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YOUTH AUT WORK

Youth work for employability of youngsters with autistic spectrum

TOOLKIT

"EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNGSTERS WITH AUTISM ON BUILDING SKILLS FOR CAREER SUCCESS"

TITLE:
Toolkit "Empowerment of youngsters with autism on building skills for career success"

PROJECT:
“Youth work for employability of youngsters with autistic spectrum”, funded by the Agency for International Programs for Youth, Republic of Latvia

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SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

Project title: "Youth work for employability of youngsters with autistic spectrum"

Summary of the project:
The motivation for our project comes from a need observed across Latvia, Italy and Serbia: the integration and accessibility of youth with autism in the labour market. We want to address this issue by training educators and youth workers and preparing society and the working environment for the effective inclusion of individuals with autism. Research indicates that young people with autism have significantly lower rates of employment compared to those with physical or cognitive disabilities. In Latvia, the challenges include insufficient support in education, limited access to specialised training, and a lack of employer awareness about inclusive practices. Similarly, in Italy, the employment for young people with autism is hindered by regional disparities in services, inadequate vocational training programmes, and low employer awareness, which limit opportunities for proper employment and career growth. On the other hand, in Serbia, the situation is worse including a lack of inclusive workplace policies, limited vocational training and job coaching, and widespread social stigma, leading to high unemployment rates and dependence on family support.

These individuals are part of a vulnerable group encountering significant obstacles in societal integration at various levels. The difficulty in securing employment for people with autism can be attributed to several factors, including:

- The lack of effective policies for the employment inclusion of vulnerable people;
- The lack of training regarding the correct relational approach in relation to young people with autism;
- The lack of awareness regarding this issue in the entrepreneurial fabric and in society.

The consequence of these listed facts is that young people with autism, once they finish school, find themselves cut off from the world of work and therefore enter a state of isolation and dependence on their families or social services.

The project aims to address the following needs:

- Effective employment inclusion policies tailored to the unique challenges faced by young individuals with autism.
- The need for specialised training that equips youth workers with the skills to support youngsters with autism in navigating the labour market successfully.
- The need to raise awareness within local communities and the business sector about the potential benefits of employing young people with autism and to challenge existing misconceptions.
- The need to actively contribute to the improvement of the European Union's Diversity and Inclusion policies, ensuring that they adequately address the employment needs of individuals with autism.

By focusing on these needs, the project seeks to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for young people with autism as they transition into the workforce.

The **goal** of our project is to enrich the quality of youth work for the employability of youngsters with autistic spectrum and provide tools for further empowering them for better inclusion in the labour market.

The specific objectives of the project are:

1. To increase the competences of youth workers, school teachers and social workers in developing and implementing a model for inclusion of youngsters with autistic spectrum in the labour market through the innovative guidebook with curriculum and the training course.
2. To educate youngsters with autistic spectrum in practical skills for the labour market, personal branding, communication and relational skills through an innovative toolkit and the piloting workshops.
3. To increase capacities of consortium partners in the topic and disseminate project outputs with relevant stakeholders in local/international level through collection and promotion of positive practices, project online platform and national conferences.

Project activities are:

WP1 – Project Management
WP1 – Project kick-off meeting – online
WP2 – R1 Guidebook with Curriculum "Empowering youth workers and educators to support youngsters with autism in the labour market"
WP2 – R2 Training course for youth workers
WP1 – Project mid-term meeting – online
WP3 – R3 Toolkit "Empowerment of youngsters with autism on building skills for career success"
WP3 – Toolkit piloting workshops
WP4 – R4 Collection of positive practices for inclusion in the labour market
WP4 – R5 Project online platform
WP4 – International conference – IT
WP4 – International conference – LV
WP4 – International conference – RS
WP1 – Project evaluation meeting – online

Project results:

- Guidebook with Curriculum "Empowering youth workers and educators to support youngsters with autism in the labour market"
- Toolkit "Empowerment of youngsters with autism on building skills for career success"
- Collection of positive practices for inclusion in the labour market
- Project online platform

INTRODUCTION AND STRUCTURE OF THE TOOLKIT

The Toolkit "Empowerment of youngsters with autism on building skills for career success" is developed as part of the project "Youth work for employability of youngsters with autistic spectrum", implemented by partners in Latvia, Italy and Serbia. The key motivation for this project comes from the need to support young people on the autistic spectrum in their transition to employment and independent living.

The toolkit is designed as a practical resource for youth workers, educators and trainers who are actively supporting young people on the autistic spectrum in their transition to employment and independent living. The main idea behind this toolkit is to provide concrete tools, methods, knowledge and strategies that can be directly applied in youth work settings, that would help young people with autism to build the confidence, skills and awareness needed to navigate today's labour market. The toolkit brings together inclusive practices, non-formal education methodologies and practical exercises to make skill-building more accessible, relatable and empowering for its target group.

What makes this toolkit particularly relevant is that it offers theoretical guidance and practical workshops, ensuring youth workers not only understand how to work with autistic youngsters but also have the practical means to do so.

The Toolkit is divided into two main parts:
Part 1 – Key concepts and practical recommendations
This short section introduces three chapters that lay the foundation for inclusive, meaningful and structured work with young people on the autistic spectrum in the targeted topics. It includes insights related to developing personal branding for youngsters with autism, techniques for effective communication in the workplace and recommendations when working with autistic youngsters in workshops. These chapters provide essential insights, practical recommendations and adaptable approaches that can be used as a reference point before planning any activity.

Part 2 – Practical workshops
This section presents a set of 15 independent workshops based on non-formal education methodology. Each workshop is designed to help young people with autism to explore, understand and strengthen key employability skills. The workshops cover a broad range of topics, starting from personal branding and communication to job searching, stress management and adapting to change. The complete list of all workshops is as follows:

- Identifying personal strengths and talents
- Crafting a personal brand statement and online presence
- Workplace communication
- Networking and teamwork skills
- Coping strategies for sensory sensitivities at work

- Setting achievable career objectives and creating action plans
- Effective job searching tips and resume writing techniques
- Simulated interview sessions with feedback
- Legal rights and advocacy in the workplace
- Addressing common workplace challenges
- Managing time and staying organised at work
- Stress management and self-care techniques
- Adapting to changes and transitions in the work environment
- Seeking opportunities for career advancement
- Recognising achievements and building resilience

Each workshop includes a brief background on the topic and workshop flow, main aim and specific objectives, methodology and methods used, competences addressed, a detailed step-by-step workshop flow that includes instructions and timing, a list of materials needed, recommendations for youth workers to adapt and multiply the session in their own contexts, and further background documents or readings, where relevant. These workshops are designed to be flexible and replicable, which makes them suitable for different learning environments and youth groups.
Trainers are encouraged to treat the timing as adaptable guidance rather than fixed requirement. When working with groups that have shorter attention span, higher support needs or have mixed literacy levels, trainers may select the most relevant activities and divide the workshop into shorter modules and deliver the same workshop across more than one session. For any activity that involves writing and reading, alternative activities involving visual materials, oral discussions, picture cards can be offered to the participants.

Overall, this toolkit is developed as an asset in the hands of youth workers, contributing to more inclusive, empowering and career-oriented youth work practices across Europe and beyond.

YOUTH AUT WORK
Youth work for employability of youngsters with autistic spectrum

Part I: Concepts and recommendations

Developing personal branding for youngsters with autism

Developing personal branding is a powerful aspect for youngsters with autism that are entering into the labour market. Personal branding allows youngsters to present their strengths, values and unique competences in a way that not only builds confidence and reputation but also aligns with inclusive employment opportunities. This chapter equips youth workers, educators and trainers with clear guidance, contextual understanding and practical recommendations to support youngsters with autism in building personal brands.

According to Winston Marketing (2025), too often, youngsters with autism are encouraged to "mask" traits to fit conventional job expectation, which then leads to exhaustion, burnout and loss of self-confidence[1]. This approach reframes the narrative where instead of adapting to neurotypical standards, it empowers young people to present their strengths such as precision, deep focus, loyalty or creative problem-solving as competitive advantages. Youth workers play a key role in this process as they can contribute to creating safe environments where youngsters with autism can explore, articulate and present who they are without compromising their identity.

Understanding personal branding in the context of youngsters with autism

Personal branding refers to how individuals present themselves in professional and social contexts, hence communicating their strengths, aspirations and values through both words and actions. However, for youngsters with autism, this concept must be reframed. Authentic personal branding in autism is not about blending in but about standing out, by highlighting abilities that emerge directly from their neurotype.

This includes using portfolios or work examples instead of relying heavily on verbal self-promotion, replacing generalised traits such as "good communicator", with concrete capabilities such as "produces high-accuracy reports under deadlines" and framing autistic traits not as limitations, but as consistent and valuable assets in certain roles or industries.

An essential element in developing personal branding is self-awareness. Before a young person can create a personal brand, it is essential that they understand their strengths, preferences, values and how their autism interacts with them. In youth work, the role of youth workers is to support this process and initiate this by facilitating structured reflection activities such as visual mind-mapping, card-sorting exercises and/or journaling prompts. These activities are designed to make abstract strengths more visible and relatable.

[1] Team, N. W. (2025, January 31). Personal Branding for Neurodivergent (ADHD or Autistic) Professionals. Winston Marketing. https://winsomemarketing.com/marketing-and-autism/personal-branding-for-neurodivergent-adhd-or-autistic-professionals

It is important to emphasise that branding should not be about hiding or weakening one's identity. Selective self-disclosure is encouraged, particularly with inclusive companies actively seeking neurodivergent employees. Branding becomes a way of saying: "Here's how I work best and here's the value I bring".

Structured process for Personal Brand Development

To support autistic youth through a low-pressure, progressive branding process, youth workers should follow a structured process that is specifically designed for this target group and adapted to their needs.

Below we present a structured process for personal brand development that has been developed specifically for this toolkit by combining and adapting elements from multiple personal-branding and career-development sources. The structured process does not reproduce a single published model but represents an original combination of established practices tailored to youth with autism and for the youth-work contexts. The process combines general personal-branding frameworks and audit checklists from career and branding resources such as Robert Walters' "How to build a strong personal brand in 2025", Automateed's "Personal brand audit checklist", and BrandWithSalman's "Personal branding strategy: Step-by-step guide to build your identity", as well as autism- and youth-focused employability materials[2].
The process consists of 4 steps which are presented below in detail.

Step 1: Strengths and values audit
It is recommended to start by identifying what makes each individual unique. Visual tools work best including mind maps, coloured cards or icons representing traits such as "visual learner", "detail-focused" or "persistent researcher". Instead of focusing on abstract qualities, youth workers should guide participants to link each trait to real-life experiences from school, hobbies, internships or volunteer activities. It is very helpful to use personalised charts to connect traits to actual job sectors. This creates an objective and empowering foundation to build upon.

[2] Sources and links for creating the structured process on Personal Brand Development:
Robert Walters. (2024). How to build a strong personal brand in 2025. https://www.robertwalters.com.au/insights/career-advice/blog/how-to-build-a-strong-personal-brand.html
Automateed. (2025). Personal brand audit checklist: How to improve your online presence. https://www.automateed.com/personal-brand-audit-checklist
BrandWithSalman. (2025). Personal branding strategy: Step-by-step guide to build your identity. https://brandwithsalman.com/personal-branding-strategy/

Some examples are shown below in the table:

Strength	Example Jobs
Hyperfocus	QA Tester, Research Assistant
Pattern recognition	Data Analyst, Logistics Coordinator
Visual-spatial thinking	Graphic Designer, Architect Assistant

Step 2: Crafting a core message
It is advisable to introduce the concept of the "elevator pitch". This is a brief and organised way of introducing oneself in a job interview or networking context. Youth workers should provide accessible templates to help with crafting messages, such as: "*I'm [Name], and I thrive when I can [key strength]. I've applied this skill in [example from life] and I'm passionate about [interest area]. I bring [unique value] to the team*".
It is important to support participants in building short "brand stories" that explain their journey, achievements and goals, while avoiding forced vulnerability but embracing honesty and pride in their identity. Written drafts, audio recordings or even illustrated timelines can all be used, based on the individual's comfort.

Step 3: Building a digital presence
This step is quite important for participants to be more visible in their surroundings. When going through this step, youth workers can help participants create simple but meaningful online profiles. Depending on capacity, this may include:

- LinkedIn summaries with a project-based focus.
- Canva-based visual CVs (e.g., timeline of milestones, skill trees).
- Personal websites (via Google Sites or similar) that feature their artwork, portfolios, writing samples or programming projects.

It is beneficial to encourage joining online communities that affirm neurodivergent identities such as Wrong Planet forums (wrongplanet.net), neurodiverse LinkedIn groups and so on before venturing into more public spaces. This builds confidence while avoiding overwhelm.

Step 4: Practicing and refining
The fourth step is about practicing the previous steps, reflecting on the needed changes and refining. It is recommended to facilitate structured feedback through peer sessions. Youth workers should use clear criteria such as authenticity, clarity or relevance to goals, and emphasise progress, but not perfection. They should engage in employer Q&A simulations with role-play designed to cultural job market norms according to the local/national context.

It is important that youth workers encourage participants to track their evolution through a “Brand Development Journal,” documenting what works, what feels natural, and what they want to change over time.

