

INTRODUCING
AUTISM FORWARD'S
NEW TRUSTEE
HELEN NEEDHAM

STANFORD
UNIVERSITY
NEURODIVERSITY
SUMMIT
2020

NEW MENTOR
PARTNER
COVERING
MANCHESTER &
CHESHIRE

AUTISM FORWARD
EMPLOYER
ROUNDTABLE EVENTS
CONTINUE
ONLINE

AUTISM FORWARD NEWS

Introducing Our New Trustee - Helen Needham

We are absolutely delighted to welcome Helen Needham to our board of trustees. Helen works in the Data Practice at global management and technology consultancy Capco and is the founder of their Employee Neurodiversity Network. Helen is also the founder of [Me.Decoded](#), a website dedicated to the promotion of neurodiversity.

Diagnosed as autistic in 2017, five years after her son's diagnosis, Helen is a dedicated neurodiversity advocate who will bring valuable insight, guidance and support to our board.

As an advocate, Helen talks passionately about the challenges and strengths of being neurodivergent in the hope that more people will be encouraged to embrace neurodiversity in the world around them, and remove the barriers that so often prevent them from finding employment and realising their potential. Helen has spoken at TEDx Square Mile, the House of Commons, Women's Forum Global meeting and numerous other awareness raising events, including our own Celebrating Neurodiversity event with Herbert Smith Freehills.

We very much look forward to working with Helen to encourage employers to improve opportunities and inclusion for neurodivergent people, and to enable more autistic people to find employment and fulfil their potential by funding one-to-one mentoring support.

Helen has also been a regular contributor to our employer roundtables and we are keen to continue holding these online.

Contact jane@autismforward.org.uk to be added to our email list for our employer roundtable events which are free to attend and will help your organisation develop workplaces where neurodivergent people can thrive and different ways of thinking are valued. Notes from previous employer roundtables can be found on our [website](#).



**AUTISM
FORWARD**

Autism Forward Beneficiaries

We have now awarded 148 grants for mentoring support and we continue to see encouraging employment outcomes for our grant holders across the country. 85% of our first year grant holders are now in paid (55%) or voluntary (30%) employment; 78% of our second year grant holders have secured paid (51%) or voluntary (27%) employment; and 35% of this year's grant holders (who have had less than 6 months' support) have already secured employment.

Recent positions secured by our grant holders include roles in retail, delivery, customer service centres, the Civil Service, and social housing. It is testament to the dedication of our mentors and engagement of our beneficiaries that they continue to secure employment in these most difficult of times. Our thanks to all our donors and regular supporters who enable us to fund this vital support.

If you would like to set up a regular donation to support our work, you can do so through [Virgin Money Giving](#) or by contacting jane@autismforward.org.uk. As we have no overheads, all funds are used to fund specialist mentoring support for autistic job seekers from our network of experienced mentors.

Stanford Neurodiversity Summit

We recently attended Stanford University's virtual Neurodiversity Summit which took place from 17 to 21 October 2020. The theme of this year's summit 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.

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. The handbook can be downloaded free of charge on the [Disability:IN website](#) and provides invaluable information for all employers who are keen to improve opportunities for autistic people.

Siena Castellon, who at just 18 years old is a multi-award winning neurodiversity advocate, author of *The Spectrum Girls Survival Guide*, and founder of [Neurodiversity Celebration Week](#) involving over 850 schools, gave a fantastic presentation "Addressing Pre-employment Challenges and Barriers". Siena outlined policies and procedures that deter autistic people from applying to organisations and steps employers can take to address this. Slides from her talk are available [here](#) which provide excellent guidance for employers. You can read more from Siena in this week's [Guardian interview](#).

New Mentor Partner

We are very pleased to announce that Sarah Musique, founder of [Think Musique](#), has joined our network of employment mentors, covering Greater Manchester and Cheshire.



Sarah was diagnosed as autistic a few years ago, shortly after her son was also diagnosed. Sarah describes the diagnosis as finding the missing pieces to the puzzle of her life:

"Fitting them in gave me both the full picture of my past, and the vision for my future. That vision is about ensuring that I can utilise the skills and experience developed in the world of corporate employment to ensure that more autistic people can gain and stay in employment."

Sarah has worked in many roles over the last 25 years including service management in telecoms, HR admin, policy & procedure, recruitment, learning & development and ultimately specialising in behavioural development and coaching, setting up [Think Musique](#) in 2018.