	37 Granville Park London SE13 7DY
Charity Registration Number	1171704
Website	www.autismforward.org.uk
Bankers	Metro Bank PLC One Southampton Row London WC1B 5HA
Independent Examiner	Rotherham Taylor Limited 21 Navigation Business Village Navigation Way Ashton-on-Ribble Preston PR2 2YP

TRUSTEES' REPORT

The trustees have pleasure in presenting their report and the unaudited financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2022.

The financial statements have been prepared on an accruals basis in accordance with the accounting policies set out in the notes to the financial statements and comply with thecharity's constitution, Charities Act 2011 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities:Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their financial statements in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland published on 16 July 2014. The financial statements have been examined by an Independent Examiner.

1. STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The charity is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered number 117104 and is constituted under a Foundation Constitution which came into force on 20 February 2017. Ann Leverett, Jane Pierce and Elif Gokcen were the three co-founders of the charity and were all reappointed for a further period of 3 years commencing on 23 January 2020. Helen Needham was appointed as a trustee on 20 October 2020.

New trustees are appointed by the existing trustees and in selecting individuals for appointment as charity trustees, the trustees must have regard to the skills, knowledge and experience needed for the effective administration of the charity. The Constitution provides for a minimum of 3 trustees and there is no maximum. Trustees are eligible for reappointment at the end of their term.

As the charity is primarily a grant-making charity, it does not have any paid employees and all fundraising and administrative work is undertaken by the trustees. The trustees attend external training courses as necessary and appropriate for their responsibilities and roles within the charity.

All trustees are required to read the Charity Commission's guidance "The Essential Trustee: What you need to know" and the new Charity Commission Governance Code.

The trustees aim to meet at least once every quarter to discuss fundraising, finances, governance issues, events, new mentor partnerships or initiatives with other autism charities or potential corporate sponsors and to confirm approval of grants. The day to day administration of grants and the processing of applications is handled by the Chair and Secretary. A Grant Approval Sub-Committee was established by unanimous agreement of the trustees on 20 October 2020 and currently comprises three trustees (Ann Leverett, Jane Pierce and Elif Gokcen) which approves all grant applications and grant extensions in accordance with its terms of reference. Details of all grants and grant extensions approved by the Grant Approval Sub-Committee are made available to all trustees and are presented at each board meeting.

All trustees give their time freely and no trustee remuneration was paid in the year and no expenses were claimed by them. Trustees are required to disclose all relevant interests and register them with the charity secretary in accordance with the charity's Conflict of Interest Policy and withdraw from any decisions where a conflict of interest arises. No disclosures have been made by the Trustees since the charity was constituted.

2. RISK MANAGEMENT

The trustees have considered the major risks to which the charity is exposed and have reviewed those risks and established systems and procedures to manage those risks which are set out in the charity's Risk Management Strategy. This contains procedures to ensure the Charity is complying with the Charity Commission guidance in relation to due diligence procedures in relation to beneficiaries, donors and partners.

The charity is primarily a grant making charity and it raises funds to provide grants for specialist employment related mentoring and workshops for autistic adults who are actively seeking paid or voluntary employment. The mentoring and workshops are provided by independent specialist mentors who have proven experience of providing employment related mentoring to autistic adults. The mentor partners are entirely independent of the charity and the charity carries out due diligence in relation to each proposed mentor partner in accordance with the Charity Commission "Know Your Partner" guidelines to verify their experience, good standing and suitability. The charity also enters into a Referral Agreement with each proposed mentor partner which sets out the process for referring grant applications to the charity and the rights and obligations of the mentor partner and the charity in relation to the mentoring services which are funded by grants provided by the charity.

The charity has put in place processes to obtain regular feedback from grant holders and mentors in relation to the mentoring provided and their progress to monitor the use of the charity's funds and outcomes and demonstrate the public benefit derived from the funding of the specialist mentoring and workshops. The charity also reviews each mentor partner annually to check they continue to meet the good standing and other relevant requirements of the "Know Your Partner" guidelines.

The charity is currently working with eleven independent specialist mentor partners across the country, including a new mentor partner, WayMakers Devon CIC. Two previous mentor partners, Autism Society Greater Manchester Area and Deb Hannah (Liverpool) have ceased offering mentoring services over the last year, so clients in Manchester and Liverpool are now directed to our current mentor partner in Manchester, Think Musique.

The charity's surplus funds are divided between the charity's business saving account at Metro Bank plc and the charity's business saving account with the Nationwide Building Society account in order to benefit from the FSCS compensation scheme with both financial institutions, minimising the charity's financial exposure. All payments made by the charity from its bank and building society accounts require authorisation by two trustees.

3. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT

The objects of the charity are the promotion of social inclusion for the public benefit amongst people aged eighteen or over who are excluded from society, or parts of society, due to an autism spectrum condition, to relieve the needs of such people and assist them to integrate into society and achieve their potential as individuals after they leave education, in particular but not exclusively through funding the provision of:

(a) pre-employment support, including social skills and other relevant training

which enhances employability;

(b) coaching, mentoring, advice and support in relation to employability;

(c) providing specialist skills and awareness training and workshops relating to

employability;

(d) facilitating access to a range of social and leisure activities; and

(e) action to increase public and employer awareness of such disabilities and

conditions and promote steps that can be taken to facilitate such social inclusion through employment.

The trustees confirm that they have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the charity's aims and objectives and planning future activities and setting the grant making policy for the charity.

The charity carries out these objects by:

- providing grants to autistic adults to allow them to access specialist mentoring and/or workshops to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and to improve their social inclusion by accessing clubs, groups, workshops and work placements;
- providing information and resources for autistic people and employers on its website, including details of specialist mentors offering one-to-one support and/or workshops to autistic people to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and links to other websites and resources;
- raising awareness among employers of the needs and strengths of autistic employees and providing advice and signposting services with the aim of increasing access to employment for autistic people and creating more inclusive workplaces; and;
- liaising with universities and colleges to raise awareness of the charity's services for autistic students upon graduation and other initiatives which can improve employment outcomes for autistic students.

The employment support we fund is of vital importance both to autistic people and wider society. The recent Office of National Statistics figures released in February 2021 showed that between July and September 2020, employment rates for disabled people aged 16-64 in the UK were 52.1%, compared with 81.3% for non-disabled people and that among disabled people, autistic people had some of the lowest levels of employment, at 21.7% (full or part-time). This is an enormous waste of talent. One of the reasons why the unemployment rate is so high for autistic people is the lack of support available once they leave education. This is the gap in support we seek to bridge.

The specialist mentoring funded by the charity enables autistic people to prepare for, find and maintain suitable employment which improves their independence and social inclusion. On average, over the last four years, including the two years when covid restrictions applied, 78% of the autistic job seekers we have supported have secured paid or voluntary employment (55% paid and 23% voluntary). The impressive outcomes for our beneficiaries, as set out in further detail in section 8 of this report, demonstrate the effectiveness of the specialist mentoring support we fund.

The Covid-19 crisis has adversely affected many of our grant holders who remain anxious about their future and their ability to find work. Changes to routine, concerns about the future and the general anxiety of the situation can be particularly overwhelming for autistic people, so our support has been more vital than ever over the last two years.

We have ensured that all our mentors are able to continue to provide regular support to our beneficiaries remotely by phone, skype, email or other appropriate means. Some of our beneficiaries have chosen to pause their support during the current crisis, but most opted to continue with remote support and it is clear from the feedback we have received from our grant holders that this support is incredibly valuable at this challenging time and has helped them access training, workshops, benefits and other support as well as employment. All of our mentors have now resumed face to face support for those who prefer this to remote support.

We strive to ensure that the support we fund is support that the autistic community desires and values and we recognise the importance of including autistic people at all levels of our organisation. Helen Needham, who is autistic herself, joined our Board of Trustees in 2020 and an increasing number of the specialist employment mentors we work with are also autistic. We seek regular feedback from the autistic job seekers we support to ensure that the support we fund is of value to them. We also use our social media and newsletters to promote the work and events of autistic and neurodivergent led organisations such as Neurodiversity in Law, GAIN, AutAngel and Me.Decoded and Merseyside Autistic Adults Group. We also fund regular Peer Support meetings which are run by our mentor partner, AS Mentoring.

We liaise with employers, universities and colleges to raise awareness of the strengths and needs of autistic people, promoting employment opportunities for autistic people across the UK. We have created a network of employers and have been holding recruitment roundtables for employers since May 2019, which have been attended by representatives from over 50 different organisations (including employers, universities and researchers). These provide a forum for HR and Diversity & Inclusion teams to meet with autistic employees and professionals to discuss how employers can improve recruitment processes and implement initiatives to improve opportunities and inclusion for autistic people.

Our mentor partners also work with employers including Goldman Sachs, Credit Suisse First Boston, Herbert Smith Freehills and Invesco to create internship opportunities for autistic candidates, which have benefited a number of our grant holders.

4. PRO BONO CONTRIBUTIONS

The charity has no paid employees and the expenses of the charity are covered by donations by the trustees. All of the grant administration, record keeping, data analysis, fundraising, event organisation, employer roundtable events, universities and communication is carried out by the trustees on a pro bono basis, drawing on their professional experience, networks and resources. All of the charity's awareness raising events and roundtables to date have been hosted by corporate supporters at no cost to the charity or attendees. This maximises the use of the charity's funds for its beneficiaries and ensures its awareness raising events reach a wide audience.

5. GRANT MAKING POLICY

The charity has established its grant making policy with the aim of promoting the social inclusion of autistic people and assist them to integrate into society and achieve their potential as individuals after they leave education by providing grants for funding specialist one-to-one mentoring to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment or for training activities which are relevant to improving employability.

The charity currently works with eleven specialist mentoring organisations across the country and has carried out due diligence checks and entered into Referral Agreements with the organisations listed below which between them cover London, Surrey, Essex, Suffolk, Brighton, Birmingham, Manchester, Bedfordshire, Devon, East Midlands, Northampton, Plymouth, Hull, Liverpool, Chester, Bristol and Poole. Since the onset of the Covid-19 crisis, all our mentors have been offering remote mentoring services, which extends their geographical reach and increases the number of clients they are able to support.