Techniques for effective communication in the workplace

Communication is one of the most important skills that are necessary in the workplace, and it means more than just speaking clearly. It also means being able to follow directions, ask questions, share information with co-workers and handle everyday social situations. For autistic youth, communication at work can present specific challenges, especially what concerns interpreting the work-related expectations, picking up non-verbal cues, managing small talk or understanding figurative language. At the same time, many autistic individuals also have communication skills that are very useful in the workplace, for example, being clear, honest, accurate, paying attention to details and information exchange in a structured way. When expectations for communication at work are clear and easy to find, these strengths can be very helpful for teams and businesses.

Employment support resources stress that expectations for communication at work are often not clear, so they need to be made clear and practiced. The Autism Speaks Employment Tool Kit, for instance, says that many autistic workers do better when they have clear explanations of what is expected of them at work, have chances to ask questions and are offered structured ways to talk to their bosses and co-workers (Autism Speaks, 2023)[3]. For many autistic youngsters, communication difficulties are not caused by the lack or deficit, but from differences in processing social information and from unclear expectations. These differences can lead to difficulties in maintaining the job and make engaging in the workplace challenging for the autistic individuals. Thus, it is essential to provide them with structured instructions, clear examples and opportunities to practice conversations.

The aim of this chapter is to provide youth workers with practical tools and structured approaches that can support autistic youngsters in developing clear, confident and authentic communication strategies that work in the workplace realities.

Understanding communication in the workplace

There are many ways that people talk to each other at work. These forms can be similar, but they usually need different skills. Workplace communication can be divided into several key areas:

- Verbal communication;
- Non-verbal communication;
- Written communication;
- Social communication;
- Self-advocacy communication.

Verbal communication includes talking to colleagues, asking questions, participating in meetings, talking to the boss about tasks or giving them updates on the work progress. Emails,

[3] Autism Speaks. (2023). Employment Tool Kit: https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit/employment-tool-kit

messages, reports and task instructions are all forms of written communication. For many autistic people, written formats can be very helpful because they give them time to think about what they read and let them go back and look at the instructions later.

Body language, tone of voice and facial expressions are all examples of non-verbal communication. Even though these signals are often used in the workplace, it's important to remember that not everyone sees them the same way. So, good communication should focus on making the message clear instead of just using body language. In addition, informal interactions between co-workers, like greetings, small talk or conversations during breaks are what social communication is all about. Even though these conversations may seem less important than the immediate work tasks, they often help build relationships at work and bring teams together.

Lastly, self-advocacy communication means being able to say what the needs of the individual are, what they want or are having trouble with, and doing it in a polite and respectful way. In the workplace setting, this could mean asking for more information, asking for written instructions or explaining how the individual would like to work on a specific task.

Clear and organised communication

A lot of problems at work come from giving instructions or setting expectations in a way that is not clear or direct. Some employees may not understand what is meant by expressions like "handle this as usual", "finish it soon" or "give it a quick look", as these instructions are not precise enough. Clear and organised communication makes it less likely that misunderstandings will happen. This means explaining the expectations, setting clear deadlines and breaking tasks down into steps when needed.

Another important strategy is to get youngsters to actively ask for clarifications. To avoid mistakes and boost confidence, these young professionals should be encouraged to ask follow-up questions, repeated instructions and check their understanding of tasks. Many employment support resources for autistic people recommend these kinds of clarification strategies because they help people do tasks more accurately and with less doubt. Another good way to help is to have people repeat or summarise the instructions in their own words. This helps to make sure that the message was understood correctly and gives the individual a chance to fix any misunderstandings right away.

The importance of written communication

Written communication can be of great help in making the workplace more welcoming to everyone. A lot of people with autism say that written instructions or summaries of meetings help them keep track of their tasks and allow them to better remember important information. Some examples include written task descriptions, sending short follow-up emails after meetings or writing down notes before talking about difficult subjects. Instead of seeing this preference as a weakness, it can be seen as a professional strength. Structured written communication often leads to better documentation, clearer expectations and also promotes better teamwork.

Dealing with social expectations at work

There are often unspoken social rules at work that people do not always explicitly explain. For instance, saying “hello” to co-workers at the start of the day, thanking them for their work during meetings or having short, casual conversations – these all can be part of the normal work culture. These expectations may not always make sense to people with autism. However, if these rules are explained clearly, it can help them feel more confident when they are interacting with others.

It is also important to note that informal communication does not have to follow strict social rules. For instance, asking relevant questions, listening carefully or sharing factual information can also be meaningful ways to participate – this can allow participants to come up with ways to talk that feel more natural to them.

Communication is a two-way process

For effective communication, people with different styles of communication need to understand each other. Employers, supervisors and co-workers can make the workplace more accessible for everyone, not just autistic employees, by using clear instructions, structured feedback and communication practices that are easy to understand.

So, for youth workers who are supporting individuals on the autism spectrum to get ready for work, it is important to stress that communication skills develop over time and with practice. Structured strategies, chances to practise in a safe and supportive environment, as well as supportive settings help young people gain confidence while still being themselves when they talk to others. In the end, good communication at work does not mean following one specific set of rules. It is rather about making it possible for people with different communication styles to work together by making it an easy, clear and respectful process of exchanging and sharing information.

Recommendations when working with autistic youngsters in workshops

Working with autistic youngsters in workshop settings requires structured approach, predictability and flexibility. Youth workers and educators play a key role in creating a safe learning environment and making sure that all participants feel respected and understood, and where they can learn at their own pace. The objective is not to suggest improvements or encourage masking, but to design an inclusive environment that reduces unnecessary stress and enables possibilities for the strengths to emerge.

Below are several recommendations that need to be considered when planning and delivering workshops for young people on the autism spectrum.

Provide structure and make things predictable

Plan shorter and modular activities. Many workshops in this toolkit contain several possible activities, which should not necessarily be delivered in one single session. For groups with limited attention span, sensory fatigue or higher support needs, it is recommended to select the most relevant activity, keep active work periods short and include a clear debrief. A practical format can be 30 minutes of activity followed by reflection.

Predictability lowers anxiety and increases participation, which is why it is recommended to:

- At the beginning of each workshop, go over the agenda;
- Show the timetable of activities on a screen or on the wall;
- Let participants know in advance about breaks and changes;
- At the end of each activity, summarise what has been achieved.

Visual timetables, written instructions, step-by-step explanations and summaries help autistic individuals to better process information and reduce cognitive overload.

Use simple and direct language

Use visual support and alternatives to reading and writing. Whenever written text is used, trainers can add simple graphic icons, pictures or symbols alongside key words and instructions. It can support participants who cannot read or write independently. These activities can be adapted by using oral discussion, picture cards, matching tasks, drawing, support staff assistance. The main aim after all is understanding and participation.

Abstract or vague instructions can be confusing. This is why it is important that the youth workers/educators:

- Avoid use of idioms, sarcasm;
- Divide tasks and activities into smaller steps;
- Give written instructions along with verbal explanations;

- Give examples or show how to do it before asking participants to complete a task.

It is helpful to check understanding by asking participants to summarise the task in their own words, without putting them under pressure.

Respect different communication styles

Not everyone will feel comfortable speaking in front of the whole group. For this is important to:

- Offer alternatives, e.g., written responses, drawing;
- Let participants decide if they want to share;
- Accept less eye contact or stimming as self-regulation strategy;
- Do not interpret silence as lack of interest.

Encouraging different forms of expression makes everyone included and allows participants to contribute in ways that feel right for them.

Be aware of sensory sensitivities

Workshop environments can become too stimulating. To avoid overstimulation, youth workers/educators are invited to:

- Keep low level of the background noise;
- Avoid use of harsh lighting;
- Provide access to sensory tools (e.g., fidgets, headphones);
- Allow short breaks when needed.

Intentional planning of the physical space demonstrates respect for sensory differences and helps participants to focus.

Give time to process information

Some autistic youngsters might need additional time to process questions or formulate responses. This is why youth workers/educators are invited to:

- Pause after asking questions;
- Not rush participants to answers;
- Offer the possibility to respond later or in writing.

The need for a longer processing time should be seen as normal and valuable, not as a deficit.

Promote gradual exposure, not forced participation

Workshops that involve role-play or public speaking should always allow for gradual involvement. This can be achieved, if participants:

- Observe before getting involved;
- Are offered written scripts;
- Can practise in pairs or on their own before presenting in plenary.

Gradual exposure to building skills allows participants to become more confident without overwhelming them.

Pay attention to psychological safety

Trust is very important in employability-related workshops, especially when discussing topics like interviews, disclosing information. Youth workers/educators should:

- Make group agreements at the beginning (e.g. no interruptions, respect);
- Show how to talk to others with respect;
- Step in calmly if there are any misunderstandings.

Participants are more likely to participate in role-plays, simulations and exercises when they feel safe.

Inclusive workshop facilitation has to include these three main principles: structure, clarity and respect. When the space is designed to make participants feel good and when value is put on their neurodiverse strengths, autistic youngsters are more likely to actively engage.

Part II: Practical activities/workshops

Workshop 1: Identifying personal strengths and talents

Workshop title: Identifying personal strengths and talents

Duration: 100 minutes

Background:
Young people with autism often possess exceptional strengths like pattern recognition, deep focus or creative problem-solving, but still may struggle to recognise or articulate these talents. Understanding personal strengths is the foundation for career exploration and personal branding, as it enables autistic individuals to identify roles that match their neurodiverse profile rather than forcing them to mask their authentic selves. This workshop helps them uncover their natural abilities through some structured and interactive activities.

Aim of the workshop:
To help participants identify, document and connect their unique strengths and talents to meaningful career paths through individual and interactive group activities.

Objectives:
- To identify core personal strengths through a structured reflection;
- To understand how to connect personal strengths to specific job roles and career paths;
- To practice articulating strengths comfortably in safe settings;
- To create a personal strengths list for future career planning;
- To create space for self-reflection and communicating own abilities;
- To encourage teamwork and collaboration.

Competences addressed:
- Critical thinking;
- Creative thinking;
- Analytical skills;
- Literacy competence;
- Communication;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:
- Individual activity: Strength's sorting cards;
- Brainstorming;
- Theoretical input;
- Individual and pair work: Strengths-to-careers mapping;

- Gallery walk activity;
- Group discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. Welcome and introduction to the workshop's topic (25 minutes)

The youth worker/educator welcomes everyone and explains that the focus of the workshop is on discovering hidden talents. Before starting the activity, he/she checks that the participants understand the key terms used in the workshop that refer to the common strengths of autistic people, such as "detail-oriented", "pattern recognition", "loyal", "systems thinker", "good with details", "good with routines", "helpful". If necessary, these terms are explained using simple definitions, icons and examples. Participants then receive pre-made "Strength cards" with words and visual items. Each participant receives one set of these cards. They are invited to select up to 5 cards that resonate most and, if possible, connect each strength to a real-life example, for instance in a school project, daily life, hobby or volunteering activity. Participants may write, draw, point to picture cards, explain orally to the youth worker/eudcator or support person, or choose not to share. Volunteers may share one card/ example with the group. The youth worker/educator then briefly highlights how strengths can become the foundation of career identity.

II. Short theoretical input: What are autistic strengths? (10 minutes)

After the warm-up activity the youth worker/educator uses already identified examples to introduce the topic of autistic strengths. He/she explains: "Personal strengths are consistent abilities that come naturally and create value in work settings". The input covers also autistic superpowers (hyperfocus, pattern recognition, deep interests, visual thinking), while pointing out how they help in the job and stressing that each person has a different mix of their strengths. Examples may include:

- Hyperfocus is useful for software testing
- Pattern recognition is useful in data analysis, science and research

III. Creating personal strengths inventory (35 minutes)

Each participant receives an A4 worksheet divided into 4 sections:

- My top 5 strengths
- Examples/evidence
- Jobs that match
- How I feel using this strength (optional)

Participants are given around 20 minutes to reflect and complete the sections individually, using writing, drawing, symbols, orally or using support staff assistance. If some participants cannot read or write, the activity can be carried out orally as a guided discussion. After individual work, participants may share up to three strengths, but sharing remains voluntary.

Participants may also show their worksheet, point to cards, ask the trainer to read their answer or choose not to share.

IV. Strength's gallery and group connections (30 minutes)

The youth worker/educator prepares four gallery corners in the room with the following titles: *Analytical strengths, Creative strengths, Reliability strengths*, and *Special interests' strengths*. Each participant receives 4 post-it notes and is asked to write on each: one strength they identified, along with an example of a potential job or task where that strength could be used. Participants who prefer not to write, can draw, use prepared cards or ask the youth worker/eudcator/ support person to write for them. The youth worker/educator guides them to place each post-it in the corner it fits best. After everyone has placed their post-its, the youth worker/educator invites the group for a gallery walk. Then, the final discussion focuses on how different strengths can be useful in team and work environments:

- Which jobs were mentioned most frequently?
- Can you see how these different strengths could be valuable in a team or work environment?

This reflection and discussion is done to help participants see how individual traits contribute to broader team success and creates space for ideas for collaborations.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its,
laptop, projector, prepared "Strength cards", prepared room for the "Strengths Gallery".

Background documents and further reading:

- Personal Branding: What it is and why it matters. (2024, March 21). Business Insights Blog. https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/personal-branding-at-work
- For the theoretical input: Strengths and abilities in Autism | Advanced Therapy Clinic. (n.d.). Retrieved January 5, 2026, from: https://www.advancedtherapyclinic.com/blog/strengths-and-abilities-in-autism
- For the theoretical input: Links ABA Therapy. (2025, April 22). Autism and career growth: What you should know. Retrieved from: https://linksaba.com/autism-and-career-growth-what-you-should-know/

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- During the gallery walk activity, the youth worker/educator can consider playing some relaxing background music to create a more relaxed atmosphere while participants continue to observe and reflect on each other's strengths. The youth worker/educator should also make sure that there is enough space between stations to avoid crowding.
- For the pair sharing activity in the third part of the workshop, it is recommended to allow participants to choose for written sharing or drawing if they feel uncomfortable

speaking. This flexibility increases inclusion and supports different communication preferences.

