Autism and the Transition to Adulthood

Transition Planning for the Long Haul - Life Beyond College

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Parents of students on the autism spectrum and their neurotypical peers begin to think about college as they progress through high school. According to the Department of Labor, students with disabilities who earn a bachelor’s degree are employed at about the same rate as their non-disabled peers (DoL, 2018). Armed with this knowledge, parents then focus upon getting into the “right” college as the end goal. However, this focus misses the mark. College in and of itself should NOT be the end goal. Rather, the goal of transition should be living independently and finding gainful employment. Many higher functioning individuals on the autism spectrum are intellectually capable of completing college level coursework, but struggle to find employment. Four-year liberal arts degrees teach students to think broadly, but do not explicitly teach job and independent living skills. Students on the autism spectrum need concrete training that connects the dots between what is learned in the classroom and what is expected in the world of work.

The statistics on employment for youth and adults on the autism spectrum are grim. People on the autism spectrum have employment rates lower than all other disability groups, make less money per hour than other disability groups, and worked in fewer fields (Roux, 2013). They earned less money than all other disability groups, worked 36% less hours per week than other disability groups, and the proportion of individuals who worked full-time is 1/3 of all that of other disability groups (Standifer, 2012). Shattuck (2012) found 34.7% of transition-aged youth on the autism spectrum attended college and 55.1% had paid employment with 6 years after high school. His team also found that over 50% did not participate in employment 2 years after high school. Consequently, transition planning with an eye past college to employment is paramount.

When should parents start thinking about transition planning? The answer is immediately. Many feel that because their...
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Employment is a defining characteristic of adulthood, yet the emerging data regarding vocational outcomes for young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has been less than optimal. Close to half of young adults with ASD are unable to secure employment after high school (Shattuck et al, 2012). If they are employed, these young adults earn significantly lower wages than peers with other disabilities (Roux, et al, 2013), and they struggle with job retention (Taylor, Henninger, & Mallick, 2015). The federal Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) system, dedicated to promoting employment for people with disabilities, also struggles to support people with ASD with only 60% of those receiving VR services exiting with a job and with a weekly median income of just $160 (Roux, 2016).

Of support programs that do seek to improve employment outcomes for young adults with disabilities, the Project SEARCH internship programs have proven to be consistently successful at transition- ing most of its graduates to competitive employment (Christensen, Hetherington, Daston & Riehle, 2015). Specific to individuals with ASD, Project SEARCH secured competitive employment for 87% of the young adults with ASD in one study, while the control group, which did not participate in Project SEARCH, had an employment rate of only 12% (Wehman et al, 2013). Internships are a proven model of success to teach skills that are necessary for employability, including the development of initiative, communication, responsibility, social skills, teamwork and work ethic (Robles, 2012). A long-established, international program, Project SEARCH requires total immersion by its participants in the workplace for one year. Interns rotate through multiple worksites, gaining hands-on training and opportunities to explore career options. In addition, Project SEARCH provides comprehensive instruction in skills that are pivotal for employment, such as successfully gaining and appropriately maintaining employment, self-advocacy and financial literacy.

As part of its commitment to improving life outcomes for adults with ASD, NEXT for AUTISM has been supporting the unique needs of transition-age youth who are moving into adulthood from supportive high school environments. Our organization has championed the development of an autism-specific Project SEARCH model, called Project SEARCH Autism Enhancement (PSAE), which resulted from a long-standing collaboration among NEXT for AUTISM, Project SEARCH and the TEACCH Autism Program at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. This enhanced, ASD-specific curriculum includes assessments and instructional strategies that are tailored to the unique needs of individuals with ASD.

NEXT for AUTISM’s PSAE enhancements include the TEACCH Transition Assessment Profile (TTAP), an assessment specifically designed to evaluate the skills of transition-aged individuals with ASD. The TTAP examines vocational, interpersonal and communication skills, all of which are particularly difficult for many individuals with ASD but are necessary for them to successfully enter the workforce. Using an ASD-specific assessment enables each intern to receive targeted instructions for their specific needs during their enrollment in the program. The use of ASD-specific, evidence-based strategies with proven success, such as visual supports and clearly articulated steps and schedules.
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child is young, those thoughts and decisions can be put off until high school. Federal legislation helps to re-enforce this notion. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) a student with a disability must set a goal for their transition at age 14 years. An explicit transition plan needs to be in place by age 16 that outlines the activities which would support the transition plan goals. Typically, those goals are either entering the world of work or independent living, or post-secondary education.

