

JOB DESCRIPTION

TITLE OF JOB: Asperger's Group Supporter

SERVICE/PROJECT: Impact Advocacy Service

REFERENCE NO: ASC/SA/June21

CLOSING DATE FOR APPLICATIONS: 21st July 2021

HOURS PER WEEK: Average 12 hours per week

PERMANENT POST: Subject to a six month probationary period

STARTING SALARY: NJC Band 3 Spinal point 13 – £7,067 actual per annum

HOLIDAY ENTITLEMENT: 65 hours per annum

LINE MANAGED BY: Self-Advocacy Team Leader

RESPONSIBLE FOR: To support members of a self-advocacy group covering the northern area of West Sussex. Pre-covid, the group meetings were held in Burgess Hill with committee meetings in Horsham. We are currently meeting via Zoom and are in the process of looking for a new venue for our group meetings.

For an informal chat about the job please ring: Lesley Durbin or Harriet Wilson on 01903 730044. This post is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (1974) and the successful applicant will be subject to an enhanced DBS check.

Background and Aims of Service:

The self-advocacy group covers the north of the county, mainly drawing its membership from the Mid Sussex, Crawley and Horsham districts, and usually holds its meetings in Burgess Hill and committee meetings in Horsham. Currently the group and the committee are each meeting twice a month via Zoom and the group have recently started an informal meet up once a month.

This group has been running since September 2012 and aims to enable people with Asperger's to meet together, make friends and support each other; raise awareness of issues faced by people with Asperger's; work together to improve services for people with Asperger's in West Sussex.

Members regularly attend the West Sussex Autism Partnership Board and its Task Groups, where they have an important say in the development and commissioning of local services for people with autism, and have been involved in advocating for adults with Asperger's and Autism through giving presentations and participating in meetings with other groups and organisations, taking part in consultations, carrying out quality check work and developing the annual Understanding Autism events that the self-advocacy group have been running since 2016 to enable adults with Asperger's and Autism in West Sussex to come together, take part in relevant workshops and find out information about services and other support available locally.

Impact Advocacy receive funding from West Sussex County Council to employ a supporter to help members run their group. The self-advocacy group has a committee made up of members who decide the direction of the group.

Please bear in mind that this has been developed by group members who have Asperger's so will contain a lot of detail. This job is very flexible and your role will vary depending on what the group is involved with at the time; you will not be expected to carry out all of the tasks listed below all of the time, as they will vary from week to week.

Tasks:

1) Support self-advocacy group meetings

This may include, for example:

- Prepare for group meetings e.g. book speakers, book room, draft the agenda and slides, help potential new members understand about the group and how it functions, ensure everything required for the meeting is available (including laptop and projection, refreshments, flip charts, printing, other resources etc) and the venue is set up appropriately.
- Send reminders to members about meetings.
- Have members' contact numbers and emergency contact information on them for all meetings.

- Facilitate group meetings and help the group follow the agenda, adapt to changing circumstances and make sure meetings runs smoothly.
- Ensure that all members feel supported, welcomed and have the opportunity to speak at the meeting.
- Support the meeting by managing group dynamics and helping to resolve any conflict that arises.
- Take notes and distribute them to the committee or group members, as required
- Ensure that the meeting ends calmly and everything is packed away.
- Ensure that membership and contact details are kept up to date.
- Check in with members who have been absent for a while.

2) Support the self-advocacy group's Committee:

The self-advocacy group currently hold their committee meetings over Zoom without a supporter present. However, the supporter may need to provide some support to the committee and may be asked to attend meetings (face-to-face and / or on Zoom) when required.

This may include, for example:

- Keep up to date with managing the groups email account and update the committee with anything they need to be aware of, eg
 - Information about people interested in joining the group
 - Support the committee with identifying topics to discuss, putting together the agendas and relevant information and circulating them, as required.
 - Making the committee aware of any consultations etc that they need to consider in the meeting and undertaking research to help the committee make decisions
 - Making sure the committee are aware of any meetings coming up, related to APB, Task groups, other groups and meetings that we are involved with, and that the committee have all the information they need to prepare for the meeting, eg copies of Powerpoint presentations, Word documents etc
 - Check for information about surveys and consultations that the group may be interested in and forward to committee to decide which ones to circulate to the rest of the group
 - Forward emails relating to Asperger's Voice projects such as Understanding Autism to the relevant planning group members
- Book meeting rooms and set up Zoom meetings as required
- Provide the committee with background information and research, progress with booking speakers etc
- Keep the accounts up to date and provide the committee with up to date financial information and any invoices and cheques that need signing
- Keep the committee up to date with renewal of recurring expenditure eg insurance, web hosting, domain name

- To support the committee to keep simple accounts, so that a monthly update can be provided for committee meetings. (The group has a simple excel accounts system and support from Impact Advocacy will be given to undertake this task)
- Provide support to the committee with decision-making as required
- Draft agendas and power point slides for meetings as required
- Drafting letters, forms and responses for the committee to review
- Supporting the committee to look for and apply for funding when needed. (Impact Advocacy will give support and training in fundraising if the candidate does not already have these skills)
- Maintaining group resources and bringing them to meetings and events as required. (The group filing cabinet is currently located at the Impact Offices in Brighton, though could potentially be relocated if required.)

3) Promotion of the group:

- Make contact with potential group members, send them information about the group and arrange to meet them face-to-face or on Zoom, as required.
- Let the Committee know that a new member will be coming to the group.
- Promote the group by getting articles in the press, attending promotional events, visiting local groups etc.

4) Autism Partnership Board (APB) and other meetings.