- For the initial activity, as an alternative to the 20 cards, you can use a pre-made A3 template featuring 20 skills in large font and colours. You could also add visual icons next to each skill (e.g., a jigsaw puzzle for ‘problem-solving’).

Workshop 2: Crafting a personal brand statement and online presence

Workshop title: Crafting a personal brand statement and online presence

Duration: 120 minutes

Background:
A personal brand statement is a message that shows who you are, what you offer and the value you bring to the professional world. For young people with autism, building a personal brand involves more than mimicking mainstream professional norms. It means to embrace authenticity and presenting one's strengths without masking. This workshop is designed to support participants' learning in building confidence when presenting themselves, while introducing them to online profile creation by using simple formats that reflect their abilities, interests and personality traits.

Aim of the workshop:
To guide participants in crafting authentic personal brand statements and developing visual representations of their strengths through basic online profile mock-ups.

Objectives:

- To understand the definition and purpose of a personal brand statement;
- To create individual elevator pitch statements;
- To design simple online profile mock-ups that reflect strengths and values;
- To practice giving and receiving detailed feedback on personal branding messages.

Competences addressed:

- Self-expression;
- Creative thinking;
- Teamwork;
- Digital competence;
- Literacy competence;
- Communication;
- Analytical skills;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:

- Warm-up exercise;
- Brainstorming;
- Theoretical input;
- Individual activity: Brand statement template
- Pair work: Peer feedback rounds

- Individual work: Profile mock-up creation
- Group sharing

Workshop flow:

I. <u>Welcome and introduction to the workshop (20 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator welcomes participants to the workshop and presents the workshop focus which is to guide participants in transforming individual strengths into a personal brand. Then, the youth worker/educator starts with a warm-up activity, where each participant is asked to write down three words or short statements that represent their professional identity. Participants may write, draw, use picture cards, choose from an example list ("careful", "reliable", "creative", "good with routines", "good with details", "helpful") or ask a support person to assist. Sharing in plenary is optional: participants can share verbally, in writing, by showing their paper, through picture cards, only with the youth worker/eudcator, or not at all. The youth worker/educator facilitates a short discussion on how simple and honest phrases can communicate strengths.

II. <u>Brainstorming and theoretical input: Personal branding and brand statement (30 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator poses the guiding question: "If you had 30 seconds to tell someone why they should work with you, what would you say?" Participants are invited to share their insights, and their ideas are written on a flipchart paper. Then, the youth worker/educator introduces the core components of a personal brand statement taken from the article of Catherine Cote written for the Harvard Business School. The theoretical input contains the following topics:

- Personal branding and its importance
- Key steps to build own personal brand: define your purpose, audit your personal brand, construct a narrative, communicate and embody your brand, socialise your brand, re-evaluate and adjust[4].

Moreover, the youth worker/educator introduces the core components of a brand statement as essential for participants to start this process. The competences introduced are:

- Who you are (name and strength)
- Evidence (specific proof or example)
- Value (what you bring to a team or workplace)

An example is presented and analysed with the group: "I'm Ana, a detail-focused researcher who created a 50-page analysis report for my school project. I help teams stay accurate and organized in data tasks."

For this part the youth worker/educator uses a PPT presentation or other visual presentation.

[4] Cote, C. (2024, March 21). Personal Branding: What it is and why it matters. Business Insights Blog. Retrieved December 20, 2025, from https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/personal-branding-at-work

III. Crafting brand statements and feedback (30 minutes)

Each participant receives a worksheet prepared by the youth worker/educator with the following sections:

- My top strength
- My evidence (project, experience, activity)
- My value to a team/employer
- Final brand statement

Participants are given 15 minutes to complete their worksheets with the option to use keywords, icons, drawings or oral answers. After this, the youth worker/educator invites participants to choose one feedback option: pair feedback, youth worker/eudcator feedback, silent self-checking with a checklist. If peer feedback is used, it is structured with simple questions: Is the message clear? Is there one concrete example? Does the statement sound respectful and realistic?

These questions remain visible on a flipchart, while the youth worker/educator moves around the room to provide support and examples where needed.

IV. Online profile mock-up and gallery walk (40 minutes)

The youth worker/educator explains that in the last activity of this workshop, participants have the chance to create their own profiles for brand representation. Each participant receives an A4 profile template resembling simplified LinkedIn or visual CV layouts. The template includes:

- Top section: Brand statement
- Middle section: 3 strengths with brief descriptions or examples
- Bottom section: Personal interests or past projects

In the meantime, the youth worker/educator sets up a gallery walk. Participants choose whether their profile is displayed with their name, displayed anonymously, shared only with the youth worker/eudcator or kept private. Participants who join the gallery walk read or look at the profiles and add one positive comment using a post-it, sticker, symbol or prepared positive-comment card. This process lasts about 10 minutes and should remain calm, quiet and non-judgemental.

The session closes with a group discussion focused on what stood out, which profiles communicated strengths clearly and how online presence can reflect authenticity. The youth worker/educator wraps up this discussion in about 10 minutes and applauds the efforts of participants.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its, laptop, projector, pre-printed worksheets for the activity “Crafting brand statement” and profile mock-up templates.

Background documents and further reading:

- Cote, C. (2024, March 21). *Personal Branding: What it is and why it matters*. Business Insights Blog. Retrieved December 20, 2025, from https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/personal-branding-at-work
- Winsome Marketing. (2025). Personal branding for neurodivergent professionals. https://winsomemarketing.com/marketing-and-autism/personal-branding-for-neurodivergent-adhd-or-autistic-professionals
- Canva. (n.d.). Create visual resumes. https://www.canva.com/

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- It is recommended that the youth worker/educator presents real online profiles, for example, on LinkedIn. It can also encourage a discussion about privacy, consent and comfort with online visibility.
- In the last activity, the youth worker/educator can add a time slot at the end for collecting all mock-ups to optionally digitise or share back with participants later for portfolio use.

Workshop 3: Workplace communication

Workshop title: Workplace communication

Duration: 70 minutes

Background:
In a professional setting, speaking clearly is not the only requirement to communicate. It also includes understanding instructions, asking for clarifications, participating in meetings, writing emails, interpreting feedback, managing misunderstandings. For young people with autism, communication in the workplace may present challenges, as many of them process information differently. At the same time, many autistic individuals demonstrate strong communication-related strengths, for example, precision, honesty, factual clarity and structured thinking. These strengths can become significant professional assets. This workshop is designed to provide practical tools that help participants understand workplace communication expectations, practise communication in common work-related scenarios and develop strategies that feel authentic to them.

Aim of the workshop:
To support participants in developing structured, clear and authentic workplace communication skills by using guided practice, role-play and reflection.

Objectives:
- To explore different types of workplace communication;
- To practise asking for clarification and confirming understanding;
- To support participants in expressing their needs or difficulties;
- To increase participant confidence in managing common communication scenarios at work.

Competences addressed:
- Critical thinking;
- Creative thinking;
- Teamwork;
- Digital competence;
- Literacy competence;
- Communication;
- Analytical skills;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:
- Brainstorming;

- Theoretical input;
- Script-based practice;
- Role-play;
- Work in small groups;
- Guided reflection and discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. <u>Welcome and introduction to the workshop (10 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator welcomes everyone and introduces the topic of workplace communication. As a playful introduction, the youth worker/eudcator may use a simple Hangman-style word puzzle, revealing the word “communication”. The youth worker/eudcator then explains that communication includes speaking, listening, writing, asking questions and managing misunderstandings. Participants are invited to name or choose from picture cards one communication situation that may happen during a normal workday or school day, such as receiving instructions, asking for help or joining a meeting. Sharing is voluntary and can be verbal, written or supported by cards.

Afterwards, volunteers are invited to share their examples with the group. The youth worker/educator writes them on a flipchart and highlights how communication is present in many different professional situations. This activity helps participants recognise that communication is essential and that it is a skill that can be structured and practised.

II. <u>Brainstorming and theoretical input: what makes communication effective? (15 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator starts with a question to the participants: “In your opinion, what makes communication at work clear and effective?” Participants share their ideas, and the youth worker/eudcator writes keywords on a flipchart (e.g., clarity, politeness, structure, listening, asking questions).

After the brainstorming, the youth worker/educator provides a short theoretical presentation with practical examples and demonstrations. For example, the youth worker/eudcator may show how the same sentence can sound different when spoken calmly or angrily, or how written instructions can reduce misunderstandings. The input could focus on:

- Types of workplace communication (verbal, written, non-verbal);
- The importance of clarity and structure in communication;
- The role of self-advocacy in communication;
- Managing misunderstandings as a normal part of professional life.

The focus is on reducing uncertainty and increasing predictability. Participants are encouraged to ask questions during this presentation.

III. Practice: asking for clarification (15 minutes)

Participants get printed cards, supported by icons that describe common workplace situations, such as receiving unclear instructions, not knowing how to complete a task or a part of it or not understanding a deadline for a task they need to perform. If participants do not have work experience, the youth worker/eudcator adapts the setting to school scenarios that mirror workplace situations.

The youth worker/educator provides a simple script template to support structured communication in these situations, for example:

- "Could you please clarify what you mean by...?"
- "I just want to confirm, the deadline is Friday, correct?"
- "Would it be possible to receive these instructions in writing?"

Participants work individually for a few minutes to adapt one sentence from the script. They may write it, point to it, practise it orally or ask for support. Then they practise very short exchanges in pairs or with the youth worker/eudcator. The activity is concluded with a short reflection on which phrases felt clear and realistic.

IV. Role-play activity: work-related communication situations (20 minutes)

Participants are put into small groups of three or four. Each group works on a different communication scenario, such as:

- Participating in a team meeting;
- Giving an update on a progress with a task;
- Responding to constructive feedback;
- Calmly explaining a mistake.

Each group has two roles: speaker and listener/observer. Each round lasts approximately 3-4 minutes, followed by a brief supportive feedback. Listeners are asked to focus on clarity and structure of communication instead of paying attention to eye contact or body language.
The youth worker/educator makes sure that participation remains voluntary and that participants may choose observer roles if they feel uncomfortable speaking. After the rotations, the group returns to plenary for a guided discussion.

V. Final reflection and takeaways (10 minutes)

In the final part of the workshop, participants are invited to individually reflect on the following questions:

- Which communication situations are most challenging for me?
- What have I learned today that could help me manage them?
- Do I prefer written or verbal communication in certain situations?

Participants are invited to write short answers on paper.

After the individual reflection, the youth worker/educator facilitates a closing discussion and emphasises the key message: workplace communication is not about changing who you are. It

is about using structured tools that allow your strengths to be clearly understood by others. The session closes with a summary of practical takeaways and encouragement to practise these strategies gradually in real-life situations.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 paper, pens, pencils, markers, whiteboard or flipchart papers, post-its, laptop, projector.

Background documents and further reading:

- Autism Speaks. (2023). Employment Tool Kit: https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit/employment-tool-kit

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- It is recommended that the youth worker/educator creates a predictable environment, especially during role-play activities. Psychological safety of the participants can be increased by using clear instructions, visible timing and voluntary participation.
- During script-based activities, youth workers/educators should encourage participants to personalise phrases so that communication remains authentic rather than memorised.

Workshop 4: Networking and teamwork skills

Workshop title: Networking and teamwork skills

Duration: 160 minutes

Background:
Many young people on the autism spectrum thrive in independent tasks but may find it challenging to engage in social aspects of the workplace, such as networking or teamwork. These challenges can stem from sensory sensitivities, social fatigue or different communication styles. However, with some structured support and low-pressure environments, these same individuals can build strong and authentic workplace connections. In this workshop the focus is to create space for rehearsing key networking situations and participate in cooperative group challenges using role-based formats that highlight autistic strengths and accommodate diverse processing styles.

Aim of the workshop:
To equip participants with practical networking and teamwork strategies through scripted role-play, interactive team activities and guided reflection to enhance workplace social integration.

Objectives:
- To use role-play activity for practicing basic networking conversations;
- To develop strategies for effective team participation and collaboration;
- To reflect on personal strengths in a teamwork context and explore how they match real-life work environments;
- To support participants in building confidence that navigates workplace social interactions.

Competences addressed:
- Communication;
- Teamwork;
- Critical thinking;
- Creative thinking;
- Analytical skills;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:
- Individual activity: Script preparation;
- Role-playing activity;
- Small group work;

- Group reflection and discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. <u>Welcome to the workshop and warm-up activity: Networking scenario practice (30 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator opens the workshop by welcoming everyone and inviting them to introduce themselves briefly. Then, he/she continues explaining the focus of the workshop and introducing the importance of networking and teamwork in today's job market. Participants are invited to a short warm-up activity related to the topic. The youth worker/educator gives each participant a "Networking Scenario Card" featuring one real-life situation. The scenarios in the card are:

- Meeting a potential employer at a job fair
- Being introduced to a co-worker
- Greeting a team supervisor

Along with the card, the youth worker/educator gives each participant a guided script template which is as follows: *"Hi, I'm [name]. I'm interested in [field]. I've worked on [strength]…")*,

Participants are instructed to draft a short networking introduction individually. They have 5 minutes for this. Then, the youth worker/educator asks them to form pairs and practice short exchanges (1 minute each). When they are done, the youth worker/educator facilitates a group reflection and also highlighting effective communication techniques and how to build from basic introductions.

