

Where is Autism Employment Heading in 2017?

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I write about emerging employment structures, policy and law.



Dr. Temple Grandin speaks on autism employment.

Where is employment for adults with autism and other neurodiverse (developmental and learning) differences heading in 2017? What employment assistance or initiatives offer the greatest promise? If you want to help someone you know who is part of the neurodiverse workforce what should you be doing in 2017?

To begin, the current year saw a range of employment initiatives, most of them extra-governmental, often driven by the energy of persons on the autism spectrum, advocates and parents. These initiatives might be grouped among three primary strategies.

“Autism at Work” and other targeted hiring and retention efforts by large employers: Microsoft’s “Autism at Work” initiative has been the highest profile effort in 2016 by a major employer, targeting recruitment of adults on the spectrum and retention structures. But 2016 also has seen the growth of the Autism at Work initiative by software giant SAP, as well as targeted autism employment initiatives at several other prominent tech firms: Salesforce, Google, Cable Labs, Hewlett Packard and CollabNet.

Further, firms outside of tech are developing autism employment initiatives, often in partnership with Specialisterne, the consulting firm specializing in autism employment. Among these non-tech employers in 2016 have been Best Buy, Deloitte, Willis Towers Watson and Ford Motor.

Autism-focused businesses: Small businesses are being launched as “social enterprises,” specifically to hire adults on the autism spectrum, and build on the employment strengths of adults with autism. The Rising Tide Car, <http://risingtidecarwash.com/>, the Florida-based car wash chain, is probably the best known, emphasizing the attention to detail and loyalty of its employees with autism. Other autism-focused businesses in 2016 are ULTRA Testing, <http://www.ultrateesting.us/>, (software testing), Spectrum Designs, <https://spectrumdesigns.org/about-us/>, (shirt design), Platinum Bay Software, <https://www.platinumbay.com/WhoWeAre/OurMission>, Chocolate Spectrum,

<http://www.thechocolatespectrum.com/>, (chocolatiers) and SMILE Biscotti, <http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/restaurants/smile-biscotti-increases-autism-awareness-and-gives-one-young-man-a-job-6537069>, to name a few of the more than 50 nationwide.

Self-employment and internet-based creative collectives: For adults on the spectrum, as for all adults, the internet is opening new employment opportunities. Picasso Einstein, <http://www.picassoeinstein.com/>, the Art of Autism, <https://the-art-of-autism.com/>, and the Autistic Creatives Collective, <https://autismcreativescollective.wordpress.com/category/member/>, are all internet-based platforms to showcase the works of adults with autism who are painters, artists, musicians, writers and photographers.

Looking to 2017, we can expect each of these three employment approaches to continue. The autism-focused businesses, like most small businesses, are the most fragile, and some likely will cease operations in 2017. At the same time, universities and foundations are experimenting with campaigns to sharpen the social enterprise approach — in June 2016, for example, the University of Miami with the Taft Foundation announced the “Awakening the Autism Entrepreneur” campaign, a \$510,000 campaign to train and move forward autism-focused businesses.



<http://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelbernick/2016/12/13/where-is-autism-employment-heading-in-2017/#6316606e5193>