Autism Bedfordshire

Autism East Midlands

AS Mentoring Limited

ASC Key Mentoring (Karen Manghan)

Autism Success Formula Limited

Faraday Fearnside

Matthew's Hub

Ros Evans Coaching

Think Musique

Track NN Limited

WayMakers Devon CIC

The charity accepts applications from grants via its mentor partners and directs enquiries from its website to the mentor partners listed on its website. All grant applications must be made via an approved mentor partner and all grant payments are made directly to the mentor partner. The charity awards initial grants for up to one year of weekly or fortnightly one-to-one mentoring support and will consider requests for grant extensions where the grant holder is making good progress towards employment and is engaging well with the mentoring support.

The applicants must be aged 18 or over and must have a diagnosis of an autism spectrum condition or evidence that they are actively seeking such a diagnosis. They must also provide evidence that they live and are entitled to work in the United Kingdom and priority is given to applicants in financial need.

The charity requires regular feedback from the mentors on the progress of the beneficiaries and feedback from the beneficiaries on the mentoring they receive in order to monitor the use of the charity's funds and outcomes.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

(a) Grants for Mentoring Support

In the financial year ending 31 March 2022, the charity awarded grants for specialist mentoring support to 41 autistic people around the country with the aim of improving their social inclusion and helping them to secure paid or voluntary employment. The charity also continued to fund mentoring support for 75 of the grant holders from the previous financial years, so provided support for a total of 116 autistic job seekers during the financial year ended 31 March 2022, 58 of whom were still receiving support at the end of the financial year. We received more new applications for support this year than last year and are continuing to see a rise in applications as the covid restrictions have been removed.

The average age of our 2021-22 grant holders is 33 years old, with 70% identifying as male, 29% female and 1% non-binary. The qualifications held by the grant holders range from no formal qualifications to Masters and PhD level degrees and professional qualifications. The sectors in which the applicants have secured or are seeking employment are incredibly varied, currently spanning 80 different career choices, including self-employment. The wide variety of careers pursued by our grant holders dispels common preconceptions of the types of role that are suitable for autistic people and demonstrates that autistic people can pursue any career choice which matches their interest and skills with the right guidance and support.

In addition to supporting our beneficiaries into employment, the mentors help with anxiety, communication, sensory and also practical issues they may be facing, which improves their autonomy, well-being and social inclusion. For example, our mentors have helped beneficiaries with anxiety, travelling on public transport, relationship issues and organisational skills. On a practical level, our mentors have helped beneficiaries deal with benefits claims, tenancy problems, debt problems and referrals to appropriate health and mental health services.

The mentors have also facilitated participation in new clubs, groups and social activities as well as workshops and training to improve their employability, social inclusion and well-being.

We have also increased our funding for workshops and programmes, as set out in more detail in section (e) below. This enables us to provide cost-effective support to a wider range of people across the country.

(b) Outcomes from Mentoring Support

Even in these challenging times, the results achieved by our beneficiaries have been impressive, demonstrating the effectiveness of the specialist mentoring support that we fund.

The outcomes for grant holders awarded grants during the financial year 2021-22 who have had between 3 and 12 months' support were as follows:

71% made job applications

54% attended job interviews

31% joined new clubs or groups

40% undertook some form of training or placement

37% secured voluntary roles

37% secured paid employment

The total employment figure for our 2021-22 grant holders is 57% (37% paid; 20% voluntary).

The total employment figure for our 2020-21 grant holders is 80% (66% paid; 14% voluntary).

The total employment figure for our 2019-20 grant holders is: 87% (61% paid; 26% voluntary).

The total employment figure for our 2018-19 grant holders is: 90% (56% paid; 34%voluntary).

The above figures for all financial years include clients whose support was ended early due to health or other issues and clients whose grants have been temporarily paused. The figures for the current financial year include only grant holders who have had between 3 and 12 months' support. Some of the grant holders who were awarded grants in previous financial years have had more than 12 months' support. As the Covid-19 restrictions have now been removed, we anticipate that our beneficiaries will continue to move into employment, improving the employment outcomes for our 2021-22 grant holders.

The outcomes achieved by our grant holders are very significantly better than the statistics provided by the Office of National Statistics for July-September 2020, which showed that only 21.7% of autistic people were in any kind of employment.

(c) Feedback from our Beneficiaries

We introduced a new format for the regular feedback from our grant holders in 2021 which enables us to assess the value of the support we fund in more detail. The results of the feedback from grant holders who have had at least 6 months' mentoring support during the financial year ended 31 March 2022 are set out below. This includes grant holders who were awarded grants in previous financial years and who continued to receive support this year. The responses demonstrate the wider impact and value of the specialist mentoring support we fund, beyond employment outcomes.

93% said the support improved their understanding of their strengths and challenges.

81% said the support improved their understanding of what job is suitable for them.

74% said the support improved their understanding of how to find a job.

74% said the support helped them draft or update their CV.

85% said the support made them more confident about disclosing their diagnosis and requesting "reasonable adjustments" from a potential employer.

50% said the support helped them prepare for interviews.

50% said the support helped them join groups, make friends or participate in other activities.

97% said the support improved their self-confidence.

52% said the support helped them access benefits, health care or other public services.

62% said the support helped them access training, workshops or further education.

66% said the support helped them find voluntary employment.

54% said the support helped them find paid employment.

The feedback and qualitative responses below from some of the autistic job seekers we have supported this year provide further evidence of the value of the specialist support we fund. This support enables people not only to find paid or voluntary employment, but also to improve their independence, social inclusion, confidence and self-esteem, to understand better how their autism affects them and to develop strategies to address issues which may be holding them back. This is beneficial not only to the individuals and their families, but also benefits the public purse as it reduces the need for reliance on benefits and public services such as mental health provision and leads to a more inclusive and cohesive society and diverse workforce.

The feedback also highlights the gap in support for autistic people when they leave education, or obtain a late diagnosis, that is so often needed to enable them to fulfil their potential in the workplace and beyond.

Feedback from Autism Forward beneficiary mentored by Alan Castellaro (ASM Mentoring - London)

At last, some help and support which is actually helpful! As an autistic adult, it can be extremely difficult finding and accessing a support service where there is understanding, acceptance and practical help from day one. This is what makes the mentoring I receive so invaluable for navigating the often confusing/overwhelming/stressful neuro-typical world I must contend with on a daily basis.

My mentor, Alan, is amazing and has supported me with pretty much everything I've been through over the past few years. We've worked on my CV, looked for jobs (he found a great one but, unfortunately, the pandemic interrupted my application), he supported me through the pandemic, my successful PIP application, help with the job centre, navigating the NHS, support groups, the list goes on!

I am so grateful to my mentor and to Autism Forward for widening my support network and providing the practical support I have previously found so difficult to access.

Autism Forward beneficiary mentored by Sarah Musique of Think Musique (Manchester)

I'd highly recommend getting mentored, it's been a positive experience, I have given Sarah's email address out to other Autistic people I have met in the groups I've joined while being mentored. It can only be positive to have someone to bounce your ideas off of and help to magnify your focus. Sarah has given me more routine to my life and I have been able to focus on being content and happy with what I am doing, which is solving problems as I don't want to be a victim of boredom or a benefit life.

Autism Forward beneficiary mentored by Sarah Musique of Think Musique (Manchester)

The difference the mentoring so far has created is subtle in line with the way that I need to work as I would not be able to work with someone that was rushing me. It is really important that I am listened to and that the mentoring is tailored which I believe it has been. I feel we are building things up in such a manner that progress to employment seems workable in a way that it didn't seem to be previously. I didn't have the confidence before and now I seem to have tools that are building confidence in me and my abilities.

Feedback from Autism Forward beneficiary mentored by Faraday Fearnside (Plymouth)

Faraday is the best neurodiversity support I have accessed to date. She was the first to understand autistic burnout and discuss nervous system support. She is excellent at role modeling boundaries if you are late diagnosed and have masked things. She encourages career development to a life you love, to have high expectations for autistic potential.

Feedback from Autism Forward beneficiary mentored by Karen Manghan (Brighton)

Really beneficial in giving me the confidence to get my needs met, and allow me to think about my experiences from an outside perspective.

Feedback from Autism Forward beneficiary mentored by Karen Manghan (Brighton)

Through mentoring I received valuable support on how to improve my skills, apply for jobs and prepare for interviews. It made me more confident to pursue my dream career and not give up, and now I am in a job I love.

Feedback from Autism Forward beneficiary mentored by Mark Blake (ASM Mentoring - London)

The mentoring is helping me to understand aspects of my diagnosis and its impact on me socially and professionally. It has been used flexibly to fit in with the demands of my work schedule.

Feedback from Autism Forward beneficiary mentored by Autism Success Formula (Essex)

It has been very transformative in the way I go about interviews and job application processes.

(c) Employer Network and Recruitment Roundtables

Autism Forward has created a network of employers, autistic employees and professionals who meet regularly to discuss and implement initiatives to improve opportunities and inclusion for autistic people. By meeting regularly and sharing best practice, we can drive change forward more effectively and ensure that the changes autistic people require to access employment and thrive in the workplace are implemented. Notes from the employer roundtables are available for all to access on our website so that employers not able to attend can benefit from the information shared www.autismforward.org.uk/employers/.

Our network includes a wide range of employers including law firms, accountancy firms, management consultants, banks, investment banks, technology companies, telecoms companies, insurers, asset management firms, universities and other autism charities and is continuing to grow. We were delighted to see initiatives continue to go ahead even during the Covid-19 crisis, in particular Invesco's has extended their six month internship programme which was launched in March 2021 and are exploring the possibility of extending the programme into their Luxembourg office.

We held our first in person employer roundtable for two years in March 2022, hosted by the law firm Weil Gotshal. This event was attended by over 30 people from a wide range of organisations including Ashurst, AstraZeneca, AXA PPP Healthcare, Barclays, Columbia Threadneedle, Credit Suisse, Deutsche Bank, Herbert Smith Freehills, Invesco, Jupiter Asset Management, New Financial, Northern Trust, Publicis Groupe, Shard Capital and Weil Gotshal.