II. <u>Role-play rotation: Practicing networking (50 minutes)</u>

Participants are divided into groups of four. The youth worker/educator informs them that in this part, they are going to do a role-play. Each group receives a printed "Networking Script Sheet" that contains three conversation stages:

- Introduction: "Hi, what do you do?"
- Follow-up: "That's interesting, I also enjoy…"
- Connection: "Would you like to connect on LinkedIn?"

The youth worker/educator prepares the script in detail beforehand according to the reality in local/national context. The role play has four roles (one per each group member): Speaker, Listener, Observer (the one who takes notes on clarity, authenticity) and Timekeeper (manages timing of each round). Participants are informed that they have to repeat the role play in their groups, hence rotate in order for each member to try different roles. In each round, participants take on one of four roles. Participants have to change/rotate roles every 8 minutes, ensuring everyone tries each role. The youth worker/educator moves between groups to offer support, encouragement and adaptations where needed. In the end, the youth worker/educator invites all groups to join the plenary and briefly share how they felt during the role play.

III. Group work: Building a paper tower (40 minutes)

Participants stay in groups of four for another task. If the group is smaller or if participants have higher support needs, the number of roles can be reduced. In groups of two, the youth worker/eudcator may reduce the roles at all and simply instruct the participants to "work as peers". This time they are tasked with building the tallest free-standing paper tower using only paper, tape and scissors. If roles are used, each participant is assigned a defined role that mirrors typical workplace responsibilities:

- Architect (planner/visionary)
- Detail Inspector (quality assurance)
- Materials Manager (organiser/logistics)
- Presenter (spokesperson)

The youth worker/educator informs them that they have 20 minutes to do this task and respect their roles. The activity is followed by brief team presentations, where each team explains how they worked together. The youth worker/educator finishes with the activity by having a short debrief that focuses on role-fit, contribution and collaboration experience.

IV. Group reflection and discussion on teamwork strengths and applications (40 minutes)

Participants return to the plenary for a reflection on the teamwork experience and discuss how their individual strengths can contribute to various team settings. The youth worker/educator presents three guiding questions and writes them on a flipchart:

- During the tower challenge, what moments made you feel like you were contributing at your best?
- Was there a task someone else did well that you found difficult? What does that say about your natural strengths?
- Which team role felt most comfortable to you? Which one felt challenging?
- In general, what makes teamwork easier or harder for you?

The youth worker/educator moderates an open discussion, where he/she encourages participants to share insights and compare different strengths. On a flipchart paper, the youth worker/educator draws four basic team contribution categories: Planners, Organisers, Doers, Detail Checkers. Participants are invited to come up and write their names or add sticky notes under the role(s) they feel represent them best. This visualises the diversity of the group and affirms that each style matters.

To close the session, the youth worker/educator summarises the key idea behind the workshop and all the activities. The workshop closes with the following quote in the flipchart/projector: "You don't need to be good at everything. Being aware of your strengths and how they fit into a team is what matters in a professional setting."

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its,

laptop, projector, networking scenario cards, networking script sheets, paper (for tower), tape, scissors for each group.

Background documents and further reading:

- Cross River Therapy. (n.d.). Legal advocacy for autism: Team roles. https://www.crossrivertherapy.com/articles/legal-advocacy-for-autism
- Autism Society. (n.d.). Workplace accommodations. https://autismsociety.org/living-with-autism/how-to-support-adults/social-skills/

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- During the role-play rounds, the youth worker/educator is advised to create a calm environment by minimising background noise and offering sensory tools (e.g. fidget items, noise-cancelling headphones) for those who may need them.
- When assigning roles for the teamwork challenge, it is recommended to allow participants to express preferences (if possible) as it helps avoid discomfort and increases confidence. Depending on the group size and participants' support needs, roles can be simplified, combined or removed. In small groups, participants can simply work as peers.
- It's helpful to print out example scripts and role descriptions on coloured cards to support visual learners and reduce cognitive load during group activities.

Workshop 5: Coping strategies for sensory sensitivities at work

Workshop title: Coping strategies for sensory sensitivities at work

Duration: 150 minutes

Background:
Many young people on the autism spectrum can have sensitivities related to noise, light, smells, textures or crowded environments. These sensory factors are sometimes present in the workplaces, and they can have a big impact on their concentration, productivity and emotional control. Open office spaces, unexpected sounds, strong scents or bright lights can make them feel stressed, tired or overwhelmed. At the same time, if sensory needs are recognised and managed in a proactive way, autistic employees can do their tasks consistently and sustainably. So, learning about the individual sensory triggers and developing coping strategies is an important element in getting ready for the work and keeping the job.
This workshop focuses on helping participants identify what sensory preferences and challenges they have and how to deal with them in a practical way. It also explores how to request reasonable accommodations in a respectful and confidential way. It also emphasises that sensory needs are real and can be managed, and that preparing ahead helps with long-term professional success.

Aim of the workshop:
To help participants recognise their sensory sensitivities and learn how to deal with them in a way that enhances their comfort, focus and sustainability in the workplace environment.

Objectives:
- To help participants to become more aware of their own sensory triggers and preferences;
- To look into common sensory challenges in work environments;
- To find useful ways and strategies to cope and self-regulate;
- To explain the idea of reasonable sensory accommodations;
- To help participants in developing their own personal sensory coping plan.

Competences addressed:
- Critical thinking;
- Teamwork;
- Literacy competence;
- Communication;
- Analytical skills;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:

- Brainstorming;
- Individual reflection activity;
- Theoretical input;
- Small group work;
- Scenario-based problem solving;
- Personal action planning;
- Group discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. <u>Welcome and sensory awareness warm-up (20 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator welcomes everyone and introduces the topic of sensory experiences at work. He/she stresses that everyone has different sensory preferences and that knowing them helps improve wellbeing and performance. For the warm-up activity, participants receive a "Sensory reflection sheet" that is divided into five categories:

- Sound
- Light
- Smell
- Touch/Texture
- Movement/Space

Participants are invited to reflect individually on these categories of the stimuli and mark:

- What helps me concentrate?
- What distracts or overwhelms me?

They have approximately 10 minutes for this reflection. Afterwards, volunteers may share one insight, and the youth worker/educator highlights the diversity of sensory experiences. The youth worker/educator emphasises that sharing is voluntary.

II. <u>Brainstorming and theoretical input: Sensory challenges at work (30 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator starts the brainstorming activity by asking the question: "What sensory situations might be challenging for you in a workplace?" to get the participants involved into the discussion.

Participants provide examples, such as:

- Too loud noises in the office
- When I get interrupted when concentrating on a task
- Bright lights
- Strong smells
- Busy meeting rooms

The youth worker/educator uses a flip chart to write these examples down.

After all ideas are collected, the youth worker/educator gives a short theoretical explanation about:

- What it means to be sensory sensitive;
- How sensory overload can impact focus and handling emotions at the workplace;
- The distinction between short-term discomfort and prolonged overload;
- The importance of having proactive ways to deal with sensory challenges.

The youth worker/educator also briefly explains what reasonable accommodations for sensory needs are (noise-cancelling headphones, flexible seating, written instructions, adjusted lighting). The youth worker/ educator invites participants to ask clarifying questions.

III. Small group work: Toolbox for coping strategy (35 minutes)

Participants are divided into small groups of three or four and each group receives a "Workplace sensory scenario card" that describes a situation, for example:

- You work in an open office where there is a constant background noise;
- Your workplace has bright fluorescent lighting;
- The team meetings your need to attend are long and many colleagues participate in them;
- There are strong smells in the office that make it difficult to concentrate.

The youth worker/educator explains the task to the group and tells them that they need to identify:

- What sensory difficulty is present?
- What immediate coping strategies could help?
- What longer-term accommodation might be requested?

Each group receives a sheet of paper to note down their ideas.

After 20 minutes, each group briefly presents their "Coping strategy toolbox". When reflecting on the group proposals, the youth worker/educator highlights practical and realistic solutions such as:

- Using headphones in noisy environment;
- Taking short regulation breaks;
- Requesting written meeting summaries;
- Adjusting seating position;
- Using desk lamps instead of overhead lighting.

IV. Development of personal coping plan (35 minutes)

In this part of the workshop, participants work individually on creating their own "Personal sensory coping plan". For this they receive a worksheet that includes the following questions that they are asked to answer:

- What are my main sensory triggers?
- What early signs can I notice when I am becoming overwhelmed?
- What immediate coping strategies can I use to improve the situation?

- What preventive long-term strategies can help me?
- Which possible workplace accommodations could I request in the workplace?

Participants are given approximately 25 minutes to complete this worksheet.

The youth worker/educator moves around the room and provides support to the participants, if needed.
Those participants who feel comfortable may share one of their strategies in the plenary.

V. <u>Final reflection and discussion (30 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator initiates the discussion by using the following guiding questions:

- Which of the discussed strategies feel most realistic for you?
- What might make it difficult to use these coping strategies at work?
- How could you communicate your sensory needs in the workplace respectfully?

The youth worker/educator reinforces the key message by stressing that managing sensory sensitivities is not a sign of weakness. Instead, it shows the self-awareness of the individual and their professional responsibility and their support to sustainable employment. The workshop closes with a short summary and encouragement to keep and regularly update the personal coping plan and to use it as a practical resource for future workplaces.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, printed Sensory reflection sheet for each participant, Workplace sensory scenario card, Personal sensory coping plan template for each participant, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, laptop, projector.

Background documents and further reading:

- Autism and sensory processing: https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/about-autism/sensory-processing
- Accommodating employees on the autism spectrum: https://askjan.org/disabilities/Autism-Spectrum.cfm

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- It is recommended that the youth worker/educator creates a calm workshop space that in itself is an example of a space that has the necessary accommodations. The level of noise, brightness of lights need to be so that the participants feel comfortable. On top of this, participants should not be forced to disclose their personal sensitivity triggers. It should be always up to the participant if they want to share.
- When talking about the workplace accommodations, the youth worker/educator should make sure that the examples they use are relevant to the local job market and the legal system.

Workshop 6: Setting achievable career objectives and creating action plans

Workshop title: Setting achievable career objectives and creating action plans

Duration: 120 minutes

Background:
Young people with autism often have clear interests, passions or long-term career ideas, but may experience difficulties when it comes to planning, prioritising tasks or breaking larger goals into manageable steps. Things like executive functioning challenges, anxiety around uncertainty and difficulties with time management can make career planning feel overwhelming, even when motivation is high. This workshop focuses on supporting participants to transform their interests and aspirations into realistic and achievable career objectives. In this workshop, participants will go through different activities and will be guided step-by-step to set concrete goals and develop action plans that respect their individual pace, strengths and support needs. The workshop emphasises that career development is a gradual process and that progress is built through small and meaningful steps rather than immediate outcomes.

Aim of the workshop:
To support participants in setting realistic career objectives and developing action plans that help them move from personal interests and aspirations toward concrete employment-related goals.

Objectives:
- To support participants in identifying career interests and aspirations;
- To introduce a goal-setting framework adapted to the needs of autistic youth;
- To support participants in translating broad career ideas into specific and achievable objectives;
- To support participants in developing personalised action plans that include steps, timelines and possible support needs.

Competences addressed:
- Critical thinking;
- Problem solving;
- Teamwork;
- Literacy competence;
- Communication;
- Analytical skills;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:

- Individual reflection “Dream workday”;
- Theoretical input;
- Individual and pair work;
- Group sharing and discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. <u>Introduction to the topic and individual reflection (20 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator welcomes participants to the workshop and introduces the topic. He/she explains that the workshop is designed to explore how personal interests and ideas can be transformed into realistic career goals and action steps. After this introduction, participants are invited to take part in a short individual reflection activity called “Dream Workday”. Each participant receives an A4 sheet and pencils/pens and is asked to imagine a normal working day in a job they would enjoy. They are encouraged to reflect on questions such as:

- What am I doing during the day?
- Where am I working?
- Who am I working with?
- What tasks do I enjoy the most?

Participants can write keywords, draw or combine both, depending on their preference. After 10 minutes, the youth worker/educator invites volunteers to share their “Dream Workday”. Then, the youth worker/educator highlights common themes, such as preferred environments, types of tasks or working styles, and explains that these elements are important starting points for setting career objectives.

II. <u>Theoretical input: Setting achievable career goals (25 minutes)</u>

After the reflection activity, the youth worker/educator introduces the concept of goal setting and explains why clear and structured objectives are important for career development. The youth worker/educator presents the SMART framework adapted for autism: Specific, Measurable, Autistic-friendly (sensory/routine needs), Realistic, Time-bound. The adaptation of this framework is done by consulting the *Employment Tool Kit by Autism Speaks (2023): Employment Tool Kit. (2023). In Autism Speaks. Retrieved December 5, 2025, from <u>https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit/employment-tool-kit</u>*

The youth worker/educator explains the key principles of setting achievable goals, focusing on clarity, realism and structure. He/she provides few examples to show the difference between broad goals such as “I want a good job” and more concrete goals such as “I want to complete a basic IT course within six months to prepare for an entry-level position”.

