Reachout ASC

Supporting autistic young people going to University

Presented by Lynn McCann

With thanks to:

Sio Wynne – ex-student

Jackson Watkinson and Abi Watkinson

Olivia Turver and Emma Turver

Cole Andrew - parent

Parents and their autistic young people in the Additional Needs Alliance

Parents and their autistic young people in Reachout ASC – Autism, ADHD and PDA FB page.

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Takeaways

1. There is help right from the beginning, from Open Days to setting in.
2. Explaining the support you need is the best thing you can do.
3. There are many ways to express yourself, be yourself and find your tribe at university.

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What we will cover

01 What do Universities offer to Autistic Students?

02 Preparation for Uni – Tips from Autistic Students and their parents.

03 Navigating University life.

04 Study support.

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What do Universities offer Autistic students?

- Taster days or even taster weeks.
- Funding – Disabled Students Allowance https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/applying-disabled-students'-allowances-dsas
- University Student Support Services – Needs Assessment interview
- Accommodation – often can have ensuite at lower rate / quiet halls etc.
- Bursaries – check their website / ask.

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“The Inclusion Team helped me put together a Student Support Plan, outlining what reasonable adjustments I would need. They also helped me apply for accommodation in quiet halls with an ensuite, so I felt more at home on campus.

In addition, they helped with my DSA application. Following this, they agreed I needed Brain in Hand, a laptop, headphones for the laptop, a printer, and an iPad. The laptop also had special software pre-installed: Dragon, MindView, and Sonocent. These help me take notes during lectures and organize them after returning to my room. The DSA funded everything apart from the first £200 towards the laptop.”

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Jackson at Edge Hill University - Creative Writing Year 2

“They had a day for students on the spectrum and the quality was fantastic – We had a tour with Autistic students telling us about help they had found, an hour to chat and ask questions and private buffet. A chance to meet other prospective students and I guess realise that they were not the only ones facing such a happy opportunity (talk about University like this).

What impressed me most was the knowledge and understanding of the staff - about the opportunities, positive attitude and help available as and when required.”

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Emma Turver –parent of Olivia at Aberdeen University

”I attended the assessment with my child, having prepared a folder of relevant info. The assessment was handled well, questions I remember were things like ‘what would you do if you arrived at a planned lecture room and found it empty?’ Getting the right support in place for the start is ideal, I only ever gave the support needed and sat silently in many interviews/ meetings!

“Take snacks and water – it can take a long time!”

Consider a Gap Year?

- Gives a break from academic pressure – recovery time.
- Gives time to grow up and learn some life skills.
- Gives thinking time, preparation time and time to do hobbies and interests.
- Travel can be local or international!

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Preparation

1. Decide on staying at home or living at Uni. Learn some cooking, washing and budgeting skills together. Practice the travelling. (But make them as easy as possible – do what works, not what is expected!)
2. Plan a visit home but leave it 4-5 weeks to give time to get used to everything. (agree a plan to contact parents that suits them - video calls can work well so you can check on their wellbeing.)
3. Most Uni's have Facebook or What'sApp groups for halls of residence so you can get to know the people in your halls beforehand.

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“Going home too soon can make home sickness worse so we often recommend not going home for the first few weeks. If you really want to see parents, maybe they can visit you? Then you can show them around, get them to buy you food and maybe explore the local area together.”

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Nicola Keeling – Reasonable Adjustments Advisor

Preparation

5. Visit the university and surrounding area often if you can so it becomes familiar. You might enjoy sharing your knowledge with other new students which will help getting to know people.
6. Make shopping lists of regular food and toiletry items; take photos of different outfits you can refer to if they struggle deciding what to wear. Take photos of their kitchen utensils etc things get mixed up with other students' stuff and it will help when moving out at the end of the year.
7. Bring familiar items from home as well as new things.

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Preparation

8. If you are worried about making friends, be reassured everyone is in the same boat and also keen to make friends. This is a good chance to be yourself.
9. You don't have to go out drinking or have sex – not everyone is doing that!
10. Find out if there is a support group/society for autistic/ neurodivergent people on campus.
11. Find ways to carry on with existing hobbies whilst at University.
12. If you are church goers, many churches in student towns have student support and care activities.

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Navigating University Life

- Don't assume it's not going to be a challenge when you get to university, so preparing accommodations is key to help you thrive.
- Don't get bogged down by the idea of 'University culture', you don't have to try and fit the mould of a 'typical student' and you will find like-minded people.
- If you can make yourself - go out and not stay in your room. Make a plan, visit a place for a walk or buy a coffee. Plan just to smile at someone and say hello. Other people get lonely too.

