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Autism in Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Community 2019

Symposium Theme: “Providing Comprehensive Care for Autistic People and their Families”

Speech by Autism Voice United Kingdom Co-founder and Programme Coordinator Korrcia Kandeh

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. My name is Mariama Korrcia Kandeh. I am co-founder and Programme Coordinator for Autism Voice UK.

On behalf of our team, I'd like to welcome you all to the second edition of our Autism in BAME symposium series.

Since our last meeting in April 2018, we have continued to expand our services to reach out to more people in the BAME community and otherwise.

In response to recommendation from our last symposium to increase on awareness of autism in the BAME community, in January this year, we started the Let's Talk about Autism, speech and interactive series. This series engage the community on different areas of autism in order to improve the support for autistic people and their families as well as enhance the understanding of the condition. Let's Talk About Autism informs and engages the public on diverse aspects of autism and also provides an opportunity for questions. The once monthly session involves speakers from diverse background and expertise.

We have also expanded our services with the starting of our monthly (every last Tuesday of the month) Support for Wellbeing Group Meet in Southwark.

Thanks to a £1500 grant received from the London Catalyst we have been able to replicate the Lambeth group meet. Our Lambeth Support for Wellbeing group continues to meet every last Thursday of the Month. The group meet provides a unique means for autistic people, parents/carers and professionals to gain knowledge and shared experience through multi-cultural connectivity.

In our bid to expand support for the whole autistic family, in March we introduced our Saturday arts and crafts club for autistic children and their siblings. We wish to thank the West Indian Association for Service Personnel for providing us with the space. We are also grateful to the arts and crafts teacher and the team of volunteers for providing exceptional service to the children and supporting them explore their talents in the arts.

Previous studies (CIPD 2017, EHRC 2010, National Audit Office 2008,) have shown that people from BAME communities are less likely to be employed compared to their white counterparts. While 74% of white people at working age are able to find a job, only around 14% of people from BAME communities are in employment (CIPD, 2017). In Lambeth, employment rate for people from the BAME community is quite low at 66% compared to their white counterpart at 85%. The BAME population in Lambeth has a high number of young people in working age 20-44 at 42%. Despite the government's promise to increase the employment rate of disabled people from 47% to 64% by 2020, the situation still remains bleak for disabled people, while the rate of employment for autistic adults is alarmingly low as only about 16% are in full time work (ONS, 2016). In response to these statistics, I am pleased to inform you that with support from People's postcode lottery, we are introducing Employment Support for Autistic

People in Lambeth. We are a small charity that continues to do big things to help change perceptions and situations for the autistic community.

This specialist service will offer three employment trainings and once weekly employment advice and support service to people with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) within working age. At the end of the project, beneficiaries would have gained vital skills and knowledge for successful job application, interview techniques, writing curriculum vitae and tips about staying in job. The service will also involve training of employers on supporting and creating an enabling environment for autistic persons. Employers will gain knowledge about ASC, tips on supporting people with ASC and creating an enabling working environment for them. The project will help increase employability for people with ASC. It will help them to get into and maintain a job. It will also improve the understanding of ASC among employers. It will help provide people with ASC vital support at work, increase tolerance, reduce bullying, stigma and discrimination. This project will start in June this year. We have successfully supported autistic people on a very small scale who have been gainfully employed and maintained their jobs. We believe this is an opportunity for us to expand on this experience. I want to invite autistic people who may want to be employed and employers as well to join this project. Please contact us via email or telephone if you wish to be part of this project.

Finally, Autism Voice is still challenged by lack of funding to pursue our vision. We have successfully received small project grants from a number of funding bodies. We are run by volunteers and are yet to employ full time staff.

I'd like to appeal to generous people out there to help support our services. We are small but with a huge commitment to putting every penny into adequate use in the best interest of our clients.

Let me finally thank the Autism Voice symposium planning team for all their hard work in ensuring the success of this event. I also wish to thank the LSBU and PARC team for their parts.

Once again, I want to thank you all for attending this meeting and I wish you all an educative, insightful and informative day.

Thank you