

From: Sally L. Smith [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 21 April 2016 1:55 PM
To: FCDC
Subject: Autism

I am a 35 year old woman with Asperger's, I was diagnosed 2 years ago. I have never really been interested in having a lot of friendships and I find it easier to be with one or two people at a time. I had some depression issues as a teenager but they were never picked up and I just struggled through. I have always done very well academically, so I was not really noticed.

When I was 18 I moved away from home to attend university, I enjoyed the study but the social expectations were annoying especially living on campus it was a hard year. The second year I moved to private rental and that was better. I then found that I was turning to self-harm in order to cope, I saw a GP about this and he referred me to a psychiatrist. I continued to see the psychiatrist for the next 4 years, usually twice a week. I was able to afford this because he bulk billed me and I was getting to the Medicare safety net so after a time it became free. I do not think I would have been able to complete university without this support. I did well in my studies and finished my training. It was my goal to be a teacher and when I completed my studies I moved to a small rural town and I thought I would do better in a small school. This was against my psychiatrist's recommendation.

I began teaching but I soon found things all too much and I attempted suicide in the first school holidays. I tried to continue working but I was very unstable so I was living off my savings. I was put under the local psychiatric services and given a case worker. I was hospitalised for short periods several times, I attempted suicide again. I cut back to part time work, the next year. Eventually I decided that I needed to admit it was not the job for me and I quit. It was a difficult decision but worked out for me.

The next year I was lucky enough to marry and, as my husband works, I do not have to. I coped very well, having 2 children and caring for them. Then my husband lost his job and the idea that I may have to work again caused me great stress and I again sought help. Unfortunately the psychiatrist I saw was of the opinion that I just did not want to work and was unwilling to help me at all. My husband found employment about 2 months later but I was still unsettled. My mother was reading about Autism, as my nephew was being assessed, and suggested that Tony Attwood's information about girls on the spectrum sounded a lot like me. So I found a way to be assessed and the diagnosis was confirmed.

It had been great to be diagnosed as it makes sense of so many things. I have a better understanding and feel better in myself. However I had to travel at least 2 hours to find anyone with the knowledge of ASD to diagnose me so there really is no support for me after diagnosis. There needs to be a lot more done for people who are diagnosed as adults as we often carry many scars from years of not understanding.

I still feel I would be unable to work but no one will recognise this and I cannot find assistance when I ask.

I believe that every diagnosed Spectrum person should have a 'case worker' who they can meet with as often as they feel they want to. This person should have knowledge of what other funding and services are out there and be a referral point to things such as psychology, homecare, educational support, employment services, Centrelink services etc. They should meet with the Autistic person even when the person is functioning well to develop relationship and so that they give help earlier if the person starts to have problems or to be stressed. They would be able to say you seem to need some help lets organise.....

I have spoken to others on the spectrum and they believe this would be hugely beneficial but also that it will never get funding.