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Olivia Turver – Aberdeen University Year 2

“There is usually something for everyone and societies really do want to welcome new members. Scheduling in time for fun is important, whatever fun looks like for you. By consciously adding these times to your timetable this can help you focus and use study time more effectively. The biggest change at Uni is the amount of free time, depending on your course you might only have a few hours a week where you have to be in class, the rest of the time is self directed.

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Nicola Keeling – Reasonable Adjustments Advisor

“The obvious too is to encourage your child to join a club/society - but I would say to be a bit careful here. Don’t put too much pressure on your child initially. Remember that so much is new already and they have so much to get used to. You know your child best though.”

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Emma Turver – parent of Olivia

What if...

Have back up plans for everything - you will not need most of them!

Back up plans for everything!

- Have an option B for which Uni your child might go to – even if your YP doesn't want to acknowledge it.
- Check in on emotional and wellbeing but also encourage/teach them to advocate for themselves and check in with University wellbeing or support staff. This is part of letting go and growing up (gradually and gently!)
- Teach them to budget but also be prepared to send food parcels, visit for a food shopping trip or bring them home for 'recovery time'.

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Back up plans for everything!

- Make lists, have some sample ‘what to do if’ or a “don’t panic’ folder with tips and hints. Share this with their support worker.
- Talk about alcohol, sex, contraception and drugs. How to say ‘no’ and consent and what to do if they feel under pressure. Practice ways of saying ‘no’.
- Try alcohol and discuss how to cope with a hangover! It will pass!
- Put instructions or photos of what to do on key items eg. washing powder, toilet roll, etc - things that will help them.

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- Set up written advocacy permissions if the young person will allow it; it makes life so much easier if you can contact lecturers, admin and fiancé people on their behalf, especially when they are in a crisis moment.
- Discuss whether the GP service will remain at home or at Uni.
- Set up a traffic light system or similar for daily contact – anxiety levels.
- Practice making up social stories on the spot and talk them through via Zoom, WhatsApp.

Cole Andrew – parent whose child went to Oxford Uni

Study support

The Uni should have study mentoring available to help with organising and managing workload, understanding assignments and prioritising.

"Ask for help and if you can do things differently. I hated group projects and ended up doing all the work for them all. But in my final year, I asked if I could do it on my own and got an 80% mark!

I also asked not to be asked questions in my presentation. My tutor allowed me more time to present so I could cover things they would ask questions about."