The youth worker/educator encourages participants to use a few minutes to reflect on how goals can be adapted to include personal working preferences, sensory needs, routines and support requirements. For this short reflection, he/she again provides some examples to illustrate how goals can include accommodations or supportive conditions, such as working in a quiet environment or following a fixed schedule. The youth worker/educator also leaves some time for questions and clarifications.

III. Individual and pair work: From interests to objectives when setting creating career goals (35 minutes)

Participants receive a worksheet that is designed to support them in transforming their interests into concrete career objectives. The worksheet guides them through several steps: identifying an interest or career idea, defining what they would like to achieve and describing what success would look like in practical terms. Participants are instructed to work individually for approximately 20–25 minutes. The "Dream-to-Plan Worksheet" contains the following content:

- Section 1: convert your dream job to 3 SMART goals.
- Section 2: list the required skills/steps.
- Section 3: necessary accommodations (for instance quiet study time, visual schedules).

The youth worker/educator goes around the room to offer individual support and clarification where needed. After completing the worksheet, participants are asked to form pairs and share one of their objectives with their partner. The partner's role is to listen and help checking whether the objective is clear, realistic and understandable. This peer exchange is done to help participants practice explaining their goals in a safe setting.

IV. Group sharing and Discussion: Developing action plans and identifying possible challenges (40 minutes)

In the final activity, participants are invited to develop a simple action plan based on one of their career objectives. They are given A3 paper and pencils, pens or other materials to work. They are instructed to create a visual timeline for the next few months. The timeline includes concrete steps to be taken, including relevant courses to attend, skills to develop or experiences to gain. Participants are also asked to reflect on possible challenges or obstacles they might face and to identify practical solutions or support strategies for each challenge. For example, a challenge such as anxiety about interviews may be paired with a solution such as practising with a trusted person or using written notes. After 25 minutes of individual work, the group comes together in the plenary to present. Participants are invited to share one step from their action plan and one challenge with its proposed solution. The youth worker/educator continues with a short discussion highlighting common themes and emphasises the idea that challenges are a normal part of the process and can be managed through planning and support.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its, laptop, projector, prepared "Dream Workday" postcards or templates, goal-setting worksheets, action-plan timeline templates.

Background documents and further reading:

- Employment Tool Kit. (2023). In Autism Speaks. Retrieved December 5, 2025, from https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit/employment-tool-kit
- Autism Speaks. (n.d.). Employment and career planning resources. https://www.autismspeaks.org/
- National Autistic Society. (n.d.). Preparing for work and employment. https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- It is recommended that the youth worker/educator prepares visual examples of completed goal-setting worksheets and action-plan timelines in advance, as concrete models support participants in understanding how to break down career objectives into manageable and practical steps.
- During the action-planning activity, the youth worker/educator should allow flexibility in how participants express their plans (drawing, keywords, symbols or colours), ensuring that different planning styles and support needs are respected.

Workshop 7: Effective job searching tips and resume writing techniques

Workshop title: Effective job searching tips and resume writing techniques

Duration: 150 minutes

Background:
Searching for a job can be overwhelming for many young people, but young people with autism often face additional challenges related to unstructured job advertisements, unclear requirements and generic application processes that do not recognise neurodiverse strengths. Traditional CV formats and job-search advice frequently prioritise self-promotion, flexibility and social confidence, which can disadvantage candidates within the autism spectrum and fail to reflect their real competences. This workshop supports participants in developing a structured and strengths-based approach to job searching and applying. It focuses on helping them to identify suitable roles, analyse job advertisements in a clear and concrete way, and create CVs that highlight skills, achievements and practical experience rather than abstract personality traits. The workshop emphasises that effective job searching is a process that can be learned, practised and adapted to individual needs.

Aim of the workshop:
To support participants in developing structured job-search strategies as well as in creating clear and strengths-based CVs that increases their chances of finding and applying for suitable employment opportunities.

Objectives:
- To support participants in identifying job opportunities that match their strengths and preferences;
- To develop participants' ability to analyse job advertisements and recognise key requirements;
- To support participants in creating CVs that focus on skills, achievements and practical experience;
- To familiarise participants with the steps involved in submitting a complete job application.

Competences addressed:
- Critical thinking;
- Problem solving;
- Digital competence;
- Literacy competence;
- Communication;
- Analytical skills;

- Personal, social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:

- Individual work – Job match;
- Theoretical input;
- Individual work
- Sharing in pairs;
- Group discussion and reflection.

Workshop flow:

I. <u>Introduction to the topic and warm-up activity "Job Match" (30 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator welcomes participants to the workshop and introduces the topic. The youth worker/educator explains that the workshop will explore how to search for jobs in an organised way and how to present skills clearly in a CV. This follows with a warm-up activity, where participants receive a few printed job advertisements indicating different types of roles such as data entry assistant, library assistant, junior graphic support, and so on. Participants are asked to work individually and highlight words or phrases in the advertisements that match their own strengths, skills or preferences such as attention to detail, routine tasks, working independently and so on. After about 5 minutes of individual reflection, participants are asked to form pairs and briefly share what they highlighted and why. Then, the youth worker/educator facilitates a short plenary discussion, emphasising that matching personal strengths to job requirements is the first and most important step in effective job searching.

II. <u>Theoretical input: Structured and autism-friendly job search strategies (20 minutes)</u>

After the warm-up activity, the youth worker/educator continues with a theoretical input related to approaches to job searching that is suitable for young people with autism. The input includes relevant content for breaking the job-search process into clear and manageable steps, such as identifying relevant keywords, researching employers, choosing appropriate job platforms, keeping track of applications and planning follow-ups.

The youth worker/educator explains how very often job advertisements contain key information that can be identified through careful reading, rather than intuition and demonstrates how to use highlighting or colour-coding to make requirements more visible. The youth worker/educator also introduces the concept of "skills and achievement focused CVs", explaining that employers value evidence of what a person can do rather than general descriptions.

Participants are encouraged to ask questions and reflect on which parts of the job-search process feel most challenging to them. The source for preparing the input is from the following source:

- Ennaglobal. (2024, August 9). A guide to Tailoring your CV: Advice for neurodivergent Job seekers. Enna Global. https://enna.org/a-guide-to-tailoring-your-cv-advice-for-neurodivergent-job-seekers/

III. Resume building: Creating a strengths-based CV (40 minutes)

Each participant receives a prepared CV template designed to highlight skills, projects, achievements and relevant experience, including non-formal learning, volunteering or school-based projects. The youth worker/educator explains each section of the template and provides examples of how to describe achievements in a concrete and clear way. Participants are instructed to work individually for approximately 30 minutes and write down their strengths and experiences into the CV template. The youth worker/educator goes around the room to offer individual support, clarification and reassurance where needed. Afterwards, participants are invited to form pairs and exchange their CVs. The youth worker/educator highlights the following criteria for reviewing the CVs so that they can give clear feedback to each other: clarity, relevance and strengths-based language. The aim of this activity is not to criticise but to help participants see their CVs from another perspective. The sharing lasts about 5-10 minutes.

IV. Job application simulation and reflection (60 minutes)

In the final activity, participants are invited to simulate a complete job application process. The youth worker/educator chooses some examples of job advertisements from the existing portals at the local level or create new ones. Each participant selects one job advertisement from the provided examples and adapts their CV accordingly by adjusting key sections or bullet points. Participants are also introduced to a short cover-letter template and asked to write a brief text explaining why they are interested in the role and how their skills match the position. The emphasis is placed on clarity and relevance rather than length or formal language. They have 40 minutes to do this task.

When everyone is done, the youth worker/educator organises a short “application gallery” where participants can display their CVs or application materials. The group takes a short walk around the room to see all the presented applications. Then, the youth worker/educator follows with a brief discussion on what made certain applications clear, convincing or easy to understand. The workshop concludes with a short reflection on next steps participants can take after the workshop.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its, laptop, projector, Printed job advertisements, CV templates, cover-letter templates.

Background documents and further reading:

- Ennaglobal. (2024, August 9). A guide to Tailoring your CV: Advice for neurodivergent Job seekers. Enna Global. https://enna.org/a-guide-to-tailoring-your-cv-advice-for-neurodivergent-job-seekers/
- National Autistic Society. (n.d.). *Employment resources for autistic people*, *Retrieved from:* https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- It is recommended that the youth worker/educator selects some real and locally relevant job advertisements in advance, as working with realistic examples helps participants better understand how job searching works in practice.
- During the CV-building activity, the youth worker/educator should allow sufficient time for individual work and offer one-to-one support where needed, as writing about personal achievements can be challenging and requires reassurance and guidance.

Workshop 8: Simulated interview sessions with feedback

Workshop title: Simulated interview sessions with feedback

Duration: 160 minutes

Background:
For young people on the autism spectrum, the job interviews are often one of the most stressful parts of the employment process. Interviews usually require spontaneous responses, including answers to open-ended questions, non-verbal communication and presenting oneself in a way that may not come naturally to people with autism. On top of this, interview questions are often quite abstract, like "Tell me about yourself" or "What are your weaknesses?" This can make a person with autism feel confused or anxious. At the same time, many autistic individuals have strong technical skills, are reliable and honest, and these are qualities that employers highly value. In the safe environment of the workshop, participants will work on structured preparation and practice in a safe environment, so that they can significantly improve their performance in the job interviews.
This workshop is designed to lower job interview anxiety through predictability and testing the possible interview frameworks, as well as getting constructive feedback in a way that is supportive and based on strengths. The objective is not to show participants how to mask or hide their personality traits, but rather how to make their answers clear and how to communicate their strong sides.

Aim of the workshop:
To support participants in preparing for job interviews using structured practice, simulated interviews and providing constructive feedback in a safe and supportive environment.

Objectives:
- To introduce to participants the most common interview formats and question types;
- To allow practising answers using clear interview frameworks;
- To increase participants' confidence in responding to questions;
- To provide and receive constructive feedback;
- To reduce anxiety related to interview situations through rehearsal and predictability.

Competences addressed:
- Critical thinking;
- Creative thinking;
- Teamwork;
- Communication;
- Personal and social competence.

Methodology and methods:

- Brainstorming;
- Theoretical input;
- Role-play simulations;
- Peer feedback;
- Self-reflection activity;
- Group discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. <u>Welcome and warm-up discussion: what is a job interview? (20 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator welcomes participants and introduces them to the topic of job interviews. He/she begins the workshop with a short brainstorming activity: "What do you think employers want to understand during an interview?" Participants are invited to share their ideas, which the youth worker/educator writes on a flipchart. Possible answers can be: they want to know more about a person's skills, reliability, ability to work in a team, motivation, problem-solving skills.

The youth worker/educator explains that an interview is a structured conversation where the employer assesses suitability of the candidate for a specific role, and where candidates demonstrate their competences and motivation. This introduction helps to clarify the process, and it reduces uncertainty related to the interviews.

II. <u>Theoretical input: interview structure (30 minutes)</u>

Using slides, the youth worker/educator provides an overview of (1) the interview types (e.g., in-person, online, panel, structured interviews), as well as (2) the main categories of questions that are used in the job interviews, for example:

- Personal introduction ("Tell me about yourself");
- Skills and experience;
- Problem-solving or behavioural questions;
- Candidate's strengths and weaknesses;
- Motivation to work in the organisation and interest in the role.

The youth worker/educator introduces a simple structured answer method inspired by common interview preparation tools: **S.T.A.R. structure (Situation – Task – Action – Result),** by showing participants how to structure their answers by elaborating on:

- Situation: describe the context;
- Task: explain your responsibility;
- Action: describe what you did;
- Result: share the outcome.

The youth worker/educator provides a clear example and breaks the structure down letter-by-letter. If something is not clear, participants are encouraged to ask clarifying questions.

III. Individual preparation: building structured answers (25 minutes)

For the individual work participants receive a worksheet that contains 4–5 common interview questions, such as:

- Please describe your education, experience and interests that are relevant to this position.
- Can you describe a specific situation where you solved a problem? Explain, what was the problem, what did you do, and what was the result?
- What are your strengths that would help you in this job? Please give one or two examples.
- What interests you about this role and this organisation? You can mention tasks, environment or skills you would like to use.

Participants are instructed to draft their responses individually using the **S.T.A.R.** format introduced above or another clear structure. They are given approximately 20 minutes. The youth worker/educator moves around the room to provide guidance and reassurance.

IV. Simulated interview rounds (60 minutes)

Participants are divided into small groups of three and assigned the roles of:

- Interviewer
- Candidate
- Observer

Each round of the interview lasts approximately 10–12 minutes, followed by 5 minutes feedback from each participant. In order to support participants, the youth worker/educator provides printed interview question sheets to the interviewers and structured feedback templates to the observers.

Observers are asked to specifically focus on:

- Clarity of the questions and answers,
- Relevance of the provided examples,
- Confidence and calmness of the interviewee,
- Use of concrete details.

Participants rotate the roles after the round is completed, so that each of them experiences the interview from all three perspectives. The youth worker/educator monitors the groups to ensure psychological safety and to encourage supportive communication within the group. Participants who prefer gradual exposure may choose to be an observer during the first round.

V. Feedback and reflection activity (25 minutes)

The group returns to plenary. The youth worker/educator facilitates a reflection discussion using guiding questions:

- What felt easier than expected?

- What was challenging?
- Did structured answers help?
- What strategy reduces anxiety?

Participants are encouraged to share one improvement they noticed in themselves. The youth worker/educator emphasises that interviews improve with practice and that clarity and preparation are more important than perfection.