When a child is born, many families begin saving for college and planning for their child’s transition from high school to college. Some families do this through a 529 College Savings Plan. Individuals with a young child on the autism spectrum are no different than the families with a neurotypical child. However, receiving the autism diagnosis can have a devastating effect upon the parents. It leads often to anxiety, uncertainty, and a loss of hopes and dreams. Some families give up those dreams and stop thinking about the transition after high school. They are focused upon daily survival. There is so early determination and intervention with empirical based techniques, the outcomes for children on the autism spectrum have improved and some students are able to attend post-secondary education.

The passage of The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act of 2014, parents of children with any kind of a disability can begin saving for not only post-secondary education, but a wide variety of support services. The ABLE Act Savings accounts are modeled after the 529 College Savings Plans. It can be used to supplement other benefits and pay for expenses such as education, housing, transportation, employment training, supportive technologies, personal support services, or health and basic living expenses. Savings accounts through The ABLE Act function like College or Health Savings Accounts – the earnings grow tax-deferred and are not taxed when used for qualified disability expenses. In order to be eligible, an individual must be entitled to benefits based on blindness or disability under Title II (SSDI) or Title XVI (SSI) or certified by SSA as meeting or being blind, or having a condition listed on the “List of Compensable Allowances” maintained by the SSA. The applicable blindness or disability must have occurred before the individual turned 26 years old. Accounts created through the ABLE Act have an annual contribution limit of $14,000 and an account limit of $400,000. The accounts are subject to a $30 annual account maintenance fee. Beneficiaries do not impair SSI benefits, balances over $100,000 will be counted as a resource of beneficiary and could result in suspension of SSI. Money in these accounts does not impact Medicaid. Money in the account may be invested in a variety of stocks, bonds, mutual funds, or other investment vehicles.

Planning for the long haul involves being able to visualize where one envisions a child on the autism spectrum will wind up and work backward from there. Will the child go to college or some other post-secondary program? Or will she or he go to work? To which level of independent living will this child aspire? Schools do an excellent job of teaching the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals that deal with their core strengths which are the teaching of academic skills. The combination of a lack of training and structural challenges make it more difficult to be successful in attaining IEP goals in the realm of the acquisition of independent living and social skills. Parents may need to take the lead in writing and teaching the skills related to those goals. For example, there are three predictors of a successful transition to our college-based program for students with disabilities. Those habits are: (1) getting themselves up and ready for school or work every day; (2) administering their own medication; and (3) washing their own laundry on a weekly basis. Although, these goals are not directly related to school work, they are directly related to living independently over the long haul. Other independent living skills that help with living in the long-term include: (1) financial literacy; (2) travel training; and (3) pre-employment and employment skills.

Knowing what one can expect from the school district in terms can help parents and the transition planning process. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004), transition services are defined as: a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities. This includes: postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; is based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests; and includes: instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

Where school districts and parents disagree, is where and when those transition services end as well as who is financially responsible for those transition services. Prior to the re-authorization of IDEA, the U.S. Department of Education held a commentary period where this issue was highlighted:

Comment: A few commentators recommended that the regulations outline how schools can use funds provided under Part B of the Act to support children in transitional programs on college campuses and in community-based settings.

Discussion: We do not believe that the clarification requested by the commenters is necessary to add to the regulations because, as with all special education and related services, it is up to each child’s IEP Team to determine the special education and related services that are needed to meet each child’s unique needs in order for the child to receive FAPE. Therefore, if a child’s IEP Team determines that a child’s needs can best be met through participation in transitional programs on college campuses or in community-based settings, and includes such services on the child’s IEP, funds provided under Part B of the Act may be used for this purpose. (34 CFR Parts 300 and 301 Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities; Final Rule, page 46668).