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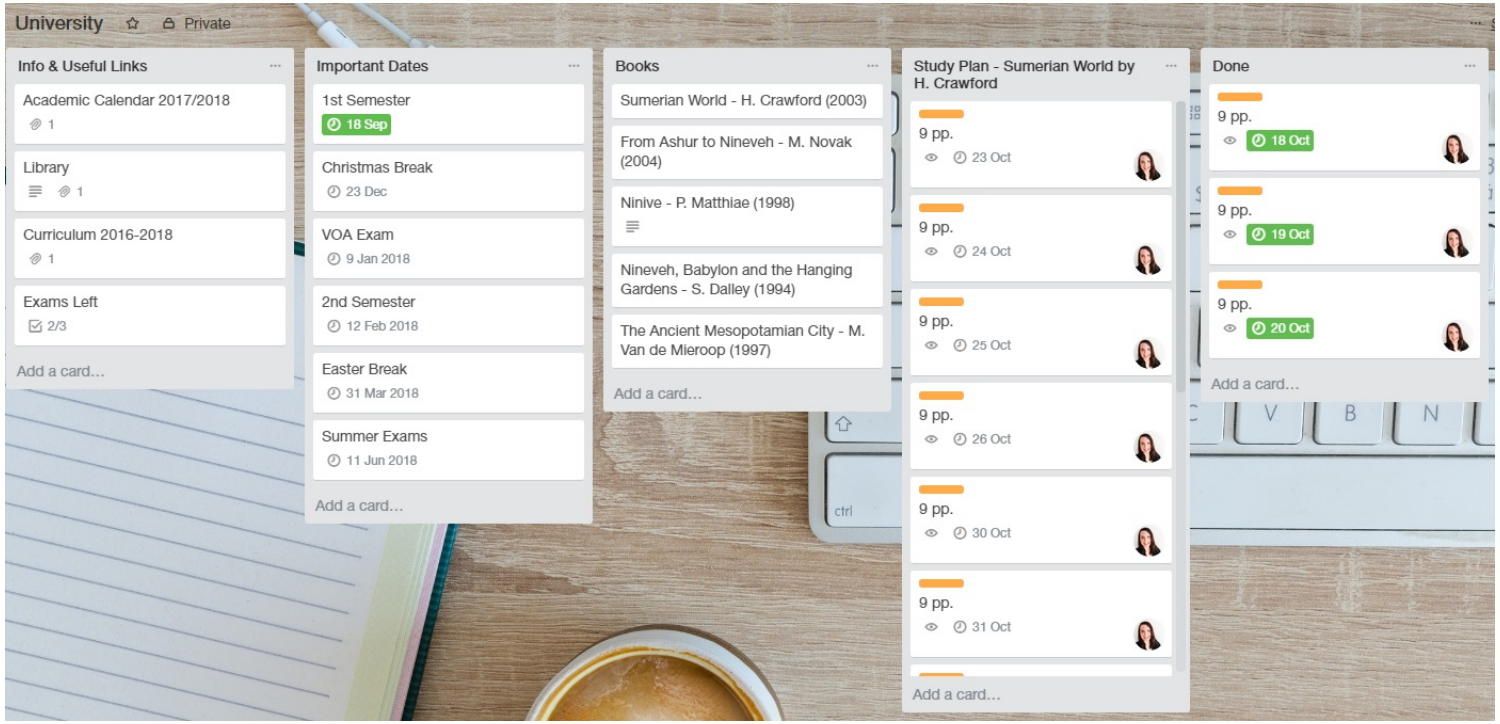
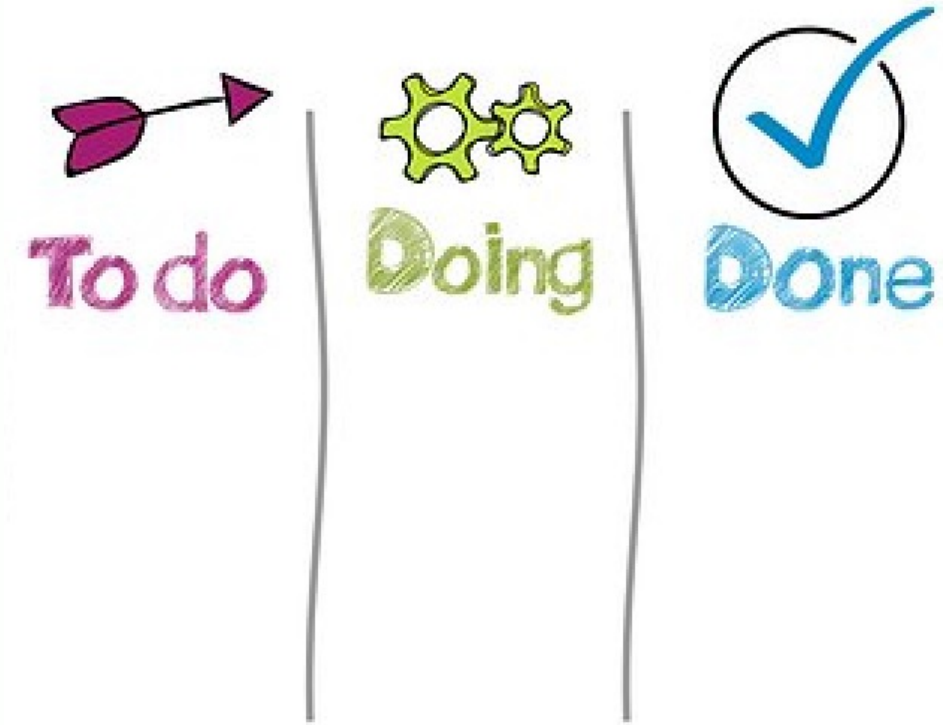
Sio Wynne – 1st in BSc Psychology – Bangor University





Kanban / Trello App can help prioritise and see what has been completed.

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“I struggle to communicate my ideas: In Year 1, I dreaded sharing my work with the group. In addition, I am a perfectionist and very conscientious, meaning I often spend too long editing one paragraph before writing the first draft of an essay or creative piece. However, this means I always work to the best of my ability.

I feel more relaxed in Year 2. I have gradually learnt the importance of critical feedback and become used to peer appraisal. Going to societies more often has allowed me to make more friends and enjoy myself.

Do not be afraid to email your tutors or staff members to ask for help. They are all there to support you and will only try to make your life easier.”

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Jackson Watkinson – Edge Hill University, Creative Writing Year 2

"He has managed to achieve so much. He has pushed himself to join a couple of societies, He has made some good friends who get together, but who also like their own space, so there is no pressure.

He has struggled with the work-load and has had a few deadline extensions, but is doing amazing. He is much more confident in his own abilities. The tutors are very supportive and go over things with him, if need be, at the end of each seminar."

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Abi Watkinson parent of Jackson

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Any Questions?

Contact us at: office@reachoutasc.com

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Autism, ADHD and PDA group

@ReachoutASC

Lynn McCann Reachout ASC