VI. Closing exercise: personal interview checklist (10 minutes)

Each participant receives a short checklist template titled "My interview preparation checklist". It includes pre-filled ideas and space to be filled by the participant on the following:

- Research on the company to which the person is applying;
- Structured examples that can be used during the interview;
- Prepared questions to the employer;
- Plan for the travel and logistics to the interview;
- Useful calming strategies that can be used before the interview.

The youth worker/educator shortly explains the categories included in the checklist and suggests ideas for filling it in. Participants are encouraged to fill in this checklist before their interviews and use it as a tool to organise their thoughts and do the necessary preparations.
The youth worker/educator closes the workshop with the key message that job interviews are situations that can be prepared for and skills of presentation and answering the questions can be practised.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, interview, structured feedback and checklist templates printed for each participant, laptop, projector.

Background documents and further reading:

- STAR interview response technique: https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/how-to-use-the-star-interview-response-technique

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- It is recommended that the youth worker/educator creates a predictable and calm environment and clearly explains expectations and timing before each round. Participants should not be pressured into participation, observer roles and gradual exposure may be used to increase their psychological safety.
- If possible, the youth worker/educator may invite external professionals or employers to conduct mock interviews in later stages of the process, when participants have built sufficient confidence.

Workshop 9: Legal rights and advocacy in the workplace

Workshop title: Legal rights and advocacy in the workplace

Duration: 130 minutes

Background:
Young people with autism often enter the labour market without clear information about their legal rights or the protections available to them in the workplace. This lack of knowledge can lead to uncertainty, fear of speaking up or acceptance of unsuitable working conditions, including discrimination or the absence of necessary accommodations. This workshop is designed with the main aim of supporting the empowerment of participants in increasing their awareness of workplace rights and strengthening their ability to advocate for themselves in a respectful and confident way. By combining legal information with practical and scripted advocacy exercises, the workshop helps participants understand that asking for support is legitimate, lawful and often essential for successful and sustainable employment.

Aim of the workshop:
To support participants in understanding their workplace rights as well as developing practical self-advocacy skills for requesting accommodations and addressing challenges in professional settings.

Objectives:
- To introduce participants to key legal rights related to employment and disability;
- To familiarise participants with common workplace accommodations relevant for autistic employees;
- To support participants in practising self-advocacy conversations in a safe environment;
- To enable participants to reflect on and identify their own advocacy needs.

Competences addressed:
- Advocacy competence;
- Critical thinking;
- Literacy competence;
- Communication;
- Problem solving;
- Analytical skills;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:
- Interactive quiz;
- Theoretical input;

- Role-play exercises;
- Individual reflection;
- Group discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. <u>Welcome and introduction to the topic (10 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator welcomes participants to the workshop and invites them to briefly introduce themselves. Then, he/she introduces the topic of workplace rights and advocacy, and explains that the workshop will focus on understanding legal protections and practising how to speak up respectfully and confidently at work.

II. <u>Interactive quiz: True or Myth (15 minutes)</u>

The initial activity that the youth worker/educator has prepared is a "True or Myth?" quiz. Participants receive 2 cards or signs labelled with the word "True" and "Myth." The youth worker/educator explains that in the next few minutes, he/she will read out a series of statements and participants will respond by holding up one of the cards, to show their opinion. The statements are related to the legal rights and advocacy in the workplace, such as:

- An employer must not discriminate against someone because of a disability.
- You are required to disclose autism during a job interview.
- Reasonable accommodations can include changes to the work environment or communication.

Participants respond by holding up the card that they think is correct. After each statement, the youth worker/educator briefly clarifies the answer and invites the group to share their comments.

III. <u>Theoretical input: Understanding workplace rights and accommodations (25 minutes)</u>

After the quiz, the youth worker/educator continues with theoretical input on the topic. He/she provides an overview of key workplace rights for employees with autism. The input focuses on general principles that apply across different national contexts, such as protection from discrimination, the right to reasonable accommodations and the voluntary nature of disability disclosure. Some of the core protections that are presented and explained in this part are:

- Anti-discrimination laws (no rejection due to disability)
- Reasonable accommodations (quiet space, clear instructions, flexible hours)
- Disclosure rights (optional, timing strategies)
- Examples from real cases

Participants are invited to note down two or three rights or accommodations that feel most relevant to their own situation. They are also encouraged to ask for clarification questions throughout the input.

IV. Advocacy role-play carousel: Practising how to speak up (40 minutes)

In this activity, the youth worker/educator sets up several role-play stations around the room, where each represents a common workplace situation where self-advocacy may be needed. Examples include the following:

- Requesting quiet workspace
- Asking for written instructions
- Addressing sensory overload during meetings
- Responding to unfair feedback

Participants are invited to work in pairs and rotate between the stations. At each station, they receive short scenario descriptions and prepared advocacy script cards with respectful and clear phrasing. Each role-play lasts approximately 8 minutes, allowing participants to practise both speaking and listening roles. The youth worker/educator goes around to visit groups and offer encouragement, adjusting scripts when needed and reminding participants that there is no single "correct" way to advocate. He/she highlights that the focus is on clarity, calm communication and self-respect.

V. Personal advocacy reflection and group discussion (40 minutes)

For the final activity, participants are invited to work individually on a short reflection task. They are invited to think about their future workplace and identify one or two situations where they might need to advocate for themselves. They are invited to take papers, pencils/pens or whatever they need. The youth worker/educator emphasises that they should note what kind of support or accommodation could help them and how they might ask for it by using language that feels comfortable. This reflection lasts approximately 10-15 minutes. After the individual reflection, the youth worker/educator continues with a plenary discussion. Participants who feel comfortable are invited to share their reflections or insights from the role-play activities. Guiding questions for the discussion include the following:

- What felt easiest or hardest about speaking up?
- What kind of support would make work more manageable for you?
- Who could you approach first if you needed help at work?

The youth worker/educator concludes the workshop by summarising key messages and briefly mentioning relevant local or national support organisations where participants can seek advice if needed.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its, laptop, projector, printed "True/Myth" statements, role-play scenario cards, advocacy script cards.

Background documents and further reading:

- Legal advocacy for autism: What you need to know. (n.d.). https://www.crossrivertherapy.com/articles/legal-advocacy-for-autism
- European Commission: Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/index_en

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- It is recommended that the youth worker/educator prepares examples and explanations of workplace rights in clear and simple language and adapts them to the national legal context of the participants where relevant.
- During the role-play activities, the youth worker/educator should emphasise that advocacy can be practised gradually and adapted to personal comfort levels. This allows participants to choose the speaking roles later if they prefer to observe first and enter gradually into the activity.

Workshop 10: Addressing common workplace challenges

Workshop title: Addressing common workplace challenges

Duration: 120 minutes

Background:
Getting and keeping a job requires more than just performing tasks well. Many young people on the autism spectrum may have challenges related to workplace routines and social expectations, have difficulties with interpretation of feedback that they receive, or dealing with unexpected changes. Experiencing these challenges does not mean that the person is not capable, it just shows that there are differences in how the person communicates, processes sensory information or understands the workplace culture. Common challenges at the workplace may include: misinterpretation of the instructions; difficulties with multitasking or prioritisation; reactivity to sudden changes and taking constructive feedback as criticism.
These situations can lead to stress or job instability, if the person experiencing them does not have a clear plan on how to deal with them. But with the right tools, problem-solving strategies and self-awareness, many of these challenges can be managed effectively. This workshop focuses on identifying the workplace challenges and developing proactive strategies to address them.

Aim of the workshop:
To support participants in recognising the workplace challenges and developing problem-solving strategies that allows them to be more resilient and job sustainable in their job.

Objectives:
- To identify workplace challenges that can be experienced by autistic employees;
- To develop structured approaches that can be applied to manage misunderstandings;
- To practise use of problem-solving tools in simulated scenarios;
- To support participants in building their own workplace coping strategy.

Competences addressed:
- Critical thinking;
- Teamwork;
- Communication;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:
- Scenario-based group work;
- Role-play exercises;
- Structured problem-solving model;

- Individual reflection;
- Group discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. <u>Welcome and warm-up: "challenge mapping" (20 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator welcomes participants and introduces them to the topic of workplace challenges. He/she explains that challenges at work are normal for everyone and that learning how to manage those increases professional confidence.

Participants are asked to write down one workplace situation that might feel challenging to them (it can be real or imagined). They have approximately 5–7 minutes for this individual reflection. After the reflection exercise, volunteers are asked to share some examples. The youth worker/educator writes them on a flipchart and groups them into categories, for example:

- Misunderstandings in communication;
- Difficulties to manage time;
- Social interactions;
- Unexpected changes.

This visual mapping helps participants to group the challenges, normalize them and show shared experiences.

II. <u>Theoretical input: problem-solving approach (30 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator introduces a practical structure for addressing workplace challenges, using the following model: **STOP–THINK–PLAN–ACT–REFLECT.** In this model, each step means the following:

- STOP: making a pause before reacting to what is happening;
- THINK: understanding rationally what is actually happening;
- PLAN: choosing a calm response;
- ACT: delivering the response respectfully;
- REFLECT: thinking of what worked and what could improve next time.

The youth worker/educator provides a clear example, based on a work-related situation, e.g., a supervisor gives you feedback that part of your work needs to be redone. The youth worker/educator demonstrates how to apply the above-mentioned model in this situation to react calmly rather than to react defensively. After the introduction of the model and example, participants are encouraged to ask questions and share their own reflections on how this structure can help them reduce their emotional response.

III. <u>Problem-solving work in small groups (40 minutes)</u>

The participants are split into small groups of three or four. Each group receives a scenario to work on, for example:

- You are already working on a task when an additional task is assigned to you, and it makes you feel overwhelmed;
- One of your colleagues tells a joke that makes you feel bad;
- Your supervisor changes the deadline of the task you are working on without warning;
- Your colleagues do not invite you to participate in informal team conversations.

Each group is asked to:

1. Discuss the described situation and identify what the challenge is;
2. Apply the STOP–THINK–PLAN–ACT–REFLECT model to the situation;
3. Prepare a short explanation of the proposed solution.

Groups have approximately 25 minutes for discussion and preparation. Then each group briefly presents their structured response to the others. The youth worker/educator highlights calm communication, clarification strategies and realistic solutions.

IV. Individual reflection: my own workplace challenge plan (20 minutes)

In the beginning of the activity participants receive a short worksheet titled: "My workplace challenge plan". The worksheet includes the following titles and space for description of the individual reflections:

- One challenge that I may face in the workplace;
- What signs will show that I am feeling stressed;
- What strategy can I apply when I feel that stress is building;
- Who could I ask for support;
- One reminder to myself.

Participants work individually for approximately 15 minutes. If there are volunteers who want to share the outcome of their reflection, the youth worker/educator invites them to do so.

V. Closing discussion and key message (10 minutes)

The workshop ends with the youth worker/educator facilitating a short closing discussion in which the participants are invited to share the following:

- What strategy felt most useful to them,
- How can a structured approach to challenging situations reduce stress in the workplace,
- What can help to stay calm during difficulties.

The youth worker/educator concludes the workshop with the key message that the workplace challenges can be effectively managed if they are approached with structure and clarity. He/she also stresses that asking for clarification or support is a professional approach, not a weakness.

Materials needed: A4 paper, pens, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, printed worksheet "My workplace challenge plan" for each participant, laptop, projector.

Background documents and further reading:

- Employment success tool: An evidence-based guide by Autism CRC: https://worktogethernc.com/wp-content/uploads/Integrated_Employment_Success_Tool.pdf

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- It is recommended that the youth worker/educator emphasises that the workplace challenges are part of the professional environment, and it is essential that he/she remains neutral and solution-focused during the discussions. The suggested scenarios should be adapted to the realities of the local labour market.

Workshop 11: Managing time and staying organised at work

Workshop title: Managing time and staying organised at work

Duration: 150 minutes

Background:
To maintain employment, several essential competences are needed, and one of them is time management. Many young people on the autism spectrum demonstrate strong focus and dedication, especially when they are working on tasks that are aligned with their interests. However, they may face challenges when they need to deal with multiple tasks at the same time, when deadlines overlap or there is an unexpected shift in priorities. Executive functioning differences of autistic individuals can affect planning, initiation of tasks, switching between several tasks or estimating how long a task will take. These challenges may cause stress, missed deadlines or misunderstandings, if there are no structured tools that can help to address them. Autistic employees can manage workload effectively and demonstrate reliability and consistency in their work, if they have clear systems, visual support and practical planning strategies. This workshop focuses on practical and autism-friendly time management tools that help to be more self-aware and support development of a personalized system that supports long-term job retention.

Aim of the workshop:
To support development of structured time management and organisational strategies that increase autistic people's productivity and help them reduce stress in the workplace.

Objectives:
- To help participants understand their time management strengths and challenges;
- To introduce practical planning and prioritisation tools;
- To practise breaking tasks down into smaller steps;
- To support participants in setting up their own organisational system.

Competences addressed:
- Critical thinking;
- Problem solving;
- Communication;
- Analytical skills;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:
- Individual reflection;
- Brainstorming;

- Theoretical input;
- Practical task breakdown exercise;
- Pair work;
- Personal planning template creation;
- Group discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. <u>Warming-up exercise: reflection on a busy workday (20 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator welcomes participants and introduces to them the topic of time management at work. In order to kick-off the discussion, the participants are asked to think of a busy day at work and to reflect individually on the following questions:

- What tasks could I have on this busy day?
- What could make it difficult for me to stay organised throughout the day?
- What can help me to stay focused?