At the roundtable, Lara Bett, EMEA Financial Controller at Invesco and co-chair of the Invesco Neurodiversity Network, explained how the internship scheme has been implemented at Invesco and what they have learned from implementing the programme. Shanice St John, a current technology developer intern at Invesco, outlined her experience of the programme and the adjustments which have enabled her to thrive in the workplace. Shanice also took part in an Autism Forward funded Steps into Work programme last summer and described how it gave her the confidence to apply for the role. David Perkins, Director of AS Mentoring, explained how AS Mentoring supported the internship programme to maximize success.

We continue to provide our employer network with information and resources and advice to help them improve opportunities and inclusion for autistic people both through our website and directly by email.

(d) Workshops for Autistic Adults

One of the developments from the Covid-19 crisis has been the increase in interest in online workshops, which are an excellent way to provide cost effective and peer to peer support for autistic adults. Our mentor partner, AS Mentoring, has put together three separate programmes which we have committed to fund in line with agreed costing proposals. The programmes are as follows:

(i) On-going programme of workshops available to all autistic adults

AS Mentoring run online workshops for autistic adults on a variety of topics including Coronavirus Anxiety & Well-being, Understanding My Autism Diagnosis, Mental Health & Well-being and Thinking of Going to University. Autism Forward has agreed to subsidise workshop places for autistic job seekers who are in financial need. The feedback from the workshops has been consistently excellent.

Examples of participant comments about the benefits of the "Understanding your autism diagnosis" workshop:

"It was brilliant to connect with other people and to hear about the condition and related issues from experts, rather than just researching it alone. I felt like I belonged, for the first time since my diagnosis."

"I hadn't connected shutdowns to anxiety as I associated it with overload/fatigue, so this gave me a new perspective."

"I also benefited from the discussions around looking disinterested/unenthusiastic as I frequently get told to by colleagues to cheer up, or that I look miserable."

"I appreciated the enthusiasm of the presenters and the efforts they made to allow everyone to take part."

Examples of participant comments about the benefits of the "Mental Health and wellbeing" workshop:

"It was helpful to get input from other sufferers as we could share resources and ideas. It was also useful to have the feedback from the leaders."

"The sharing element was good, to get ideas you hadn't thought of off others and to know others are the same as you."

"Learning new techniques to control Anxiety & Depression i.e energy accounting and the colour coded slide on mood which included activities which can be undertaken to relax at each stage on the scale. Learning about the lived experience of others on the Spectrum."

"Opportunity for discussion, knowledgeable tutor and CBT strategies were relevant to the autistic experience."

"An opportunity to hear other autistic people's experience of mental health and services experiences, and how a better informed understanding might be translated into practice and service provision."

(ii) Peer Mentoring Pilot

AS Mentoring launched a pilot Peer Mentoring Programme in February 2020, aimed at Autism Forward grant holders and other autistic people who have recently secured employment or are about to start work. This group is funded by Autism Forward and has continued to expand and hold regular meetings. It currently has around 14 regular participants.

The aim of the programme is to enable the participants to share their experiences and to benefit from peer to peer support as well as expert advice from the workshop facilitators. The participants meet together on a monthly basis for an online workshop to discuss a topic based around a work-related issue. The workshop is facilitated by autism specialist mentors from AS Mentoring and the participants are asked to select a topic for each session.

In light of the success of the Peer Mentoring Programme, AS Mentoring are planning to increase the number of Peer Support Groups and also run a series of quarterly workshops available to all members of the groups.

(iii) Steps into Work Programme

AS Mentoring launched a pilot "Transition to Work Programme" in June 2021 aimed at improving employment outcomes for autistic graduates who had recently graduated and had little previous work experience. Autistic graduates have the highest rate of unemployment amongst all graduates with a disability, as reported in the recent Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services report published earlier this year, which demonstrates the need for targeted support.

Autism Forward funded 12 places on the four month programme which comprised one to one support sessions, six workshops and "homework" tasks with the following objectives:

- Consider employment or further study options and achievable next steps
- Identify potential barriers that their autism presents
- Equip them with job search skills and preparation for interviews
- Give guidance and practical tools to disclose their diagnosis in the workplace, request reasonable adjustments and communicate effectively with managers and colleagues.
- Provide signposting of further sources of support

The benefit of the programme is that it combined tailored one to one support with workshops and peer support for the participants at a key transition stage in their lives, in a very cost effective way.

The feedback from the participants was excellent, with 100% of participants who responded to the feedback survey reporting improved self-confidence, 100% reported that they felt better prepared to get paid employment, 83% had made job applications and 66% had attended interviews.

One of the participants secured a 6 month paid internship with Invesco and spoke about her experience of the programme and the internship at our recent employer roundtable event.

Autism Forward also subsidised 3 places on AS Mentoring's "Looking for Work" programme which was open to autistic job seekers with any level of education and ran between November 2021 and March 2022.

The Feedback from the "Looking for work" programme was also very positive. When asked what elements of the programme helped the most the participants highlighted the following:

- Clear and concise tutorials
- The one-to-one sessions
- Sharing our experiences
- A group to speak with
- Introspection and clarity

When asked what the strengths of the programme were, the participants responded:

- Advice that is tailored to autistic individuals
- Clear and concise guidelines on how best to approach a job searching plan as a neurodivergent
- An understanding of the basic elements of applying for a job
- The one-to-one mentors

- Welcoming and understanding
- The session to homework balance

(e) Fundraising

We are extremely grateful to our supporters and regular donors who have enabled us to continue to provide vital support to autistic job seekers throughout this challenging time and ensure that we have certainty of funds for the coming financial year so that we can continue to increase the number of autistic job seekers we are able to support across the country.

We were delighted to be the Charity of the Year for Sunningdale Golf Club Ladies Team who raised over £4,000 to support our work.

Autism Forward is registered with the donation platforms Just Giving, Charities Aid Foundation and Work for Good and is also a listed charity with Amazon Smile.

7. FINANCIAL REVIEW

At the end of the financial year ending 31 March 2022, the charity had reserves of £186,573 available. The charity awarded 41 grants for mentoring support and approved funding for various workshop programmes run by AS Mentoring for the benefit of autistic job seekers.

During the financial year ending 31 March 2022, the charity received donations totaling £106,542 and £15,452 in gift aid receipts. None of the donations received by the charity had any conditions attached.

The charity's grant making function is entirely reliant on funds that are raised through donations and sponsored events, employer match funding of donations and trust or foundations grants. The trustees are extremely grateful to all the individual donors, fundraisers and corporate supporters who have enabled the charity to provide so many autistic people with the support they need to access employment and fulfil their potential.

The charity only makes grants available if it has sufficient funds available to be able to fund the entire grant which ensures its financial stability. When the charity awards a grant, it designates funds in relation to the full amount of the grant awarded at the time the grant is approved, even though the grant will generally be paid out at regular intervals over the course of the grant period rather than in one upfront payment. If the grant is curtailed for any reason, for example if the beneficiary finds paid employment or no longer wishes to continue with the mentoring, any funds designated for that grant but not used will be reallocated to the charity's general funds and be available to fund other grants.

The charity keeps designated funds to cover the full amount of any grant awarded which ensures that its obligations to grant holders can always be met in full. All of the charity's grant administration, record keeping, data analysis, fundraising, event organisation and awareness raising with employers and universities is carried out by the charity trustees on a pro bono basis.

As the charity relies largely on individual donations which can be unpredictable, based on current levels of expenditure and in order to ensure that the charity is able to renew and continue making grants through periods where donations are lower, the trustees have agreed that appropriate level of reserves should be kept at the level of at least £20,000, to be reviewed at the end of each financial year or more frequently if requested by the Treasurer. The charity currently has a higher than usual level of reserves that will enable it to continue to award new grants and grant extensions without having to seek new sources of funding for the upcoming financial year, but trustees will continue to review the financial situation on a monthly basis to ensure that the charity can continue to operate effectively.

8. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The charity is currently funding specialist one-to-one support for over 70 autistic job seekers to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and to improve their social inclusion, support which they would not otherwise have been able to access. We are seeing an uptick in new grant applications from autistic job seekers and we will continue to extend grants for existing beneficiaries who are engaging well with support and making progress towards employment. We are continuing to see successful outcomes for our job seekers across a wide range of sectors and are increasingly being contacted by employers who are keen to encourage applications from autistic candidates.

We are delighted with the success of the pilot programme for recent graduates run by AS Mentoring last summer, which was followed up by a similar programme open to autistic job seekers of all education levels. The Peer Support groups have also continued to thrive and we are encouraging our other mentor partners around the country to consider similar initiatives in their area.

The charity is continuing to grow its network of employers who are keen to improve inclusion and support for autistic employees, including making changes to their recruitment procedures and workplaces, developing neurodiversity networks or putting in place specific recruitment programmes or internships for autistic candidates. Now that the Covid-19 restrictions have been removed, the charity has been able to resume its series of recruitment roundtables which provide a forum for employers, autistic employees and professionals to discuss ways to improve recruitment processes and drive changes to make the workplace more accessible and inclusive for all. The Law Society is holding its first Neurodiversity Event this year which is a great step forward, with all law firms being invited to participate. We look forward to being involved with that event.

We are also continuing to expand our connections with universities around the country and will continue to work with other charities and to promote the work of neurodivergent led groups such as Neurodiversity in Law and GAIN to improve inclusion and employment outcomes for autistic people. We are also exploring ways in which we can work with new charities such as Neurodiversity in Business to improve employment opportunities and inclusion in the workplace for autistic people. We have recently taken on a new mentor partner, WayMakers Devon CIC, which extends our geographical reach to a new area and we are actively seeking new mentor partners in other areas of the country where support is not currently readily available.

As far as we are aware, Autism Forward is the only charity operating nationally which funds specialist one to one support to help autistic people find employment in their chosen field and fulfill their potential in life. We are proud to be able to support both autistic job seekers and employers to drive change, reduce the autism employment gap and improve inclusion and opportunities for autistic people in the workplace and beyond. The outcomes and feedback from the autistic job seekers we support demonstrate the value of the specialist support we fund and we are pleased to see more employers recognising the value of a neurodiverse workforce and the skills and different perspective that autistic employees bring, as well as an increase in neurodivergent led support groups both within and outside the workplace.

9. INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

A resolution to reappoint Mr NP Smith FCCA as independent examiner for the ensuing year will be proposed at the annual general meeting.

