

Autism – Until Everyone Understands!

Saturday 2nd April to Friday 8th April 2016 is World Autism Awareness Week, and the theme this year is ‘Until Everyone Understands!’

In the UK, there are an estimated 700,000 people living with autism, including Asperger’s Syndrome. That’s almost as many as the number of people living with dementia. Including family members, autism probably affects the lives of about 2.8 million people in the UK every day.

Although there is no ‘cure’, people with autism can be helped to cope better if they receive the right support at all stages of their life.

Autism is often not well understood by the public and professionals unless they know what to look for. Hence, many people with autism face misunderstanding and sometimes discrimination on a daily basis. They are often denied the help they need.

People with autism are much more likely than the rest of us to experience common mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. And yet, mental health services discriminate against them by not routinely making their services accessible, useable and effective for people with autism.

Fifty per cent of people with autism have a normal IQ. Under the Equality Act, Autism Act and Mental Health Act they have the right to access mainstream mental health services, and to expect that these services will make

‘reasonable adjustments’ to meet their needs. A point emphasised in the recent House of Lords report on disability discrimination.

One of the main adjustments is to ensure that staff in relevant roles e.g. community psychiatric nurses, social workers and psychologists have received detailed training in autism. This is either not happening at all or not in sufficient numbers to make a difference. Accredited training programmes are readily available.

Not only do reasonable adjustments help to make life better for someone with autism, the National Audit Office says that it saves money - a critical factor at this time of pressure on public finances.

Perhaps our elected representatives - M.P.s and Local Authority Councillors - would like to investigate and remove this discrimination and waste of public money on behalf of the many voters and taxpayers who will have an interest in this matter.

If you or a member of your family has experienced discrimination in getting access to effective services because of a lack of reasonable adjustments for Autism or Asperger’s Syndrome, please let your M.P. and Local Councillor know.