Participants have 5-7 minutes to write their answers in the form of keywords or drawings. After the individual reflection, volunteers may share their reflections. During the feedback the youth worker/educator highlights common themes brought up by the participants such as distractions, unclear priorities, multitasking or time pressure. This activity helps to normalise organisational challenges and introduces the need for structured systems.

II. <u>Understanding time management: brainstorming and theoretical background (30 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator starts the brainstorming activity by asking the question: "What does good time management look like at work?" Participants share their ideas and the youth worker/educator notes them down on the flipchart paper. These ideas can be, for example, meeting the set deadlines, prioritising tasks, planning the day ahead or reducing procrastination.

After the brainstorming, the youth worker/educator provides structured theoretical input that covers the following:

- The concept of executive functioning;
- The difference between urgent and important tasks;
- The benefits of visual planning tools;
- Breaking large tasks into smaller steps;
- Estimating time realistically.

The youth worker/educator introduces a simple prioritisation tool, such as the **Task categorisation model**, and provides examples to make the concept clear and concrete.

- High priority / urgent;
- Important but not urgent;

- Low priority;
- Delegated or postponed.

III. Practical exercise: breaking tasks down into manageable steps (40 minutes)

To illustrate breaking down a large task into small manageable steps, the participants are given a card with an example of a larger task, for example: “Prepare a monthly report.” The youth worker/educator explains that there are several steps that need to be undertaken to deliver this task and asks the participants to break the task down to smaller steps, for example:

- Collection of the necessary data;
- Organising information;
- Drafting the report;
- Submission of the report for the review and incorporation of the changes;
- Submission of the report.

Based on this example, participants work individually for 20 minutes on the task that is provided to them, for example, “Organise a team meeting”. They need to define the steps that need to be undertaken. After the individual task is finalised, participants discuss the outcome in pairs and compare how they structured the task. When finalising the exercise, the youth worker/educator highlights that breaking tasks into smaller steps reduces overwhelm and increases clarity.

IV. Personal organisation system design (40 minutes)

Based on previous activities within this workshop and all information received so far, participants are invited to design their own “Work organisation plan”. For this they receive a worksheet containing sections that they need to fill in, such as:

- My preferred planning tool (paper planner, digital calendar, task app, visual board);
- How I will track deadlines;
- How I will prioritise tasks;
- What helps me avoid distraction;
- What I will do if I fall behind schedule.

Participants are encouraged to personalise their system using colours, symbols or drawings.

The youth worker/educator provides examples that can include use of the following tools:

- Visual checklists;
- Calendar reminders;
- Time-blocking;
- Alarms to inform about time for breaks;
- Time buffer between tasks.

After 25–30 minutes, participants may share one strategy they plan to use. Sharing is voluntary, participants should feel comfortable sharing.

V. Final reflection and discussion (20 minutes)

The youth worker/educator facilitates the closing discussion in which he/she invites the participants to reflect on the following questions:

- What strategies feel most realistic for you?
- What challenges might appear when you are trying to follow a plan?
- How can you ask for a clarification about what is to be prioritised?

At the end of the workshop, the youth worker/educator again reinforces the key message: organising and managing your time is not about doing everything perfectly. Instead, it is about creating a system that supports your working style and allows you to reduce unnecessary stress. The youth worker/educator closes the workshop by encouraging the participants to test one strategy in their daily life during the following week.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, flipchart papers, pens, colour pencils, markers, cards with tasks, printed "Work organisation plan" for all participants, laptop, projector.

Background documents and further reading:

- Employment success tool: An evidence-based guide by Autism CRC: https://worktogethernc.com/wp-content/uploads/Integrated_Employment_Success_Tool.pdf

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- It is recommended that the youth worker/educator provides visual examples of planning tools, for example, paper planners, digital calendar apps or visual task boards. This will make the concepts of planning and time management more concrete. At the same time, participants should not be overwhelmed with too many tools at the same time. Introducing one or two practical examples is often more effective than rushing through many systems.

Workshop 12: Stress management and self-care techniques

Workshop title: Stress management and self-care techniques

Duration: 150 minutes

Background:

Having a job can provide individuals with structure, independence and a sense of accomplishment. At the same time, it can also add stress into their lives because of deadlines, social expectations, sensory stimuli, multitasking or requirements to deal with unexpected changes. Young people on the autism spectrum may have stronger stress responses because of their sensory sensitivities, their differences in the executive functioning or the need to mask their behaviours in a professional setting. Stress can build up and lead to anxiety, burnout or quitting the job, if there are no appropriate coping strategies that support self-care. Learning how to understand stress signals, identifying early warning signs and making personalised self-regulation plans are all important parts of long-term career growth.

This workshop focuses on helping participants to raise their self-awareness and come up with useful ways to take care of themselves and manage their stress that will help them stay healthy. The emphasis is put on proactive regulation, not on crisis management.

Aim of the workshop:

To support participants to learn how to recognize their signs of stress and develop useful self-care and stress-management strategies that promote their wellbeing and long-term job sustainability.

Objectives:

- To explain the main stressors in the work place;
- To increase participants' awareness of their personal stress triggers and signs of stress;
- To provide participants with simple regulation techniques;
- To support participants with their personal self-care plan.

Competences addressed:

- Critical thinking;
- Creative thinking;
- Teamwork;
- Communication;
- Analytical skills;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:

- Individual reflection;
- Brainstorming;
- Theoretical input;
- Guided practical exercise;
- Personal action planning.

Workshop flow:

I. <u>Welcoming participants and warm-up (20 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator welcomes all participants and introduces the topic of stress management in professional life. After a brief introduction, participants are asked to individually reflect on the following questions:

- How do I feel stress in my body?
- What situations at work might cause stress in me?
- How do I usually react when I feel overwhelmed?

Participants have 5-7 minutes to write or draw their responses to these questions. After that the youth worker/educator asks if there are volunteers who would like to share their insights from this exercise. When providing feedback, the youth worker/educator highlights that stress responses are individual and that awareness is the first step in managing them.

II. <u>Brainstorming and theoretical input: stress and burnout (30 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator asks participants: "What situations at work can create stress for you? Participants may mention examples such as:

- The need to comply with tight deadlines;
- Misunderstandings about the tasks;
- Sensory overload in the office;
- Unclear expectations from the management.

The youth worker/educator writes the input of the participants on a flipchart.

After the brainstorming ideas are exhausted, the youth worker/educator provides structured theoretical input in which he/she explains:

- Difference between short-term stress and chronic stress;
- Concept of burnout and emotional exhaustion;
- Importance of recognising early warning signs of stress and overload;
- Connection between stress and executive functioning.

The youth worker/educator emphasises that stress management is an essential skill and that it can be developed.

III. <u>Practical activity: stress management toolbox (40 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator talks about practical stress relief techniques that can be used in the workplace, for example:

- Breathing exercises;
- Grounding techniques, like the 5-4-3-2-1 sensory awareness method;
- Short breaks;
- Visualisation of calm environments;
- Use of written plans to reduce the cognitive load;
- Physical movement during breaks;
- Written scripts for difficult conversations.

During the introduction, the participants are guided through the practical exercises, for example, a short breathing exercise and a grounding technique to experience them directly. After the introduction, participants break up into small groups and discuss the following:

- Which techniques could realistically work in the workplace?
- Which ones do not feel very comfortable?
- What changes might be needed to these techniques?

Groups briefly, on a voluntary basis, share their most important conclusions.

IV. Personal self-care plan (40 minutes)

Participants receive a worksheet "My personal stress management plan". The worksheet includes the following titles and space for description of the individual reflections:

- My main stress triggers are...;
- Early warning signs (physical, emotional, behavioural) of stress are...;
- Immediate coping strategies that I can use at the workplace are...;
- Preventive strategies (daily habits) that will help me are... ;
- Who I can ask to support me...;
- My reminder message to myself during stressful moments is...

Participants are given approximately 30 minutes to complete the plan individually, based on the information that they have received during the workshop and their own reflections. The youth worker/educator moves around the room to provide guidance and reassurance to the participants. When the plans are ready, volunteers might share their main ideas.

V. Final reflection and closing (20 minutes)

The youth worker/educator facilitates a closing discussion using the following guiding questions:

- Which strategy do you think will help you the most?
- How can you remind yourself to use coping tools before the stress gets worse?
- How taking care of yourself does help you at work?

After the participants have shared their thoughts and ideas, the youth worker/educator reinforces the key message by stressing that taking care of their own mental and emotional health is an important part of being a responsible employee. Stress management ensures that the individuals are more resilient and it is an important element of their long-term career

development. At the end of the workshop, participants are asked to practice at least one strategy over the next week.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, colour pencils, markers, flipchart, printed worksheet “My personal stress management plan” for each participant, laptop, projector.

Background documents and further reading:

- Stress and anxiety: UK National Autistic Society: https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/mental-health/anxiety and https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/autistic-burnout

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- During the workshop, the youth worker/educator should model calm communication and regulation techniques to show how they can be used in real life. Participants should be encouraged to talk about their personal stress experiences, but not obliged to do so if they don’t want to. It is important that the youth worker/educator stresses privacy and voluntary sharing.

Workshop 13: Adapting to changes and transitions in the work environment

Workshop title: Adapting to changes and transitions in the work environment

Duration: 150 minutes

Background:
Change is a normal part of working life. Changes can be different, and they can affect management, organisational structure, and technology that is used in the workplace. Also, colleagues may change and new procedures can be adopted or introduced. Change can be good for growth, but at the same time it can also increase anxiety, uncertainty and stress. This is especially true for young people on the autism spectrum who might rather prefer when things are predictable and structured. Thus, transitions like starting a new job, moving to another department or getting new responsibilities or a new boss can be very difficult for them. It leads to changes in communication styles, schedules or expectations that happen suddenly and can be very demanding.
But with planning and structured ways to deal with the change, as well as with proactive communication, these transitions can become manageable, and they can even be empowering events. This workshop is about showing participants how to be more flexible while still respecting their needs for structure and stability.

Aim of the workshop:
To help participants to come up with structured plans for handling changes and transitions at work in a calm, proactive and confident way.

Objectives:
- To help participants learn more about the different kinds of changes that can happen at work;
- To look into how participants feel about change;
- To give participants useful tips on how to deal with new situations;
- To help participants to make their own personal transition plan.

Competences addressed:
- Critical thinking;
- Creative thinking;
- Communication;
- Analytical skills;
- Problem solving.

Methodology and methods:
- Individual reflection;

- Brainstorming;
- Theoretical input;
- Group work;
- Personal action planning.

Workshop flow:

I. <u>Welcome and warm-up: my experience with change (20 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator welcomes participants and shortly introduces the topic of changes and transitions at work. Then each participant is asked to reflect individually on the following questions:

- What kinds of changes are difficult for me to deal with?
- How do I feel when something unexpected happens?
- What has helped me to deal with the change in the past?

Participants have 5-7 minutes to write or draw their replies to these questions. Volunteers can share their thoughts, if they feel comfortable. The youth worker/educator points out that people react differently to change and that it is normal and manageable to feel stressed during transitions.

II. <u>Introduction to the topic: transitions in the workplace (30 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator leads a brainstorming activity by asking: "What kinds of changes can happen at work?" Participants may mention:

- Change of the agreed schedule;
- A new colleague;
- New software or tools;
- Change in the order of tasks;
- A promotion or new responsibilities.

The youth worker/educator notes all responses on a flipchart.

After the group comes up with ideas, the youth worker/educator provides structured input that covers the following:

- Why change can make people feel stressed;
- How important it is to be able to predict things and have a routine;
- The idea of slowly getting used to change;
- The importance of communication during the times of change;
- The difference between the things you can and cannot control.

The youth worker/educator emphasises that being adaptable does not mean hiding your discomfort, it means learning how to deal with it in a positive way.

III. Group work: managing transitions (40 minutes)

Participants are divided into small groups and each group receives a scenario to work on, for example:

- Your supervisor tells you that your working hours will change next month;
- A new digital tool is added to support your work, but training on it is limited;
- You are moved to a new team;
- You have more work to do;
- You start your first day of work at a new job.

Groups are instructed to:

- Find the main challenge;
- Make a list possible emotional responses;
- Find useful ways to deal with problems;
- Make a short action plan.

Groups are given approximately 25 minutes to work on these questions. After that each group briefly presents their structured plan to the whole group.

When providing feedback, the youth worker/educator highlights realistic solutions proposed by the participants, such as:

- Asking for written instructions and explanations;
- Asking for clarification meetings;
- Creating personal checklist for dealing with change;
- Scheduling extra preparation time for complex tasks;
- Using stress-management techniques.

IV. Role-play: communication during the time of change (30 minutes)

Participants remain in the same small groups. Now they are given a task to practise short conversations based on the scenarios that they received in the previous step. In each group the following roles are distributed among the participants:

- Employee;
- Supervisor or colleague;
- Observer.

The main task for the employee is to practise asking clarifying questions, for example:

- “Could you please explain to me the new expectations?”
- “Would it be possible to receive written guidance for this task?”
- “Now that the task has changed, can we review priorities?”

The task for observers is to focus on the clarity and calm tone of the employee. If participants feel comfortable, they might switch the roles after the first round. The youth worker/educator supports groups, monitors participation and ensures voluntary engagement.