10. DECLARATION

The annual report was approved by the trustees of the charity on 14/9/22 and signed on its behalf by:

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

.....
Ms H Needham
Trustee

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

The trustees are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with the United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) and applicable law and regulations.

The law applicable to charities requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charity for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the applicable Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations, and the provisions of the constitution. The trustees are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Approved by the trustees of the charity on 14/09/22 and signed on its behalf by:

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

.....
Ms H Needham
Trustee

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

AUTISM FORWARD

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF AUTISM FORWARD

I report to the trustees on my examination of the financial statements of Autism Forward ('the charity') for the year ended 31 March 2021 which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities, the Balance Sheet and related notes, which are set out on pages 19 to 26.

This report is made solely to the charity's trustees, as a body, in accordance with section 145 of the Charities Act 2011. My work has been undertaken so that I might state to the charity's trustees those matters I am required to state to them in this report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, I do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charity and the charity's trustees as a body, for my work, for this report, or for the opinions I have formed

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

As the trustees of Autism Forward you are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the financial statements of Autism Forward carried out under section 145 of the Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

An independent examination does not involve gathering all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently does not cover all the matters that an auditor considers in giving their opinion on the financial statements. The planning and conduct of an audit goes beyond the limited assurance that an independent examination can provide. Consequently I express no opinion as to whether the financial statements present a 'true and fair' view and my report is limited to those specific matters set out in the independent examiner's statement.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of Autism Forward as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records; or
3. the accounts do not comply with the accounting requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair view' which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

AUTISM FORWARD

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF AUTISM FORWARD

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

.....

Mr N P Smith
FCCA

21 Navigation Business Village
Navigation Way
Ashton-on-Ribble
Preston
PR2 2YP

Date: 14/9/22

AUTISM FORWARD

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2022

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Total 2022 £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies	2	121,994	121,994
Investment income	3	108	108
Total income		122,102	122,102
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds		(1,261)	(1,261)
Charitable activities		(37,369)	(37,369)
Support costs	6	(1,543)	(1,543)
Total expenditure		(40,173)	(40,173)
Net income		81,929	81,929
Net movement in funds		81,929	81,929
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward		104,644	104,644
Total funds carried forward	12	186,573	186,573

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Total 2021 £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies		52,183	52,183
Investment income	3	172	172
Total income		52,355	52,355
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds		(260)	(260)
Charitable activities		(65,318)	(65,318)
Support costs	6	(1,592)	(1,592)
Total expenditure		(67,170)	(67,170)
Net expenditure		(14,815)	(14,815)
Net movement in funds		(14,815)	(14,815)
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward		119,459	119,459
Total funds carried forward	12	104,644	104,644

The notes on pages 21 to 26 form an integral part of these financial statements.

AUTISM FORWARD

(REGISTRATION NUMBER: 1171704)
BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 MARCH 2022

	Note	2022 £	2021 £
Current assets			
Debtors	9	5,300	4,934
Cash at bank and in hand	10	235,920	163,257
		241,220	168,191
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	11	(54,647)	(63,547)
Net assets		186,573	104,644
Funds of the charity:			
Unrestricted income funds			
Unrestricted funds		186,573	104,644
Total funds	12	186,573	104,644

The financial statements on pages 19 to 26 were approved by the trustees, and authorised for issue on 14.09.22 and signed on their behalf by:

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

.....
Ms H Needham
Trustee

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

1 ACCOUNTING POLICIES

Statement of compliance
The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Charities Act 2011.

Basis of preparation
Autism Forward meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102. Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant accounting policy notes.

The financial statements have been prepared to give a 'true and fair' view and have departed from the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 only to the extent required to provide a 'true and fair' view. This departure has involved following Accounting and Reporting by Charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) issued on 16 July 2014 rather than the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of a Recommended Practice effective from 1 April 2005 which has since been withdrawn.

Going concern
The trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

Income and endowments
Voluntary income including donations, gifts, legacies and grants that provide core funding or are of a general nature is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the income, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured with sufficient reliability.

Donations and legacies

Donations and legacies are recognised on a receivable basis when receipt is probable and the amount can be reliably measured.

Grants receivable

Grants are recognised when the charity has an entitlement to the funds and any conditions linked to the grants have been met. Where performance conditions are attached to the grant and are yet to be met, the income is recognised as a liability and included on the balance sheet as deferred income to be released.

Gift aid

Gift Aid receivable is included in income when there is a valid declaration from the donor. Any Gift Aid amount recovered on a donation is considered to be part of that gift and is treated as an addition to the same fund as the initial donation unless the donor or the terms of the appeal have specified otherwise.

Investment income

Income from interest, royalties and dividends are included in the accounts when receipt is probable and the amount received can be measured reliably.

Expenditure and liablities

Grant expenditure

Grants are recognised in the financial statements as liabilities after they have been approved by the trustees, the recipients have been notified and there are no further terms and conditions to be fulfilled within the control of the charity. In these circumstances there is a valid expectation by the recipients that they will receive the grant.

Liability recognition

Liabilities are recognised where it is more likely than not that there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to pay out resources and the amount of the obligation can be measured with reasonable certainty.

Support costs

Support costs have been allocated between governance costs and other support. Governance costs comprise all costs involving public accountability of the charity and its compliance with regulation and good practice.

Creditors

The charity has creditors which are measured at settlement amounts less any trade discounts.

Provisions for liablities

A liability is measured on recognition at its historical cost and then subsequently measured at the best estimate of the amount required to settle the obligation at the reporting date.

Financial instruments

The charity accounts for basic financial instruments on initial recognition as per paragraph 10.7 FRS 102 SORP. Subsequent measurement is as per paragraphs 11.17 to 11.19, FRS 102 SORP.

Fund structure

Unrestricted income funds are general funds that are available for use at the trustees's discretion in furtherance of the objectives of the charity.

Debtors

Debtors are measured on initial recognition at settlement amount after any trade discounts or amount advanced by the charity. Subsequently, they are measured at the cash or other consideration expected to be received.

Gift Aid receivable is recorded as accrued income at the reporting date.

2 INCOME FROM DONATIONS AND LEGACIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Donations and legacies;		
Appeals and donations	106,542	106,542
Gift Aid reclaimed	15,452	15,452
Total for 2022	121,994	121,994
Total for 2021	52,183	52,183

3 INVESTMENT INCOME

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Interest receivable and similar income;		
Interest receivable on bank deposits	108	108
Total for 2022	108	108
Total for 2021	172	172

4 EXPENDITURE ON RAISING FUNDS

A) COSTS OF GENERATING DONATIONS AND LEGACIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Donations	1,261	1,261
Total for 2022	1,261	1,261
Total for 2021	260	260

5 EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Grant funding of activities	37,369	37,369
Total for 2021	65,318	65,318

6 SUPPORT COSTS

	Note	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Independent examiner fees			
Examination of the financial statements	7	1,200	1,200
Marketing and publicity		99	99
Administrative expenses		244	244
Total for 2022		1,543	1,543
Total for 2021		1,592	1,592

7 INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REMUNERATION

	2022 £	2021 £
Examination of the financial statements	1,200	1,140

8 TAXATION

The charity is a registered charity and is therefore exempt from taxation.

9 DEBTORS

	2022	2021
	£	£
Accrued income	5,300	4,934

10 CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS

	2022	2021
	£	£
Cash at bank	235,920	163,257

11 CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR

	2022	2021
	£	£
Other creditors	53,447	62,407
Accruals	1,200	1,140
	54,647	63,547

12 FUNDS

	Balance at 1 April 2021	Incoming resources	Resources expended	Balance at 31 March 2022
	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted funds				
General	104,644	122,102	(40,173)	186,573

	Balance at 1 April 2020	Incoming resources	Resources expended	Balance at 31 March 2021
	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted funds				
General	119,459	52,355	(67,170)	104,644

13 ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds at 31 March 2022 £
Current assets	241,220	241,220
Current liabilities	(54,647)	(54,647)
Total net assets	186,573	186,573

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds at 31 March 2021 £
Current assets	168,191	168,191
Current liabilities	(63,547)	(63,547)
Total net assets	104,644	104,644

AUTISM FORWARD

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES BY FUND FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2022

	Total Unrestricted Funds 2022 £	Total Unrestricted Funds 2021 £
Income and Endowments from:		
Donations and legacies	121,994	52,183
Investment income	108	172
Total income	122,102	52,355
Expenditure on:		
Raising funds	(1,261)	(260)
Charitable activities	(37,369)	(65,318)
Other expenditure	(1,543)	(1,592)
Total expenditure	(40,173)	(67,170)
Net income/(expenditure)	81,929	(14,815)
Net movement in funds	81,929	(14,815)
Reconciliation of funds		
Total funds brought forward	104,644	119,459
Total funds carried forward	186,573	104,644

AUTISM FORWARD CIO

England & Wales - Charity number 1171704

Accounts

Charity registration number: 1171704

AUTISM FORWARD

ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

AUTISM FORWARD

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AUTISM FORWARD

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Trustees	Ms J Pierce Ms H Needham Dr E Gokcen Ms A Leverett
Principal Office	37 Granville Park London SE13 7DY
Charity Registration Number	1171704
Website	www.autismforward.org.uk
Bankers	Metro Bank PLC One Southampton Row London WC1B 5HA
Independent Examiner	Rotherham Taylor Limited 21 Navigation Business Village Navigation Way Ashton-on-Ribble Preston PR2 2YP

TRUSTEES' REPORT

The trustees have pleasure in presenting their report and the unaudited financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2021.

The financial statements have been prepared on an accruals basis in accordance with the accounting policies set out in the notes to the financial statements and comply with thecharity's constitution, Charities Act 2011 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities:Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their financial statements in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland published on 16 July 2014. The financial statements have been examined by an Independent Examiner.

1. STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The charity is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered number 117104 and is constituted under a Foundation Constitution which came into force on 20 February 2017. Ann Leverett, Jane Pierce and Elif Gokcen were the three co-founders of the charity and were all reappointed for a further period of 3 years commencing on 23 January 2020.

