

## **Employment Experiences: Of people with learning disabilities and autism**

### Summary

In 2018, only **16% of adults with learning disabilities were in paid employment in Essex**. At Essex County Council, we have a responsibility to **enable all residents to live a life that is meaningful to them**. This includes supporting residents with learning disabilities & autism (LD/A) into meaningful employment.

In 2021-2022, the Research & Citizen insight team at Essex County Council collaborated with Revealing Reality to **explore the needs, motivations, and barriers** to successful employment for people with LD/A in Essex.

To drive change, we communicated the insights in a way that was **impactful, engaging, tailored to different audiences**, and **focused on real employment journeys**. In addition to an in-depth report, we worked with people with LD/A, their employers, and families to create a **film and video case studies** which demonstrated the challenges faced during the employment journey and the impact meaningful employment had on their lives. This was shared with **partners, employers, families, and individuals with LD/A** through a launch event, which aimed to collectively discuss evidence-based actions, social media campaigns, and workshops with decision-makers across partners. This inspired action across Essex to better encourage and support people with LD/A into meaningful employment.

### Methodology

In collaboration with Revealing Reality, we took a qualitative research approach, where we aimed to understand each stage of the employment journey from getting into, maintaining, and progressing through suitable employment.

As the employment journey for people with LD/A stretches beyond the individual, in addition to interviewing young people with LD/A, the approach encompassed the perspectives of their wider support networks, friends, family, employers and work colleagues.

The team conducted 10 in-person interviews with people with LD/A, 7 parents and 4 employers to learn about their experiences of employment. In-field observation days took place with participants at their places of work, including at a pub, café, nursery, and a charity.

The participants who took part had a range of needs, experiences of employment and were at different stages of their employment journey. This provided us with assurance that we were covering an appropriate range of different experiences that would be reflective of the full employment journey.

We produced a film and in-depth case studies to accurately portray the stories and experiences of people with LD/A and their support networks, which was used alongside a report which also embedded video clips to bring the insight to life.

### Wow factor

People with LD/A need a strong support network, with people who believe in them and will encourage them even if they fail. The stories were a powerful tool to bring to light unknown perspectives across support networks which was vital in mobilising change.

### Synopsis

This research aimed to explore the needs, motivations, and barriers to successful employment for people with learning disabilities and autism in Essex, but the ultimate goal for this research was to identify the opportunities for people with LD&A to have rewarding and meaningful employment, while also getting employers across the county to see the value and benefits of employing LD&A employees.

The research findings identified numerous opportunities for multiple partners to do this. Schools, colleges, employers, and service providers, as well as people with LD/A themselves and their families can all make a positive impact. And the benefits of providing better employment support were seen to be felt not only by people with learning disabilities and autism, their families, and employers, but will also help reduce the need for other council and government services.

Due to the need for partnership response to address the challenges identified in the research, a delivery approach was designed to ensure that the insight was accessible for a wide range of audiences. This included creating a film that could be used for a dual purpose; an inspirational film that was shared with people with LD&A and their friends and families through a social media approach to encourage the exploration of meaningful employment, and as an informative film which reflective the themed insights from the research which could be shared with a wide range of partners, such as schools, colleges, employers, service providers, to inspire collective action and response.

It was important that we brought the voices of people with LD&A to life in the reporting, so as well as the film, video case studies were created, and quotes and imagery were used in the report to ensure all insights were reflective back to real life experiences. We also launched the work through an online event that was attended by over 70 partners and colleagues, whereby we invited the participants to join and share their experiences in real time. We designed the event to be collaborative and created a breakout room space for partners to join together to discuss what the insights meant for their organisations, what needed to change and what collective actions could be taken to make this happen. Participants of the research were also invited to participate in these breakout sessions.

Beyond the launch event, we held workshops with key partners in the system, such as the Meaningful Lives Matters (MLM) working group at ECC and ECL, to ensure the insights from this research were informing some of the direct decisions that would impact people with LD&A within employment. This work helped to inform the MLM 2023-2027 strategy.

#### What should LARIA members learn from your award entry?

Our research demonstrates the importance of embedding citizen's voices within the communication and delivery of insight findings. The challenges, opportunities, and experiences of people with LD&A through the employment journey were more powerfully conveyed through their own voices than a static written report. In addition, we managed to reach a broader audience using this delivery method which increased the reach and impact our research will have on decisions being made across Essex.

The use of film was vital in our approach, not only to reach more partners, but to ensure that the insight was easily digestible and accessible to be shared with the LD&A community. In addition, by using different delivery methods, such as the online event, social media campaigns and

workshops, meant we were able to share the employment journey with a wider range of partners, and even 18 months on from the original launch we still receive requests from partners to discuss the research in more depth, demonstrating the durability of the work and the approach.

Is there a published report or background information on your study publicly available?

Please find the full report here: [LD.A Employment\\_Final report\\_RR\\_ECC.pdf \(essex.gov.uk\)](#)

Please find the film here: [ECC - Employment experiences of those with LD/A on Vimeo](#)

And an example of a case study: [ECC LDA - GEORGE'S STORY.mp4 \(vimeo.com\)](#)