V. Personal transition plan (20 minutes)

After the group work, participants work individually, and for this they receive a worksheet titled: "My change strategy". The worksheet includes the following titles and space for description of the individual reflections:

- Types of change that I find most challenging.....
- Signals that I start feeling overwhelmed....
- I can ask these questions to get more clarity....
- To deal with stressful situations, I can...
- In case I need support, I can approach ...

Each participant completes their worksheet individually. The youth worker/educator provides support in case it is necessary.

VI. Closing and key message (10 minutes)

At the end of the workshop, the youth worker/educator facilitates a short reflection based on these questions:

- What strategy of those that we discussed today feels most helpful to you?
- How can preparation and proactive approach to changes reduce uncertainty?
- What can you remind yourself of when you are going through a change?

After the participants have reflected on the questions above, the youth worker/educator closes the workshop and stresses the key message underlining that changes are part of professional life. When approached with preparation, communication and structure, changes and transitions can become more manageable and they also present opportunities for growth.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, colour pencils, markers, flipchart, cards with different scenarios, printed worksheet "My change strategy" for each participant, laptop, projector.

Background documents and further reading:

- Change and transitions: UK National Autistic Society: https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/about-autism/preference-for-order-predictability-or-routine

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- The youth worker/educator should model adaptation by slowly making changes within the workshop itself, such as explicit signalling when activities are changing. This will help participants to reflect on their responses to change. The youth worker/educator needs to be aware not to exaggerate with the "change" simulation in order not to stress the participants too much. This variation of "learning by doing" is suggested only to experienced youth workers/educators that will know how to handle the situation and different reactions of the participants.

- Participants should not be forced to talk about their own difficulties related to transitions in front of other participants. All sharing should be on a voluntary basis.
- Scenarios used in the group exercises should be tailored to the reality of the local labour market and age-specific job circumstances.

Workshop 14: Seeking opportunities for career advancement

Workshop title: Seeking opportunities for career advancement

Duration: 130 minutes

Background:
Many young people with autism enter the labour market through entry-level or highly specialised roles where they often perform consistently and with high quality. However, it can be challenging to identify opportunities for advancement that request additional responsibilities or plan long-term career progression. Some of the challenges or barriers may include unclear promotion pathways, discomfort with self-promotion or uncertainty about how and when to initiate conversations about growth. This workshop is designed to support participants in understanding career advancement as a gradual and structured process rather than a sudden leap. In this workshop participants are guided to see advancement as something that can be planned, prepared for and aligned with their strengths and working style.

Aim of the workshop:
To support participants in identifying realistic career advancement opportunities and developing strategies for professional growth over time.

Objectives:
- To help participants understand different forms of career advancement;
- To support participants in mapping potential progression paths based on their skills and interests;
- To practise communicating aspirations for growth in a clear and respectful way;
- To give space for participants to identify concrete next steps for their own career development.

Competences addressed:
- Critical thinking;
- Teamwork;
- Digital competence;
- Literacy competence;
- Communication;
- Analytical skills;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:
- Theoretical input;
- Role-play exercises;

- Work in pairs;
- Group discussion;
- Individual work: Action planning.

Workshop flow:

I. <u>Welcome and introduction to the topic (5 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator welcomes participants and introduces the focus of the workshop, which is career growth and long-term development. The youth worker/educator explains that career advancement does not always mean to become a manager or get a new role in a company/organisation but can also include gaining new skills or increasing responsibility in ways that suit each individual.

II. <u>Theoretical input: Understanding career advancement pathways (25 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator provides an input on different ways that career advancement can happen. The input focuses on four main pathways:

- progressing within the same organisation through promotions or expanded responsibilities;
- moving into different roles or departments that better match strengths;
- changing jobs/employers in order to access new opportunities;
- developing skills through training, certifications or learning on the job.

The youth worker/educator highlights that employees with autism often demonstrate strong reliability, consistency and attention to detail, which are valuable foundations for progression. The youth worker/educator also shares practical examples to illustrate how small and steady steps can lead to meaningful career growth. Participants are encouraged to ask questions and reflect on which pathways feel most relevant to them.

III. <u>Individual work and sharing in pairs: Career opportunity mapping "Career Web" (30 minutes)</u>

Participants receive large sheets of paper and are guided to create a "career opportunity web". Before participants start, the youth worker/educator shows a completed example of such a web, so that the task is easier to understand. The example should include a current role or skill in the centre, two or three possible opportunities, needed skills, a timeframe, support needs and one small first action. Participants then create their own web. In the centre, they write or draw their current skills or role. From there, they draw lines to different possible opportunities, such as internal roles, external positions, skill-development options or better-fitting tasks. For each opportunity, participants note what skill is needed, a possible timeframe, one support need and one small action they could take. The youth worker/educator moves around the room to offer support and suggest examples adapted to the local labour market. When the time is up, participants may work in pairs to briefly share their maps, but sharing remains voluntary. This strengthens the idea that career growth does not need to be navigated alone.

IV. Role-play: Practising career advancement conversations (40 minutes)

The youth worker/educator explains that career advancement often requires communicating intentions and aspirations clearly, even when such conversations and situations feel uncomfortable. In this activity, participants receive a scenario and have the chance to practice their communication skills when dealing with career advancement conversations. The youth worker/educator presents three common career-advancement situations. The situations are written on flipchart paper and briefly explained:

- Scenario 1: Asking for more responsibility or progression after completing tasks successfully.
- Scenario 2: Requesting access to training, mentoring, or skill development opportunities.
- Scenario 3: Expressing interest in a different role or lateral move within an organisation.

Participants are invited to work in pairs for the next 20 minutes. One person takes the role of the employee, and the other plays the role of a supervisor or coordinator. Each pair chooses one scenario to work on. The youth worker/educator provides structured prompt cards for each scenario, containing example sentence starters such as:

- I've noticed that I work best when I can focus on tasks like…
- I would like to develop my skills further in…
- I'm interested in learning what steps are needed to move towards…

Participants are given time to read the prompts and adapt the wording so that it feels natural to them. They are encouraged to keep the conversation short and focused, and to stop at any point if they feel overwhelmed. After the first round, pairs switch roles if they wish or continue observing and giving feedback. When everyone is done with the role-playing, the youth worker/educator brings the group back to the plenary and facilitates a short reflection using the following questions:

- What felt comfortable or uncomfortable during the conversation?
- Which phrases felt useful or realistic?
- What helped make the conversation clearer?

V. Individual work: "Advancement Next Step" (35 minutes)

The last activity of the workshop is about thinking and planning for actionable steps. In this part participants move into individual reflection and action planning. Each participant receives an "Advancement Next Step" sheet that is designed containing the following prompts:

- One area where I would like to grow or advance;
- One realistic opportunity or pathway connected to this goal;
- One small step I could take in the next three to six months;
- One person or resource that could support me.

The youth worker/educator divides the activity into short guided stages and announces each stage clearly: (1) choose one area for growth; (2) choose one realistic pathway; (3) write one small step for the next three to six months; (4) identify one person, resource or accommodation that could support this step. Participants may write, draw, use keywords or discuss their

answers with the trainer/support person. Those who feel comfortable are invited to share an element of their plan in the plenary. The youth worker/educator closes the activity by reinforcing that career advancement is a gradual process and that recognising one's readiness for growth is already a meaningful step forward.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its, laptop, projector, career web templates, role-play script cards, action plan worksheets.

Background documents and further reading:

- Links ABA Therapy. (2025, April 22). Autism and career growth: What you should know. Retrieved from: https://linksaba.com/autism-and-career-growth-what-you-should-know/
- Knight, R. (2018, January 29). How to ask for a promotion. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2018/01/how-to-ask-for-a-promotion

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- It is recommended that the youth worker/educator clearly explains that career advancement can take many forms and encourages participants to define success in ways that fit their strengths and preferences.
- The career web activity should be supported by at least one full example. This helps participants to understand the task before they are asked to create their own map.
- During the role-play activities, the youth worker/educator should allow participants to choose observer roles if they feel uncomfortable speaking and ensure that all discussions remain supportive and non-judgemental.

Workshop 15: Recognising achievements and building resilience

Workshop title: Recognising achievements and building resilience

Duration: 150 minutes

Background:
In order to keep their jobs and to pursue their long-term career goals, young people require more than just technical skills. Also, personal traits, like confidence, self-awareness and resilience are equally important. Many young people on the autism spectrum tend to underestimate their achievements or focus primarily on perceived difficulties rather than on progress that they have made. Repeated experiences of being misunderstood, rejected or experiencing workplace challenges can lower their self-esteem and motivation. Recognising achievements, whether large or small, strengthens self-awareness and enhances a positive professional identity. At the same time, resilience helps individuals to recover from setbacks that may happen, such as unsuccessful job applications, misunderstandings at work or changes in their routine. This workshop focuses on helping participants to recognize their achievements, reflect on their personal growth and come up with practical strategies to stay motivated and resilient in their professional journey.

Aim of the workshop:
To help participants recognise their accomplishments, build their self-esteem and come up with resilience strategies for long-term career development.

Objectives:
- To help participants identify their personal and professional successes;
- To reflect on the progress made throughout the training programme or in the previous job experiences;
- To introduce the idea of resilience in the workplace;
- To develop strategies that help dealing with setbacks;
- To reinforce a professional identity that is built on strengths.

Competences addressed:
- Critical thinking;
- Creative thinking;
- Communication;
- Analytical skills;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:
- Individual reflection;

- Strengths-based activity;
- Small group sharing;
- Guided discussion;
- Personal action planning;
- Visual mapping exercise.

Workshop flow:

I. <u>Welcome and warming up (20 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator welcomes everyone to the workshop. He/she opens the workshop by inviting participants to engage in a playful yet thought-provoking warm-up activity, in which participants are asked to reflect on the following questions:

- What have I learned about myself during this programme/internship?
- What is one new skill that I have developed?
- What one challenge have I managed successfully?

They are given 5-7 minutes to write down their ideas or draw their reflections. If there are volunteers, they are invited to share their insights. The youth worker/educator also stresses that growth may not always be immediately visible, as it often happens gradually.

II. <u>Achievement timeline (35 minutes)</u>

Participants receive a sheet of A3 paper and are invited to create their own visual "Achievement timeline", in which they are invited to mark:

- Important learning moments that they had in the course of the training/internship;
- Skills that they developed;
- Personal improvements that they feel happened over time;
- Difficulties that they have learned to overcome;
- Positive feedback received and provided to the others.

Participants are encouraged to include both formal achievements (e.g., completing a workshop, finishing a project) and informal personal achievements (e.g., speaking in front of a group, asking for clarification, managing stress successfully). Participants work individually for approximately 25 minutes.

Afterwards, those who feel comfortable may share one achievement with the group. The youth worker/educator emphasises that recognising progress and achievements strengthens professional identity and motivation of the employees.

III. <u>Theoretical input: understanding resilience (20 minutes)</u>

The youth worker/educator provides structured information about resilience in professional life, which includes the following:

- Resilience means being able to bounce back and adapt in case things go wrong;
- Job seekers often get rejections in their job search;

- The importance of distinguishing performance from personal worth;
- The role that support systems and coping techniques play.

The youth worker/educator emphasises that being resilient does not mean ignoring one's own emotions, it means managing them in a positive way. Participants are encouraged to ask questions or share their own reflections.

IV. Discussion in a small group: how to deal with setbacks (30 minutes)

Participants work in small groups, and each group received a realistic scenario to discuss, for example:

- You did not get the job that you applied for;
- You made a mistake at work;
- You received a critical feedback from your superior;
- You feel excluded from a team activity.

After gathering their initial ideas, the groups are asked to reflect on the following questions:

- What feelings could come up in this situation?
- What not helpful thoughts might come up?
- What would be a helpful response that could support resilience?

After 20 minutes of discussion, each group briefly shares their thoughts. When providing feedback, the youth worker/educator highlights solution-focused thinking and self-compassion.

V. Personal resilience plan (30 minutes)

Participants receive a worksheet "My resilience plan", which includes the following titles and space for description of the individual reflections:

- A common work-related problem that I may experience…
- What I usually do and how I usually react…
- A better way to respond would be….
- A statement that will remind me of a better way to respond…
- People or resources that can support me in these situations….
- My strength that helps me get better is…..

Each participant completes their worksheet individually. The youth worker/educator moves around the room to provide guidance and reassurance to the participants. When the plans are ready, volunteers might share their main ideas.

VI. Final reflection and celebration (15 minutes)

The youth worker/educator invites everyone to write one sentence on a post-it note that starts with: "I am proud of myself for…", and participants put their post-its on a board that is visible to everyone. The youth worker/educator shortly reflects on the achievements and concludes the workshop with a summary message stressing that professional growth is a process that is happening all the time. Recognising achievements and building resilience strengthens an

individual's confidence, keeps them motivated and makes them more likely to get a job in the future.
At the end of the workshop, participants are encouraged to revisit their achievement timeline and remind themselves of what they are proud of whenever they face a new challenge.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, printed cards with scenarios, printed worksheet “My resilience plan” for each participant, post-its, laptop, projector.

Background documents and further reading:

- Roadmap to transition: A handbook for autistic youth transitioning to adulthood https://autisticadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Roadmap-to-Transition-A-Handbook-for-Autistic-Youth-Transitioning-to-Adulthood.pdf

Recommendations for future youth workers/educators multiplying this workshop:

- It is recommended that the youth worker/educator encourages participants and ensures a supportive and celebratory environment for this workshop. The youth workers/educators may also give participants a printed or digital copy of their achievement timeline as a tool to keep them motivated.

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