Helen Needham was appointed as a trustee on 20 October 2020. Helen is a management consultant with Capco, where she has set up a successful Neurodiversity Network which holds regular events and seeks to improve inclusivity, awareness and support for neurodivergent people. Helen is a renowned and respected neurodiversity advocate and has been a supporter of the charity for over two years, speaking at the charity's awareness raising events and roundtable discussions. Helen is also the founder of Me.Decoded, which is a website where neurodivergent people and their allies can share their stories.

New trustees are appointed by the existing trustees and in selecting individuals for appointment as charity trustees, the trustees must have regard to the skills, knowledge and experience needed for the effective administration of the charity. The Constitution provides for a minimum of 3 trustees and there is no maximum. Trustees are eligible for reappointment at the end of their term.

As the charity is primarily a grant-making charity, it does not have any paid employees and all fundraising and administrative work is undertaken by the trustees. The trustees attend external training courses as necessary and appropriate for their responsibilities and roles within the charity. Training courses attended by trustees this year included:

- Strategy and business planning for charity leaders
- Stewardship of donors
- Practical charity governance
- Impact Aloud 2020
- FSI Virtual Fundraising Conference
- NCVO Trustee Training course
- Digital Marketing

All trustees are required to read the Charity Commission's guidance "The Essential Trustee: What you need to know" and the new Charity Commission Governance Code.

The trustees meet at least once every quarter to discuss fundraising, finances, governance issues, events, new mentor partnerships or initiatives with other autism charities or potential corporate sponsors and to confirm approval of grants. The day to day administration of grants and the processing of applications is handled by the Chair and Secretary. A Grant Approval Sub-Committee was established by unanimous agreement of the trustees on 20 October 2020 and currently comprises three trustees (Ann Leverett, Jane Pierce and Elif Gokcen) which approves all grant applications and grant extensions in accordance with its terms of reference. Details of all grants and grant extensions approved by the Grant Approval Sub-Committee are made available to all trustees and are presented at each board meeting.

All trustees give their time freely and no trustee remuneration was paid in the year and no expenses were claimed by them. Trustees are required to disclose all relevant interests and register them with the charity secretary in accordance with the charity's Conflict of Interest Policy and withdraw from any decisions where a conflict of interest arises. No disclosures have been made by the Trustees since the charity was constituted.

2. RISK MANAGEMENT

The trustees have considered the major risks to which the charity is exposed and have reviewed those risks and established systems and procedures to manage those risks which are set out in the charity's Risk Management Strategy. This contains procedures to ensure the Charity is complying with the Charity Commission guidance in relation to due diligence procedures in relation to beneficiaries, donors and partners.

The charity is primarily a grant making charity and it raises funds to provide grants for specialist employment related mentoring and workshops for autistic adults who are actively seeking paid or voluntary employment. The mentoring and workshops are provided by independent specialist mentors who have proven experience of providing employment related mentoring to autistic adults. The mentor partners are entirely independent of the charity and the charity carries out due diligence in relation to each proposed mentor partner in accordance with the Charity Commission "Know Your Partner" guidelines to verify their experience, good standing and suitability. The charity also enters into a Referral Agreement with each proposed mentor partner which sets out the process for referring grant applications to the charity and the rights and obligations of the mentor partner and the charity in relation to the mentoring services which are funded by grants provided by the charity.

The charity has put in place processes to obtain regular feedback from grant holders and mentors in relation to the mentoring provided and their progress to monitor the use of the charity's funds and outcomes and demonstrate the public benefit derived from the funding of the specialist mentoring and workshops. The charity also reviews each mentor partner annually to check they continue to meet the good standing and other relevant requirements of the "Know Your Partner" guidelines.

The charity has now been working successfully with eleven independent specialist mentors for three years and in October 2020 entered into a referral agreement with a new mentor partner, Think Musique, in Manchester, having carried out due diligence in line with the Charity Commission "Know Your Partner" guidelines to verify their experience, good standing and suitability.

The charity's surplus funds are divided between the charity's business saving account at Metro Bank plc and the charity's business saving account with the Nationwide Building Society account in order to benefit from the FSCS compensation scheme with both financial institutions, minimising the charity's financial exposure. All payments made by the charity from its bank and building society accounts require authorisation by two trustees.

3. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT

The objects of the charity are the promotion of social inclusion for the public benefit amongst people aged eighteen or over who are excluded from society, or parts of society, due to an autism spectrum condition, to relieve the needs of such people and assist them to integrate into society and achieve their potential as individuals after they leave education, in particular but not exclusively through funding the provision of:

(a) pre-employment support, including social skills and other relevant training

which enhances employability;

(b) coaching, mentoring, advice and support in relation to employability;

(c) providing specialist skills and awareness training and workshops relating to

employability;

(d) facilitating access to a range of social and leisure activities; and

(e) action to increase public and employer awareness of such disabilities and

conditions and promote steps that can be taken to facilitate such social inclusion through employment.

The trustees confirm that they have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the charity's aims and objectives and planning future activities and setting the grant making policy for the charity.

The charity carries out these objects by:

- providing grants to autistic adults to allow them to access specialist mentoring and/or workshops to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and to improve their social inclusion by accessing clubs, groups, workshops and work placements;
- providing information and resources for autistic people and employers on its website, including details of specialist mentors offering one-to-one support and/or workshops to autistic people to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and links to other websites and resources;
- raising awareness among employers of the needs and strengths of autistic employees and providing advice and signposting services with the aim of increasing access to employment for autistic people and creating more inclusive workplaces; and;
- liaising with universities and colleges to raise awareness of the charity's services for autistic students upon graduation and other initiatives which can improve employment outcomes for autistic students.

The employment support we fund is of vital importance both to autistic people and wider society. The recent Office of National Statistics figures released in February 2021 showed that between July and September 2020, employment rates for disabled people aged 16-64 in the UK were 52.1%, compared with 81.3% for non-disabled people and that among disabled people, autistic people had some of the lowest levels of employment, at 21.7% (full or part-time). This is an enormous waste of talent. One of the reasons why the unemployment rate is so high for autistic people is the lack of support available once they leave education. This is the gap in support we seek to bridge.

The specialist mentoring funded by the charity enables autistic people to prepare for, find and maintain suitable employment which improves their independence and social inclusion. On average, over the last three years, including this pandemic year, 79% of the autistic job seekers we have supported have secured paid or voluntary employment (54% paid and 25% voluntary). The impressive outcomes for our beneficiaries, as set out in further detail in section 8 of this report, demonstrate the effectiveness of the specialist mentoring support we fund.

The Covid-19 crisis has adversely affected many of our grant holders who are increasingly anxious about their future and their ability to find work. Changes to routine, concerns about the future and the general anxiety of the situation can be particularly overwhelming for the autistic job seekers we support, so it is more important than ever that we continue to provide support for our beneficiaries at this time.

We have ensured that all our mentors are able to continue to provide regular support to our beneficiaries remotely by phone, skype, email or other appropriate means. Some of our beneficiaries have chosen to pause their support during the current crisis, but most opted to continue with remote support and it is clear from the feedback we have received from our grant holders that this support is incredibly valuable at this challenging time and has helped them access training, workshops, benefits and other support as well as employment. Many of our mentors are now resuming face to face support for those who prefer this to remote support.

We strive to ensure that the support we fund is support that the autistic community desires and values and we recognise the importance of including autistic people at all levels of our organisation. We are delighted that Helen Needham, who is autistic herself, has joined our Board of Trustees and an increasing number of the specialist employment mentors we work with are also autistic. We seek regular feedback from the autistic job seekers we support to ensure that the support we fund is of value to them. We also use our social media and newsletters to promote the work and events of autistic and neurodivergent led organisations such as Neurodiversity in Law, GAIN, AutAngel and Me.Decoded and Merseyside Autistic Adults Group.

We liaise with employers, universities and colleges to raise awareness of the strengths and needs of autistic people, promoting employment opportunities for autistic people across the UK. We have created a network of employers and have been holding recruitment roundtables for employers since May 2019, which have been attended by representatives from over 50 different organisations (including employers, universities and researchers). These provide a forum for HR and Diversity & Inclusion teams to meet with autistic employees and professionals to discuss how employers can improve recruitment processes and implement initiatives to improve opportunities and inclusion for autistic people.

Our mentor partners also work with employers including Goldman Sachs, Credit Suisse First Boston, Herbert Smith Freehills and Invesco to create internship opportunities for autistic candidates, which have benefited a number of our grant holders.

4. PRO BONO CONTRIBUTIONS

The charity has no paid employees and the expenses of the charity are covered by donations by the trustees. All of the grant administration, record keeping, data analysis, fundraising, event organisation, employer roundtable events, universities and communication is carried out by the trustees on a pro bono basis, drawing on their professional experience, networks and resources. All of the charity's awareness raising events and roundtables to date have been hosted by corporate supporters at no cost to the charity or attendees. This maximises the use of the charity's funds for its beneficiaries and ensures its awareness raising events reach a wide audience.

5. GRANT MAKING POLICY

The charity has established its grant making policy with the aim of promoting the social inclusion of autistic people and assist them to integrate into society and achieve their potential as individuals after they leave education by providing grants for funding specialist one-to-one mentoring to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment or for training activities which are relevant to improving employability.

The charity currently works with twelve specialist mentoring organisations across the country and has carried out due diligence checks and entered into Referral Agreements with the organisations listed below which between them cover London, Surrey, Essex, Suffolk, Brighton, Birmingham, Manchester, Bedfordshire, East Midlands, Northampton, Plymouth, Hull, Liverpool, Chester, Bristol and Poole. Since the onset of the Covid-19 crisis, all our mentors have been offering remote mentoring services, which extends their geographical reach and enables one-to-one mentoring support to continue while the Covid-19 restrictions are in force.

Autism Bedfordshire

Autism East Midlands

Autism Society Greater Manchester Area

AS Mentoring Limited

ASC Key Mentoring (Karen Manghan)

Autism Success Formula Limited

Deborah Hannah

Faraday Fearnside

Matthew's Hub

Ros Evans Coaching

Think Musique

Track NN Limited

The charity accepts applications from grants via its mentor partners and directs enquiries from its website to the mentor partners listed on its website. All grant applications must be made via an approved mentor partner and all grant payments are made directly to the mentor partner. The charity awards initial grants for up to one year of weekly or fortnightly one-to-one mentoring support and will consider requests for grant extensions where the grant holder is making good progress towards employment and is engaging well with the mentoring support.

