
Autism accessibility in action

Gearoid Kearney and Miriam O'Sullivan set up myAccessHub which helps businesses and employees learn to be more inclusive of colleagues with autism and other neurodiversities.

Why we started

We are graduates from the Institute of Technology in Tralee. Miriam completed her Masters in Autism and Technology, and I completed a degree in Computer Science. During this time we came together to create an event called the Autism Summit. This was to raise money for Temple Street children's hospital through the 100minds initiative for college students. Over the next year, we started to learn about the negative experiences people with autism were having when interacting with businesses whether be as employees and as customers. This motivated us to setup [myAccessHub](#) and change this.

The Tom Crean Centre

We started working on the idea in the summer of 2017. A lot of the work that was done was in the development of our training content and what we believe businesses need to know when it comes to providing accessible and inclusive environments to people with autism and other neurodiversities. In September 2017 we were accepted onto the Enterprise Ireland New Frontiers Programme in the Tom Crean Centre. This programme which lasted for six months gave us funding, training, mentorship and the time to develop our business plan.

Using VR

From our user testing, we arrived at video animation which was best received for the autism awareness modules. The use of Virtual Reality was the best to understand the barriers faced by people with autism in the workplace.

You have a great emphasis on grants for employers employing people with Autism and other disabilities. How aware of these grants do you find employers are? Did you avail of any government grants before launching the business yourselves?

The Department of Social Protection is significant support for companies that want to train their employees about disabilities. The Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme is aimed at employers who provide disability awareness training for their staff. Employers are able to apply for grant aid towards the cost of this training. The scheme is funded under the Department of Social Protection's Reasonable Accommodation Fund. Many employers are not aware of these grants.

The only grant we received from the government for myAccessHub would have been the stipend we received from Enterprise Ireland.

As you mentioned on your website, it's the small things in the workforce that could make a massive difference to someone with Autism thriving in their job. What are some of the most frequent things you see that could make the most significant difference to the employer and employee?

Assessing and adapting the environment is key to the success of employees with autism but engaging in this task is also beneficial for the employer. As a result of assessing the situation, the employer becomes more aware of the impact that particular elements have on people with autism and how they work. For example, hot desking is on trend within workspaces; however, the uncertainty of this would cause anxiety for an employee with autism and could result in increased levels of absenteeism.

What advertising or PR have you done for MyAccessHub? What do you find works best?

The majority of our potential customers are large organisations, and the buyers within these organisations are HR managers and diversity and inclusion managers. To date, we have found LinkedIn and Twitter to be the most effective for getting in front of our target market. LinkedIn gives us the ability to reach out to HR and D&I managers from the biggest companies in the world. Currently, some of the top HR/D&I professionals from across Europe, North America and Asia have access to the online platform for our Workplace Study. These professionals combined to represent the interests of over 370,000 employees. They will complete our eLearning modules on autism awareness, and they will have access to our Virtual Reality tool which will help them to

reduce or remove the many barriers faced by people with autism in the Workplace.

What are some of the awards that you have been nominated for or won? What have you learnt about what the impact of these awards can do for a startup?

Our first award was in 2017 where we won €5,000 in the *KBC Bright Ideas Competition*. This gave us the resources to continue to develop our MVP and secure our first pilot locations. The judges also gave us great insight very early on in our business. These insights have had a significant impact on where we have taken myAccessHub.

2018 was a busy year where we got the opportunity to go to Boston with Cork County Council. This was part of the Bridge to MassChallenge Competition that they ran earlier in the year. Well over 50 startups applied to attend a boot camp in Cork. 20 were selected to undergo a three-day intensive boot camp facilitated by Kathleen Healy, Laura Hamilton and Brian Sugrue. From there we got the opportunity along with 11 other startups to go to Boston for five days for another boot camp. These boot camps provided us with a wealth of knowledge that gave us the confidence and support to grow both as a company but also as a team.

During the summer at the National Startup Awards, we won Best Social/Sustainable Startup. These awards were sponsored by Bank of Ireland and Enterprise Ireland. The judges from BOI and EI were brilliant, and they had a lot of kind words to say about our mission and the impact of myAccessHub in the future of the workplace.

The startup culture in Ireland can be very Dublin-centric. Why did you choose to found the company in Kerry? What are some of the benefits of this?

Kerry is a natural base for myAccessHub as both the founders are from the County. When I came back from New Zealand, I studied in the Institute of Technology in Tralee. Now our office in the Tom Crean Centre is overlooking the Institute which is soon to become the Munster Technology University.

Being based in Kerry, it has given us access to insights from some of the best entrepreneurs in the country from Sean Ryan of Aspen Grove to Jerry Kennelly of Tweak. It's inspiring to know that they have built some of the most successful companies in Ireland from their bases in the Kingdom.

The talent and opportunities in the county are endless, Kerry SciTech, Enterprise Ireland, and the IDA are doing tremendous work to promote Kerry as a destination for both employees and companies. This will have a massive effect on myAccessHub as we scale over the next couple of years.

What is the one piece of advice you would give to an entrepreneur starting out in the disability area?

People's level of empathy and understanding towards employees with disabilities is low. Just because you have a passion for changing something doesn't mean everyone else will.

Are there any other Irish startup or companies you like, or you think are doing unique things in the disability area?

I love what Caroline Casey is doing with #valuable. The World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2019 in Davos talked about disability inclusion. We need leaders to take responsibility for inclusion within their workplace and disclose if they have a disability, Caroline exemplifies this in her #valuable campaign.

As someone with dyslexia it was Richard Branson that gave me the confidence to push myself, and after being diagnosed with Addison's, I learned how John F. Kennedy also had Addison's, which motivated me to never use it as an excuse for not achieving my goals in life.

www.myaccesshub.io