

Charity registration number: 1171704

**AUTISM
FORWARD**



AUTISM FORWARD

**ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021**

AUTISM FORWARD

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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

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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 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.

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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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

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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.

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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.

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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.

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(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.

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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.

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(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.

AUTISM FORWARD

TRUSTEES' REPORT

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.

AUTISM FORWARD

TRUSTEES' REPORT

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

AUTISM FORWARD

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 11/10/22 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.

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: 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		<u>52,355</u>	<u>52,355</u>
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds		(260)	(260)
Charitable activities		(65,318)	(65,318)
Support costs	6	(1,592)	(1,592)
Total expenditure		<u>(67,170)</u>	<u>(67,170)</u>
Net expenditure		<u>(14,815)</u>	<u>(14,815)</u>
Net movement in funds		(14,815)	(14,815)
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward		<u>119,459</u>	<u>119,459</u>
Total funds carried forward	12	<u>104,644</u>	<u>104,644</u>

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Total 2020 £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies		191,746	191,746
Investment income	3	725	725
Total income		<u>192,471</u>	<u>192,471</u>
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds		(1,086)	(1,086)
Charitable activities		(102,104)	(102,104)
Support costs	6	(3,317)	(3,317)
Total expenditure		<u>(106,507)</u>	<u>(106,507)</u>
Net income		<u>85,964</u>	<u>85,964</u>
Net movement in funds		85,964	85,964
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward		<u>33,495</u>	<u>33,495</u>
Total funds carried forward	12	<u>119,459</u>	<u>119,459</u>

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

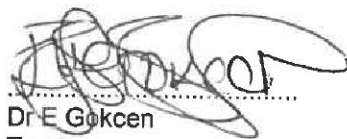
AUTISM FORWARD


(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. 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.

AUTISM FORWARD

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

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 liabilities

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 liabilities

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.

AUTISM FORWARD

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

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

AUTISM FORWARD

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

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

AUTISM FORWARD

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

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

AUTISM FORWARD

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

13 ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS

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

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds at 31 March 2020 £
Current assets	193,724	193,724
Current liabilities	<u>(74,265)</u>	<u>(74,265)</u>
Total net assets	<u>119,459</u>	<u>119,459</u>

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	<u>52,355</u>	<u>192,471</u>
Expenditure on:		
Raising funds	(260)	(1,086)
Charitable activities	(65,318)	(102,104)
Other expenditure	<u>(1,592)</u>	<u>(3,317)</u>
Total expenditure	<u>(67,170)</u>	<u>(106,507)</u>
Net (expenditure)/income	<u>(14,815)</u>	<u>85,964</u>
Net movement in funds	(14,815)	85,964
Reconciliation of funds		
Total funds brought forward	<u>119,459</u>	<u>33,495</u>
Total funds carried forward	<u>104,644</u>	<u>119,459</u>