The applicants must be aged 18 or over and must have a diagnosis of an autism spectrum condition or evidence that they are actively seeking such a diagnosis. They must also provide evidence that they live and are entitled to work in the United Kingdom and priority is given to applicants in financial need.

The charity requires regular feedback from the mentors on the progress of the beneficiaries and feedback from the beneficiaries on the mentoring they receive in order to monitor the use of the charity's funds and outcomes.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

(a) Grants for Mentoring Support

In the financial year ending 31 March 2021, the charity awarded grants for specialist mentoring support to 36 autistic people around the country with the aim of improving their social inclusion and helping them to secure paid or voluntary employment. The charity also continued to fund mentoring support for 85 of the grant holders from the previous financial years, so provided support for a total of 121 autistic job seekers during the financial year ended 31 March 2021, 73 of whom were still receiving support at the end of the financial year. Although we received fewer new applications for support this year due to the effect of the pandemic, we continued to support a similar number of autistic job seekers this year compared to previous years due to grant extensions awarded to existing grant holders.

The average age of our grant holders is 30 years old, with 72% identifying as male, 27% female and 2% non-binary. The qualifications held by the grant beneficiaries ranged from no formal qualifications to Masters and PhD level degrees and professional qualifications. The sectors in which the applicants have secured or are seeking employment incredibly varied, currently spanning 80 different career choices, including self-employment. The wide variety of careers pursued by our grant holders dispels common preconceptions of the types of role that are suitable for autistic people and demonstrates that autistic people can pursue any career choice which matches their interest and skills with the right guidance and support.

In addition to supporting our beneficiaries into employment, the mentors help with anxiety, communication, sensory and also practical issues they may be facing, which improves their autonomy, well-being and social inclusion. For example, our mentors have helped beneficiaries with anxiety, travelling on public transport, relationship issues and organisational skills. On a practical level, our mentors have helped beneficiaries deal with benefits claims, tenancy problems, debt problems and referrals to appropriate health and mental health services.

The mentors have also facilitated participation in new clubs, groups and social activities as well as workshops and training to improve their employability, social inclusion and well-being. We have continued to fund remote interview training from the specialist service Avatar Jo which has proved very helpful for some of our grant holders. Our beneficiaries have also been given free access to the cyber security training programme on the Immersive Labs Neurodivergent Digital Cyber Academy, which enables users to access a jobs site once they have completed the training.

We are also increasing our funding for workshops and programmes, as set out in more detail in section (d) below. This enables us to provide cost-effective support to a wider range of people across the country.

(b) Outcomes from Mentoring Support

Even in this most challenging of years, with so many employment opportunities on hold due to the pandemic, the results achieved by our beneficiaries have been impressive, demonstrating the effectiveness of the specialist mentoring support that we fund.

The outcomes for grant holders awarded grants during the financial year 2020-21 who have had between 3 and 12 months' support were as follows:

84% made job applications

63% attended job interviews

38% joined new clubs or groups

50% undertook some form of training or placement

28% secured voluntary roles (20% of those have not yet secured paid roles)

46% secured paid employment

The total employment figure for our 2020-21 grant holders is 66% (46% paid; 20% voluntary).

The total employment figure for our 2019-20 grant holders is: 81% (59% paid; 22% voluntary).

The total employment figure for our 2018-19 grant holders is: 90% (56% paid; 34%voluntary).

The above figures for all financial years include clients whose support was ended early due to health or other issues and clients whose grants have been temporarily paused. The figures for the current financial year include only grant holders who have had between 3 and 12 months' support. Some of the grant holders who were awarded grants in previous financial years have had more than 12 months' support. As the Covid-19 restrictions continue to ease, we anticipate that our beneficiaries will continue to move into employment, improving the employment outcomes for our 2020-21 grant holders.

The outcomes achieved by our grant holders are very significantly better than the statistics provided by the Office of National Statistics for July-September 2020, which showed that only 21.7% of autistic people were in any kind of employment, compared to 46% of this year's grant holders securing paid employment and a further 20% securing voluntary employment. The outcomes for our two previous financial years, when the jobs market was less precarious, are even more impressive (59%; 56% paid and 22%; 34% voluntary respectively).

(c) Feedback from our Beneficiaries

We have introduced a new format for the regular feedback from our grant holders, which enables us to assess the value of the support we fund in more detail. The results of the feedback from grant holders who have had at least 6 months' mentoring support during the financial year ended 31 March 2021 are set out below. This includes grant holders who were awarded grants in previous financial years and who continued to receive support this year. The responses demonstrate the wider impact and value of the specialist mentoring support we fund, beyond employment outcomes.

96% said the support improved their understanding of their strengths and challenges.

92% said the support improved their understanding of what job is suitable for them.

90% said the support improved their understanding of how to find a job.

78% said the support helped them draft or update their CV.

80% said the support made them more confident about disclosing their diagnosis and requesting "reasonable adjustments" from a potential employer.

69% said the support helped them prepare for interviews.

52% said the support helped them join groups, make friends or participate in other activities.

88% said the support improved their self-confidence.

58% said the support helped them access benefits, health care or other public services.

73% said the support helped them access training, workshops or further education.

52% said the support helped them find voluntary employment.

48% said the support helped them find paid employment.

The feedback and qualitative responses below from some of the autistic job seekers we have supported this year provide further evidence of the value of the specialist support we fund. This support enables people not only to find paid or voluntary employment, but also to improve their independence, social inclusion, confidence and self-esteem, to understand better how their autism affects them and to develop strategies to address issues which may be holding them back. This is beneficial not only to the individuals and their families, but also benefits the public purse as it reduces the need for reliance on benefits and public services such as mental health provision and leads to a more inclusive and cohesive society and diverse workforce.

The feedback also highlights the gap in support for autistic people when they leave education, or obtain a late diagnosis, that is so often needed to enable them to fulfil their potential in the workplace and beyond.

Feedback from Autism Forward beneficiary mentored by Karen Manghan (Brighton)

Karen is an excellent mentor who has supported me better than I could have hoped for over this last year. She has supported me in a range of areas from getting PIP and going through that entire process as well as with support moving jobs and helping me cope with a deteriorating living situation. I feel better able to cope with stressful events although not fully confident in this area but that has more to do with me than the excellent and outstanding support I have received from Karen.

The support offered by Karen has made a huge difference in my life and general wellbeing. My only issue is that there isn't more funding available for more autistic adults in the local area to access services like the one provided by Autism Forward. The support provided by Karen has and will continue to help autistic adults navigate a world not built for them and to live fully independently. I would not be in employment or a comfortable living situation or decent financial position if it were not for the support provided by Karen. Only negative feedback would be there isn't enough funding for everyone, I really feel so many others could benefit massively from the support provided by the mentors at Autism Forward, especially Karen.

Feedback from Ky, an Autism Forward beneficiary mentored by Abbey Townend of Matthew's Hub (Hull)

I was extremely happy with all of the support I received. I was able to attend college and on from college I secured a full-time job in the industry I studied. Getting the back up and reassurance really helped boost my self- esteem and confidence. I feel without this support I would not have been able to attend college and achieve my career goals. It is essential that this continue for others in need as it will give others like myself the opportunity to grow and move forward.

Autism Forward beneficiary mentored by Sarah Musique of Think Musique (Manchester)

This mentoring is definitely some of the best that I've had. Most others just don't seem to have understood my interests and my overall goals whereas Sarah does understand this. I'm not sure if it's because Sarah is more open minded or because of being more specialised in working with people with Autism but it makes a difference for me in that I know that there are more people out there that are willing to listen and understand.

Feedback from Autism Forward beneficiary mentored by Faraday Fearnside (Plymouth)

The time that I have had with my mentor has been amazing; she has helped me so much, she has made me see that I am a lot more capable than I thought originally, and she has helped uncover the tools that I need in order to succeed. Mentoring has definitely had a very

positive impact on my life, I am now in a much better place than I was 2 years ago.

Feedback from Autism Forward beneficiary mentored by Faraday Fearnside (Plymouth)

The mentoring with Autism Forward has helped me to recognise my talent and creativity and given me confidence to pursue it. Working with my mentor Faraday has challenged and encouraged me to be true to myself and to work towards where my talent lies. She has helped me to see things differently and see my own talent, rather than just ticking the box and taking a job for the sake of it. I believe it is important to choose a career option that is suited to who you are, and not let our Asperger's or society hold us back.

Feedback from Lydia – Autism Forward Beneficiary mentored by Deb Hannah (Liverpool)

After receiving my own diagnosis I realised there wasn't much in the way of autism groups in my area. I decided to start my own support group, Merseyside Autistic Adults was formed on the 7th November 2018.

I have run the group in a voluntary capacity since then and the demand has grown from the local area and beyond, expanding from the original group held in Wirral and creating another in Liverpool. The Covid19 pandemic meant the group made the move to online meetings in order to continue and have been successful in maintaining and growing participant numbers

I was initially looking for paid work, as well as doing my autism group, when I began receiving mentoring from Autism Forward. When Covid19 hit the number of autistic people needing help increased. I took this as a sign that I needed to focus my energy on making the group official.

It will take time, but I'm hoping that with funding, and the mentoring support from Autism Forward, I can make the group official and eventually create a paid role from it.

Website: https://www.facebook.com/merseysideautisticadults

Feedback from Autism Forward beneficiary mentored by Ros Evans (Surrey)

Mentoring has made a huge difference to me in helping me accept and understand my autism and neurodiversity. It has helped me have the confidence to seek a diagnosis and I am now learning about how autism affects me and what adjustments would be useful for me to ask in employment.

I am feeling more confident in approaching employers and I have recently disclosed my autism to the company I am volunteering for. I also have a better understanding of how to approach interviews, including how to answer different types of questions and how to prepare myself. I plan to work further with my mentor on my communication skills and further on a disclosure statement next year.

(c) Employer Network and Recruitment Roundtables

Autism Forward has created a network of employers, autistic employees and professionals who meet regularly to discuss and implement initiatives to improve opportunities and inclusion for autistic people. By meeting regularly and sharing best practice, we can drive change forward more effectively and ensure that the changes autistic people require to access employment and thrive in the workplace are implemented. Notes from the employer roundtables are available for all to access on our website so that employers not able to attend can benefit from the information shared www.autismforward.org.uk/employers/.

