

Signposting information

For many individuals there are alternatives to seeking a formal diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC). Pursuing a formal diagnosis through the NHS is a long process; it can take up to 18 months to be seen for a formal assessment. Doing so does not always guarantee the outcome some people are seeking.

Currently the Pan Dorset Community Adult Asperger's Service (CAAS) is under extreme pressure. We are receiving an unprecedented and significant volume of referrals above our commissioned rate. This mirrors the national picture in other Autism Specialist Teams. Sadly, this means that we must focus our resource for those whose ASC symptoms significantly impact their life in multiple areas.

Fortunately, there are numerous ways to seek help and support without pursuing a formal diagnostic assessment. There are a few organisations that can provide help and support. We have listed some options below that might be beneficial to you.

Learning about Autism Spectrum Conditions

- **Recovery Education Centre (REC): An Introduction to Asperger's Syndrome:** This course is run over 3 sessions, facilitated by a person with Asperger's Syndrome and a health care professional from the Community Adult Asperger's Service. This course gives a thorough understanding of Asperger's Syndrome. Carer's and partners are welcome to attend with the individual (with or without a formal diagnosis of an ASC). To book a place, they must first register with the REC via this website: www.dorsethealthcare.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/our-services-hospitals/REC. During the COVID pandemic, the REC has made some interesting pod casts for people with idiosyncrasies seen in those with a formal diagnosis of an ASC. Please see the links below to access them.
 - <https://soundcloud.com/user-186630975/understanding-autistic-spectrum-condition-1-of-4-life-in-the-pandemic>
 - <https://soundcloud.com/user-186630975/understanding-autistic-spectrum-condition-2-of-4-supporting-people-on-the-spectrum>
 - <https://soundcloud.com/user-186630975/understanding-autistic-spectrum-condition-3-of-4-change>
 - <https://soundcloud.com/user-186630975/understanding-autistic-spectrum-condition-4-of-4-fear-and-anxiety>
- **Online Autism Courses:** There are some free online courses that you can access to learn more about Autism and how the diagnosis effects people:
 - www.futurelearn.com/courses/autism - This course is run over 4 weeks in 3 hour sessions.
 - www.open.edu/openlearn/science-maths-technology/understanding-autism/content-section-overview?active-tab=description-tab - This course has 24 hours of content in total and is more academic, so ideal if you would like to know more detail.
 - healthtalk.org/life-autism-spectrum/overview - there are lots of videos of people talking about their experiences in different areas relating to ASC, an opportunity to see what others with a diagnosis have experienced.

Support with your mental health

- **Steps2Wellbeing (S2W):** Psychological therapy for a range of anxiety conditions and depression can be obtained from the primary care mental health service and we would happily provide consultation to any therapist working with you, both now and in the future, on how best to adapt therapy to meet your needs. You can self-refer to this service online: www.steps2wellbeing.co.uk/accessing_support/ Or by contacting your local service:
 - **Bournemouth and Christchurch**
Telephone: 0300 790 0542
Email: dhc.bc.s2w@nhs.net
 - **Poole Purbeck & East Dorset**
Telephone: 0300 123 1120
Email: dhc.pped.s2w@nhs.net
 - **West Dorset**
Telephone: 0300 790 6828
Email: dhc.west.admin.s2w@nhs.net
- **Action for Asperger's:** A bespoke counselling service for people who have been adversely affected by their experience of ASC. The service is happy to receive enquiries from undiagnosed autistic individuals as well as enquiries from formally diagnosed autistic individuals. This service is not based locally, but does offer counselling via skype. Visit www.actionforaspergers.org/ for further information email info@actionforaspergers.org, or call **01536266681**.
- **Mental health crisis support:**
 - **Connections:** Dorset Healthcare's 24/7 mental health and support line. Contact Number: **0800 652 0190** or phone **111** and select the option for mental health support. Visit their website for more information: www.dorsethealthcare.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/our-services-hospitals/mental-health/connection
 - **The Retreat:** 'A safe space to discuss your problems and access peer support'. If you're struggling to cope with life and feel yourself approaching crisis point you can attend the Retreat at Hahnemann Road, Bournemouth, and Maiden Castle Road in Dorchester.
 - **Community Front Rooms (CFRs):** are open to anyone over 18 who needs face-to-face support. They are staffed by mental health professionals and peer specialists (people with personal experience of mental health issues), and are there for you if you are struggling to cope and feel you are approaching a crisis point. They also offer virtual drop-ins during the same time period. Visit: www.dorsethealthcare.nhs.uk/access-mental-health/community-front-rooms
 - Open Thursday to Sunday 3.15pm – 10.45pm
 - Located at:
 - Bridport: The Assembly Rooms, Bridport
 - Shaftesbury: Community Front Room, Hope Offices, Shaftesbury
 - Wareham: Unit 1 Leanne Business Centre, Wareham
 - Weymouth: 56 St Mary Street, Weymouth

Education & Employment support:

- **Steps2Success:** As part of the Dorset Skills for Young people programme, BCHA has launched this service for people, aged 15-24 who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). For more information, please contact Kate Coughlan on 07971 640948 or steps2success@bcha.org.uk.
- **C.O.A.S.T.:** offer support to help explore future work options or help retain current employment & can be found at Seaview Centre Annex, Croft Rd, Parkstone, BH12 3LD. Tel: 01202 797846, Mob: 07814774689, web: poole.coast@tricro.co.uk. No need for a referral. You may also wish to consider a referral to Vocational Services at Dorset Healthcare University Foundation NHS Trust who also offer help.
- **Ignite:** offer a free 6 week course personal and social development (available to anyone over 19yrs and unemployed or at risk of unemployment) which can boost your self-esteem and make you feel more positive. Contact Ignite on 012020 410500 or email ignite@bcha.org.uk
- **Job Centre Plus:** Jobcentre Plus provides resources to enable job-searchers to find work, through Jobpoints (touch-screen computer terminals), Jobseeker Direct (telephone service) and the Jobcentre Plus website. They offer information about training opportunities for the chronically unemployed. They administer claims for benefits such as Income Support, Incapacity Benefit, and Jobseeker's Allowance. You can find your nearest branch online.
- **Disabled Students Allowance (DSA):** Southampton Assessment and Study Services (SASS) provide needs assessments and support plans for students eligible for the Disabled Students Allowance. This assessment should not only focus upon perceived weaknesses but also on existing strengths. In addition, the results should be monitored and reviewed as situations can change and some students require additional support at later stages e.g. when doing thesis work. If you have applied for Disabled Students Allowance and been told to arrange a DSA study needs assessment, you can contact SASS to arrange an appointment at their centres in Southampton, Bournemouth, Chichester or Bognor Regis. Email: admin@sass-ltd.co.uk, Phone: 07837 553841 or 0845 070 6941 (phones will be answered between 8.30am and 6pm, Monday to Friday), Text: 07837 553841, Fax: 023 8020 2648, Post: SASS, Unity 12, 9-19 Rose Rd, Southampton SO14 6TE, Web: www.sass-ltd.co.uk

Other students with features of an ASC have found the following additional recommendations to be useful:

- Extra time and a separate room in exams
- Permission to use laptop computers to type written exams
- Clear concise and unambiguous instructions and feedback
- Special arrangements in student accommodation
- Give as much notice as possible to changes of plans, room changes, staff changes and assignment changes
- Personal mentoring or additional tutoring
- Support when working in group settings

N.B. - It is important to note that a formal diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Condition is a recognised disability under the Equality Act 2010 and as such 'Reasonable Adjustments' should be made in any workplace or educational setting. These adjustments should be negotiated with employers and educators and tailored to meet the needs of the individual (e.g. if they have particular sensory sensitivities then the environment could be changed to reduce this distress; or if the person has difficulties remembering instructions, instructions

could be written down instead, or they may need more time to process and or carry out tasks). Guidance for employers can be found on the National Autistic Society website which includes advice on how to go about organising appropriate adjustments in the workplace: www.autism.org.uk/professionals/employers/information-for-employers/managing.aspx

Social Care:

- **Social care needs assessment:** If you feel that you have care and support needs, residents in Bournemouth, Christchurch or Poole can contact the Adult Social Care Contact Centre via email asc.contactcentre@bcpcouncil.gov.uk or via telephone: 01202 123654 Mon–Thursday :8:30am-5:15pm and Friday 8:30-4:30pm for enquiries or to request a social care needs assessment. Residents of Dorset can visit the website: dorsetforyou.gov.uk or email adultaccess@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk or call Dorset Social Care on Tel: 01305 221016. In addition, any people who could be classified as your carer (i.e. people who help, support and potentially live with you) could be entitled to a Carers Assessment, which would look at their needs. This can be arranged along with your social care needs assessment. Within BCP, those with a formal diagnosis of an ASC will likely be seen for assessment by the specialist Asperger's social care team.

Support and information services:

- **Dorset Adult Asperger's Support (DAAS):** DAAS provide support and information for adults both diagnosed and undiagnosed with Asperger's as well as carer's, friends and family. They have monthly meetings, social events and have a drop in service at Rossmore Library twice a month. For more information or to register with them visit the following website address www.dorsetadultaspergerssupport.org.uk/
- **National Autistic Society:** The NAS website has advice and information on many different areas relating to Autism Spectrum conditions. You may wish to explore the website: www.autism.org.uk/
- **Autism Unlimited:** Is a local organisation which provides support to people diagnosed and undiagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Condition and their families. You can contact Autism Unlimited visiting their web page and requesting contact via the following link www.autism-unlimited.org/enquiry/
- **Help & Care: The Dorset Self-Management Service** - This service aims to support people with long-term health conditions and those caring for others. The service helps people to feel more confident managing on a day to day basis and includes managing one's health, as well as becoming more connected with the local community. Open Mon-Fri 10-4pm. Tel; 0300 111 3303 or visit www.helpandcare.org.uk

Seeking a diagnosis through an independent practitioner

It is worth noting you can request a diagnostic assessment to explore the possibility of an ASC through an independent practitioner. You could search the National Autistic Society Directory (www.autism.org.uk/directory) or contact Autism Unlimited (www.autism-unlimited.org/enquiry/) for further advice and guidance. It is important that you check with the relevant professional body for the clinician you identify, to ensure they have the relevant professional qualification to complete a diagnosis. For psychologists, this would be the Health and Care Professions Council (www.hcpc-uk.org), and for a medic, this would be the General Medical Council (www.gmc-uk.org).

We hope this information on resources is of assistance to you.

The Pan Dorset Community Adult Asperger's Service