- Support representatives from the self-advocacy group to attend the APB meetings, to feed back information to members and represent the views of the group.
- Support group members and representatives to participate in Task Groups and report back to members and to the APB.
- Support representatives to feed back information to members and represent the views of the group at the APB.
- Support group members to attend other meetings relevant to the group's work and aims.
- Attend meetings in West Sussex and Impact Offices in Brighton, as needed.

5) Website / Facebook Page / other social media:

- Support the group with keeping the group website up to date and finding and liaising with relevant IT professionals if required
- Support the group with social media and update regularly with information about the group or useful links and information for members, as agreed with committee.

6) Projects:

- To support the group to identify projects which fit with the aims of the group and interests of members.
- Support the group with this project, for example, by organising and facilitating meetings, applying for funding, liaising with other people and organisations, etc.

7) Informal meetings:

- Support the committee with research and planning for informal meetings for group members.

8) Quality Checks:

- Facilitate self-advocates to participate in quality checking exercises on areas of service provided across statutory, health, independent and voluntary services, where group members are interested in being involved. WSCC Commissioners and the Autism Partnership Board will identify the area of service each year, and will provide an outline brief. Training and support from Impact Advocacy will be offered if this is required of the post holder.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Essential Skills	
An interest in working with people with Asperger's / Autism Spectrum Conditions. (ASC) and a willingness to learn more about ASC.	The post involves working closely with a diverse group of self-advocates who have Asperger's / ASC. The post holder would need to be willing to undertake training around ASC and learn from the experiences of people with Asperger's to gain a better understanding of the condition and how it affects the lives of our members.
A good understanding of and empathy for people with Asperger's / ASC (Autism Spectrum Conditions)	The post involves working closely with self-advocates who have Asperger's / ASC. The post holder would need to have empathy for what it is like to have Asperger's / ASC and understand the challenges that this may bring. For example, the post holder may need to adapt the way they communicate or change the physical environment to work successfully with members,
An understanding of advocacy and self-advocacy groups	This role is around supporting members to run their own self-advocacy group. It is important that the post holder understands the principles of advocacy and how these apply to self-advocacy groups and is able to work with the group in an empowering way.
Good communication skills	<p>a) The post holder will need to be able to establish rapport with group members and communicate information both verbally and via email in a clear, accurate and concise manner.</p> <p>b) They will need to have good comprehension skills and attention to detail to ensure effective understanding of people with Asperger's / ASC and to help members get their views across effectively in meetings and written responses.</p> <p>c) They will also need to be able to communicate verbally and via email to a range of professionals, eg to promote the group and organise events that the self-advocacy group may host.</p> <p>Verbal communication includes talking to people face-to-face, by telephone and on Zoom.</p>
Patience and understanding.	The post holder will need to demonstrate that they have patience to be able to work successfully with group members. For example, self-advocates may need to spend a lot of time looking at the details of an idea before making a decision. Self-advocates may sometimes come across as

	quite blunt when they are giving feedback. The post holder will need to have some understanding to not take this feedback personally and be able to maintain relationships with self-advocates.
Evidence of having good time-keeping skills and being reliable.	Being reliable and being on time is extremely important for many group members, as they can become anxious if the group supporter is late or does not turn up. The role also requires the supporter to open and set up venues before meetings, when some members arrive early. The post holder needs to have previous experience of having a role where they have demonstrated good time-keeping and reliability, while being understanding of the difficulties that group members may have with this themselves.
Experience of managing your own workload and being able to prioritise tasks	The post holder is required to work independently often in different geographical locations around the county. The post holder will need to be able to prioritise email, telephone and other work tasks within post hours.
IT skills	The post holder is required to use Office 365 to send emails and use MS Teams. They will need to be proficient in Word and familiar with PowerPoint and Excel to draft reports, documents and presentations for the group. They will need to be able to support group meetings on Zoom and face-to-face, e.g. using projector and or audio-visual equipment. They need to have some experience of Excel spreadsheets to support with group accounts. The group have a website and Facebook and Twitter accounts, which the post holder may be required to update when needed.
Ability to attend daytime and evening meetings as required.	<p>The group is currently meeting twice a month on Zoom, with the committee meeting at least twice a month on Zoom, and an informal monthly meet up (e.g. in a park).</p> <p>Going forward, once we are able to hold group meetings indoors once again, we expect group meetings to continue twice a month in the evening, with one of those group meetings being face-to-face and one being on Zoom, and continue to meet up socially once a month. There will also be other meetings that may occur during the day or in the evening depending on what the group and committee are involved in, e.g. due to our involvement with the Autism Partnership Board, other opportunities to advocate on behalf of people with Asperger's and Autism in West Sussex, and</p>

	any projects that the group may decide to take forward.
Car driver, who is willing and able to use own car for work	Due to the late (e.g. 9:30pm) finish of some meetings, the widely dispersed locations, the rural nature of West Sussex and limited public transport, a car driver is needed for this role.
Demonstrable commitment to equal opportunities	Impact Advocacy is committed to working towards a fairer society for all groups in the community. The post holder needs to share these values and work with the self-advocacy group as they ensure equal opportunities within their group.

Desirable Skills and Experience

Experience of facilitating group meetings.	The post holder will need to be able to facilitate group meetings and support the committee with the running of the group, so previous experience of taking on this role is desirable. If there are disagreements between members, the post holder will need to support the group to address these in a sensitive and conflict-resolving manner.
Experience of fundraising via grant applications	The self-advocacy group are an independent group who need to apply for funding for room hire, transport costs and special projects. Part of the supporter's role is to support group members with this task and previous experience of making successful grant applications would be an advantage.
Experience of being involved in user led research	The post involves supporting self-advocates to undertake Quality Checking research on local services. This can involve supporting members to design questionnaires, undertake interviews and write up reports.