Our network includes a wide range of employers including law firms, accountancy firms, management consultants, banks, investment banks, technology companies, telecoms companies, insurers, asset management firms, universities and other autism charities and is continuing to grow. We were delighted to see initiatives continue to go ahead even during the Covid-19 crisis, in particular Invesco's six month internship programme which was launched in March 2021, with remote inductions replacing traditional on-boarding processes.

A number of our awareness events have been put on hold until Covid-19 restrictions are further eased. However in June 2020 we were able to hold a virtual employer roundtable with Adjust Training relating to the Unwritten Rules of the Workplace which was attended by a range of employers and included presentations from autistic employees about their experiences in the workplace. We continue to provide our employer network with information and resources and advice to help them improve opportunities and inclusion for autistic people both through our website and directly by email.

(d) Workshops for Autistic Adults

One of the developments from the Covid-19 crisis has been the increase in interest in online workshops, which are an excellent way to provide cost effective and peer to peer support for autistic adults. Our mentor partner, AS Mentoring, has put together three separate programmes which we have committed to fund in line with agreed costing proposals. The programmes are as follows:

(i) On-going programme of workshops available to all autistic adults

AS Mentoring run online workshops for autistic adults on a variety of topics including Coronavirus Anxiety & Well-being, Understanding My Autism Diagnosis, Mental Health & Well-being and Thinking of Going to University. Autism Forward has agreed to subsidise workshop places for autistic job seekers who are in financial need. The feedback from the workshops has been consistently excellent and we are in the process of updating the feedback forms to enable us to monitor the outcomes workshops in more detail.

(ii) Peer Mentoring Pilot

AS Mentoring launched a pilot Peer Mentoring Programme in February 2020, aimed at Autism Forward grant holders and other autistic people who have recently secured employment or are about to start work. Autism Forward has agreed to fund the Peer Mentoring Programme in line with an agreed costs proposal. The workshops are available to all autistic adults who meet the relevant criteria for the workshops.

The aim of the programme is to enable the participants to share their experiences and to benefit from peer to peer support as well as expert advice from the workshop facilitators. The participants meet together on a monthly basis for an online workshop to discuss a topic based around a work-related issue. The workshop is facilitated by autism specialist mentors from AS Mentoring and the participants are asked to select a topic for each session. Proposed topics include: Communications at Work; Sensory Issues; Work Relationships and Social Interaction; Reasonable Adjustments; and Disclosing Your Diagnosis.

The initial feedback on the programme has been excellent, with all participants keen to continue. The programme will be fully evaluated at the end of the six month pilot.

(iii) Transition to Work Programme

AS Mentoring will be launching a pilot "Transition to Work Programme" in June 2021 aimed at improving employment outcomes for autistic graduates who have recently graduated and little previous work experience. Autistic graduates have the highest rate of unemployment amongst all graduates with a disability, as reported in the recent Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services report published earlier this year, which demonstrates the need for targeted support.

Autism Forward has agreed to fund 12 places on the four month programme which will comprise one to one support sessions, six workshops and "homework" tasks with the following objectives:

- Consider employment or further study options and achievable next steps
- Identify potential barriers that their autism presents
- Equip them with job search skills and preparation for interviews
- Give guidance and practical tools to disclose their diagnosis in the workplace, request reasonable adjustments and communicate effectively with managers and colleagues.
- Provide signposting of further sources of support

The pilot would be fully evaluated during and at the end of the programme, with a view to being expanded in the future. The benefit of the programme is that it combines tailored one to one support with workshops and peer support for the participants at a key transition stage in their lives, in a very cost effective way.

(e) Research Paper on Effective Support for Autistic Job Seekers

In February 2021, the journal Advances in Autism published a research paper by Carl Cameron and Abbey Townend, both Autism Forward employment mentors with Matthew's Hub in Hull. The purpose of their research was to determine the most appropriate and effective support to enable autistic people to gain and maintain employment in their chosen field. It is encouraging that this important research by two autistic researchers was selected for publication and that the work of our mentors across the country to improve employment outcomes for autistic people has been acknowledged.

The researchers found that the nationally recognised statistic of autistic people in full-time employment as 16% (National Autistic Society, 2016) was ambitious and subject to regional variation. However, based on the results of a programme providing employment and specialist mentoring support funded by Autism Forward, outcomes improve and employment is more likely to be achieved. It was found that 48% of autistic job seekers supported by specialist mentors found paid employment (full-time or part-time), demonstrating a 16% increase in paid employment between those who received mentoring support and those who did not. As set out in section (b) above, our outcomes are now even better than reported at the time of the research paper, further demonstrating the value of the support our mentor partners provide to autistic job seekers.

Carl Cameron also contributed a chapter to The Neurodiversity Reader which was published in August 2020 by Pavilion Publishing and Media Limited. It is a thought-provoking collection written for all stakeholders in relation to autism and neurodivergent conditions. The book brings together work from pioneering figures within and beyond the neurodiversity movement to critically explore its history, the concepts of neurodiversity that have shaped it, lived experiences, and how a better informed understanding might be translated into practice and service provision.

(f) Stanford Neurodiversity Summit

The Stanford University Neurodiversity Virtual Summit was held online in October 2020. The theme this year was "Scaling Up the Neurodiversity at Work Initiative". The virtual summit brought together neurodivergent individuals, employers, service agencies, educators and students, parents, and professionals from all areas of the field, including representatives from Autism Forward. Excellent resources were made available including the Autism @ Work Playbook developed as part of a collaborative research project, Autism-Ready Workplace: Creating and Sustaining Autism Hiring Initiatives which studied the Autism @ Work programs of four leading employers: Microsoft, SAP, JPMorgan Chase and EY.

(g) National Autistic Society - Autism at Work Conference

Autism Forward participated in the National Autistic Society's first ever Autism at Work conference which was held online in March 2021. This gave employers, HR teams, recruiters, D&I professionals and autistic job seekers the opportunity to hear about leading initiatives from UK and international employers and hear first hand accounts from autistic employees and professionals. Speakers at the event included Autism Forward trustee, Helen Needham, and Autism Forward employer roundtable hosts, Daniel Aherne and Ian Iceton. The event gave us the opportunity to promote the charity's work with a virtual stand at the online event.

(h) National Lottery Community Funding

The charity was delighted to be awarded funding of £9,750 from the National Lottery Community Fund in June 2020 in recognition of the work we are doing to improve employment outcomes for autistic people. The funds were used to provide £750 of specialist mentoring support for 13 autistic job seekers, in line with our usual criteria.

(h) Fundraising

We are extremely grateful to our supporters and regular donors who have enabled us to continue to provide vital support to autistic job seekers throughout this difficult period. Fundraisers for the charity took part in virtual events such as the 2.6 Challenge organised by Virgin Money Giving and the Declutter + Donate fundraising.

Autism Forward is registered with the donation platforms Virgin Money Giving, Just Giving and Work for Good and is also a listed charity with Amazon Smile and the Ultra Challenge Events.

7. FINANCIAL REVIEW

At the end of the financial year ending 31 March 2021, the charity had reserves of £104,644 available. The charity awarded 36 grants for mentoring support and approved funding for the following workshop programmes run by AS Mentoring for the benefit of autistic job seekers:

During the financial year ending 31 March 2021, the charity received donations totalling £35,182 and £7,251 in gift aid receipts. None of the donations received by the charity had any conditions attached. The charity also received funding of £9,750 from the National Lottery Community Fund in June 2020 which was used to fund the first £750 of grants for mentoring support for 13 autistic job seekers, awarded in line with our usual criteria.

The charity's grant making function is entirely reliant on funds that are raised through donations and sponsored events, employer match funding of donations and trust or foundations grants. The trustees are extremely grateful to all the individual donors, fundraisers and corporate supporters who have enabled the charity to provide so many autistic people with the support they need to access employment and fulfil their potential.

The charity only makes grants available if it has sufficient funds available to be able to fund the entire grant which ensures its financial stability. When the charity awards a grant, it designates funds in relation to the full amount of the grant awarded at the time the grant is approved, even though the grant will generally be paid out at regular intervals over the course of the grant period rather than in one upfront payment. If the grant is curtailed for any reason, for example if the beneficiary finds paid employment or no longer wishes to continue with the mentoring, any funds designated for that grant but not used will be reallocated to the charity's general funds and be available to fund other grants.

The charity keeps designated funds to cover the full amount of any grant awarded which ensures that its obligations to grant holders can always be met in full. All of the charity's grant administration, record keeping, data analysis, fundraising, event organisation and awareness raising with employers and universities is carried out by the charity trustees on a pro bono basis.

As the charity relies largely on individual donations which can be unpredictable, based on current levels of expenditure and in order to ensure that the charity is able to renew and continue making grants through periods where donations are lower, the trustees have agreed that appropriate level of reserves should be kept at the level of at least £20,000, to be reviewed at the end of each financial year or more frequently if requested by the Treasurer. The charity currently has a higher than usual level of reserves that will enable it to continue to award new grants and grant extensions during the Covid-19 crisis, but trustees will continue to review the financial situation on a monthly basis to ensure that the charity can continue to operate effectively through this period.

The trustees anticipate being able to generate donations in the next financial year through a combination of its current supporters and sponsored events to attract new donors and corporate supporters, although this may be impacted by the Covid-19 crisis. The charity has recently registered with Just Giving to facilitate fundraising through organisations such as Ultra Challenges and has three places for fundraisers in the London Virtual Marathon.

8. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The charity is currently funding specialist one-to-one support for 73 autistic job seekers to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and to improve their social inclusion, support which they would not otherwise have been able to access. As lockdown is easing and face to face support is resuming, we are anticipating an increase in new grant applications from autistic job seekers and we will continue to extend grants for existing beneficiaries who are engaging well with support and making progress towards employment. Even amid the current crisis, we are seeing successful outcomes for our job seekers with grant holders recently securing roles as teachers, administrators, software developers, digital marketing assistants, cyber security analysts or becoming self-employed.

One of the major developments in the coming year will be the roll out of the new pilot programme for recent graduates by AS Mentoring which will provide four months' support to recent graduates, combining one to one support with workshops to help them with the transition into employment at a time when autistic graduates typically face a cliff edge in support.

The charity is continuing to grow its network of employers who are keen to improve inclusion and support for autistic employees, including making changes to their recruitment procedures and workplaces, developing neurodiversity networks or putting in place specific recruitment programmes or internships for autistic candidates. As the current Covid-19 restrictions are further eased, the charity is planning to continue its series of recruitment roundtables for the coming year to provide a forum for employers, autistic employees and professionals to discuss ways to improve recruitment processes and drive changes to make the workplace more accessible and inclusive for all.

We are also continuing to expand our connections with universities around the country including the Open University and will continue to work with other charities and to promote the work of neurodivergent led groups such as Neurodiversity in Law, AutAngel and GAIN to improve inclusion and employment outcomes for autistic people.

Autism Forward is proud to be able to support both autistic job seekers and employers to drive change, reduce the autism employment gap and improve inclusion and opportunities for autistic people in the workplace and beyond. The outcomes and feedback from the autistic job seekers we support demonstrate the value of the specialist support we fund and we are pleased to see more employers recognising the value of a neurodiverse workforce and the skills and different perspective that autistic employees bring, as well as an increase in neurodivergent led support groups both within and outside the workplace.

9. INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

A resolution to reappoint Mr NP Smith FCCA as independent examiner for the ensuing year will be proposed at the annual general meeting.

10. DECLARATION

The annual report was approved by the trustees of the charity on 11/10/2021 and signed on its behalf by:

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

The trustees are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with the United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) and applicable law and regulations.

The law applicable to charities requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charity for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the applicable Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations, and the provisions of the constitution. The trustees are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Approved by the trustees of the charity on 11/10/2021 and signed on its behalf by:

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

AUTISM FORWARD

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF AUTISM FORWARD

I report to the trustees on my examination of the financial statements of Autism Forward ('the charity') for the year ended 31 March 2021 which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities, the Balance Sheet and related notes, which are set out on pages 19 to 26.

This report is made solely to the charity's trustees, as a body, in accordance with section 145 of the Charities Act 2011. My work has been undertaken so that I might state to the charity's trustees those matters I am required to state to them in this report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, I do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charity and the charity's trustees as a body, for my work, for this report, or for the opinions I have formed

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

As the trustees of Autism Forward you are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the financial statements of Autism Forward carried out under section 145 of the Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

An independent examination does not involve gathering all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently does not cover all the matters that an auditor considers in giving their opinion on the financial statements. The planning and conduct of an audit goes beyond the limited assurance that an independent examination can provide. Consequently I express no opinion as to whether the financial statements present a 'true and fair' view and my report is limited to those specific matters set out in the independent examiner's statement.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of Autism Forward as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records; or
3. the accounts do not comply with the accounting requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair view' which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF AUTISM FORWARD

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

.....
Mr N P Smith
FCCA

21 Navigation Business Village
Navigation Way
Ashton-on-Ribble
Preston
PR2 2YP

Date: 11/10/2021

AUTISM FORWARD

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Total 2021 £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies		52,183	52,183
Investment income	3	172	172
Total income		52,355	52,355
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds		(260)	(260)
Charitable activities		(65,318)	(65,318)
Support costs	6	(1,592)	(1,592)
Total expenditure		(67,170)	(67,170)
Net expenditure		(14,815)	(14,815)
Net movement in funds		(14,815)	(14,815)
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward		119,459	119,459
Total funds carried forward	12	104,644	104,644

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Total 2020 £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies		191,746	191,746
Investment income	3	725	725
Total income		192,471	192,471
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds		(1,086)	(1,086)
Charitable activities		(102,104)	(102,104)
Support costs	6	(3,317)	(3,317)
Total expenditure		(106,507)	(106,507)
Net income		85,964	85,964
Net movement in funds		85,964	85,964
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward		33,495	33,495
Total funds carried forward	12	119,459	119,459

The notes on pages 21 to 26 form an integral part of these financial statements.

AUTISM FORWARD

(REGISTRATION NUMBER: 1171704)
BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 MARCH 2021

	Note	2021 £	2020 £
Current assets			
Debtors	9	4,934	7,618
Cash at bank and in hand	10	163,257	186,106
		168,191	193,724
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	11	(63,547)	(74,265)
Net assets		104,644	119,459
Funds of the charity:			
Unrestricted income funds			
Unrestricted funds		104,644	119,459
Total funds	12	104,644	119,459

The financial statements on pages 19 to 26 were approved by the trustees, and authorised for issue on 11/10/21..... and signed on their behalf by:

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

1 ACCOUNTING POLICIES

Statement of compliance
The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Charities Act 2011.

Basis of preparation
Autism Forward meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102. Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant accounting policy notes.

The financial statements have been prepared to give a 'true and fair' view and have departed from the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 only to the extent required to provide a 'true and fair' view. This departure has involved following Accounting and Reporting by Charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) issued on 16 July 2014 rather than the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of a Recommended Practice effective from 1 April 2005 which has since been withdrawn.

Going concern
The trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

Income and endowments
Voluntary income including donations, gifts, legacies and grants that provide core funding or are of a general nature is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the income, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured with sufficient reliability.

Donations and legacies

Donations and legacies are recognised on a receivable basis when receipt is probable and the amount can be reliably measured.

Grants receivable

Grants are recognised when the charity has an entitlement to the funds and any conditions linked to the grants have been met. Where performance conditions are attached to the grant and are yet to be met, the income is recognised as a liability and included on the balance sheet as deferred income to be released.

Gift aid

Gift Aid receivable is included in income when there is a valid declaration from the donor. Any Gift Aid amount recovered on a donation is considered to be part of that gift and is treated as an addition to the same fund as the initial donation unless the donor or the terms of the appeal have specified otherwise.

Investment income

Income from interest, royalties and dividends are included in the accounts when receipt is probable and the amount received can be measured reliably.

Expenditure and liablities

Grant expenditure

Grants are recognised in the financial statements as liabilities after they have been approved by the trustees, the recipients have been notified and there are no further terms and conditions to be fulfilled within the control of the charity. In these circumstances there is a valid expectation by the recipients that they will receive the grant.

Liability recognition

Liabilities are recognised where it is more likely than not that there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to pay out resources and the amount of the obligation can be measured with reasonable certainty.

Support costs

Support costs have been allocated between governance costs and other support. Governance costs comprise all costs involving public accountability of the charity and its compliance with regulation and good practice.

Creditors

The charity has creditors which are measured at settlement amounts less any trade discounts.

Provisions for liablities

A liability is measured on recognition at its historical cost and then subsequently measured at the best estimate of the amount required to settle the obligation at the reporting date.

Financial instruments

The charity accounts for basic financial instruments on initial recognition as per paragraph 10.7 FRS 102 SORP. Subsequent measurement is as per paragraphs 11.17 to 11.19, FRS 102 SORP.

Fund structure

Unrestricted income funds are general funds that are available for use at the trustees's discretion in furtherance of the objectives of the charity.

Debtors

Debtors are measured on initial recognition at settlement amount after any trade discounts or amount advanced by the charity. Subsequently, they are measured at the cash or other consideration expected to be received.

Gift Aid receivable is recorded as accrued income at the reporting date.

2 INCOME FROM DONATIONS AND LEGACIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Donations and legacies;		
Appeals and donations	35,182	35,182
Gift Aid reclaimed	7,251	7,251
Grants, including capital grants;		
Grants from other agencies	9,750	9,750
Total for 2021	52,183	52,183
Total for 2020	191,746	191,746

3 INVESTMENT INCOME

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Interest receivable and similar income;		
Interest receivable on bank deposits	172	172
Total for 2021	172	172
Total for 2020	725	725

4 EXPENDITURE ON RAISING FUNDS

A) COSTS OF GENERATING DONATIONS AND LEGACIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Donations	260	260
Total for 2021	260	260
Total for 2020	1,086	1,086

5 EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Grant funding of activities	65,318	65,318
Total for 2020	102,104	102,104

6 SUPPORT COSTS

	Note	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Independent examiner fees			
Examination of the financial statements	7	1,140	1,140
Trustees training costs		66	66
Marketing and publicity		84	84
Administrative expenses		302	302
Total for 2021		1,592	1,592
Total for 2020		3,317	3,317

7 INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REMUNERATION

	2021 £	2020 £
Examination of the financial statements	1,140	1,140

8 TAXATION

The charity is a registered charity and is therefore exempt from taxation.

9 DEBTORS

	2021 £	2020 £
Accrued income	4,934	7,618

10 CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS

	2021 £	2020 £
Cash at bank	163,257	186,106

11 CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR

	2021 £	2020 £
Other creditors	62,407	73,125
Accruals	1,140	1,140
	63,547	74,265

12 FUNDS

	Balance at 1 April 2020 £	Incoming resources £	Resources expended £	Balance at 31 March 2021 £
Unrestricted funds				
General	119,459	52,355	(67,170)	104,644

	Balance at 1 April 2019 £	Incoming resources £	Resources expended £	Balance at 31 March 2020 £
Unrestricted funds				
General	33,495	192,471	(106,507)	119,459

13 ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds at 31 March 2021 £
Current assets	168,191	168,191
Current liabilities	(63,547)	(63,547)
Total net assets	104,644	104,644

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds at 31 March 2020 £
Current assets	193,724	193,724
Current liabilities	(74,265)	(74,265)
Total net assets	119,459	119,459

AUTISM FORWARD

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES BY FUND FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

	Total Unrestricted Funds 2021 £	Total Unrestricted Funds 2020 £
Income and Endowments from:		
Donations and legacies	52,183	191,746
Investment income	172	725
Total income	52,355	192,471
Expenditure on:		
Raising funds	(260)	(1,086)
Charitable activities	(65,318)	(102,104)
Other expenditure	(1,592)	(3,317)
Total expenditure	(67,170)	(106,507)
Net (expenditure)/income	(14,815)	85,964
Net movement in funds	(14,815)	85,964
Reconciliation of funds		
Total funds brought forward	119,459	33,495
Total funds carried forward	104,644	119,459