Under IDEA, the local educational agency or school district is responsible for the education of a child with a disability in the least restrictive environment until age 21 years if the student has not graduated from high school, met his or her IEP goals, and had an exit interview. Under this law, the notion of transition-aged youth ended at age 21. Any parent can tell you that a transition-aged youth ends at age 21. Whether or young person has a disability or not, young people still need support and help transitioning into adulthood. With the passage of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), the age of transition-aged youth is extended to age 24. This Act has been hailed as “Most significant piece of legislation for people with disabilities since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).” WIOA extends the notion of transition-aged youth and mandates that 15% of State Vocational Rehabilitative Services budgets be allocated to this population. The goal is to obtain competitive integrative employment for transition-aged youth. It also moves away from sheltered workshop placements and sub-minimum wage jobs. No longer is a mere closing of a case after 90 days used as an outcome to demonstrate that the child is “employed” by the organization. The emphasis is now on longevity in a career and the generation of a living wage. WIOA specifically calls for “…transition services for students with disabilities that facilitates the transition from school to post-secondary education and vocational rehabilitation options, to competitive integrated employment, or pre-employment services…” (H.R. 803-233). Previously, parents of a transition-aged youth could not rely upon state agencies for vocational rehabilitation funds or pre-employment training. WIOA NOW funds pre-employment transition services which can include:

- Interview skills
- Dressing appropriately for the work setting
- Travel training
- Independent living skills
- Resume writing
- Appropriate peer and supervisor communication
- Financial literacy

These skills are critical for students on the spectrum to gain and keep employment. The hope is that this new legislation will result in more collaboration between schools, office of vocational rehabilitation (VR), and institutions of higher education. Miligore et al. (2012) found that the odds were greater for employment if job placement services were provided by VR. However, only 48% ASD youth received such services. Post-secondary college services are the best predictor of better earning, according to Miligore’s team, but only 10% of the VR dataset received these services. Wehman et al (2013) and Moore and Schilling (2015) in their studies found that post-secondary vocational training and college-based transition programs significantly increases the chances that a student on the autism spectrum will be employed. Roux, A.M., Rast, J.E. & Shattuck, P.T. (2018) research indicated that transition-aged youth who received vocational rehabilitative services while in high school were more likely to be employed.

The implication for parents is to encourage the participation of representatives for the state office of vocational rehabilitative services at IEP meetings starting at age 14. If a student on the autism spectrum is not going to pursue a college degree, then they should seek a college-based or community-based transition program, if appropriate, as a part of their transition to adulthood. Finding these programs can be difficult. Four resources available to parents who are thinking about transition planning and looking for programs are:

1. Think College! https://thinkcollege.net/
2. Heath Center National Youth Transition Center: https://www.heath.gwu.edu/

When looking for such a program, ask what are the outcomes for their graduates? Do they have data tracking how their alumni are doing? What do graduates of these programs do once they complete the program? Some programs have a naturally occurring community of people with disabilities who wind up riding permanently in the community near by the transition program. What do these programs do to continue to support these graduates? Howlin, Goode, Hutton, and Rutter’s (2004) findings indicated that few young adults on the autism spectrum lived alone, were employed, and had friends. Most relied upon family for living arrangements and continuing support.
Threshold Program at Lesley University
College-Based Transition Program
Cambridge, MA

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The Threshold Program at Lesley University is a two-year, college-based transition program. Here, we prepare young adults who have diverse learning challenges for the world of work and independent living. Students are a part of Lesley’s on-campus community in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They gain career training in order to be successful in the workplace and in the real world. They learn how to budget, pay bills, use transportation, and be engaged members of their community. And best of all—they make friends for life.

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- Graduate with a certificate of completion and six college credits
- Further skills by choosing to continue on to our Transition Year or Bridge Year programs
- Gain lifetime access to our Alumni Center’s programs and support services

**Program Outcomes**
- 95% of alumni are satisfied with their level of independence
- 85% of alumni are employed in at least one job
- 89% of alumni are satisfied with their social lives
- 64% of alumni spend time with friends at least once per week
Entrusting into adulthood for women with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) involves a shift in many life systems. When preparing for the change from formal schooling to adulthood, a transition plan and support services are often provided. This is a time when students explore what life will look like as an adult. Many transition support services focus on systems that will shift including health care, benefits, daily activities, and decision making. These support services aim to help students navigate the changes and provide what is needed to be a successful, independent adult. Spending time discussing and planning for what life will look like after formal schooling ends is essential for a successful transition. However, many transition support services often leave out one very important system to consider, a social life!

We all need social connectedness and to feel supported, loved, cared about, encouraged, and feel like we belong. But not belonging because we conform to what others think we should be, but truly accepted for who we are. This connection and acceptance is important to our wellbeing and is what true social communities can provide. Finding this social connectedness is critical given that adolescent females with ASD have reported lower quality of life and poor social competence compared to females without ASD, putting them at risk for developing co-existing mental health conditions (Jamison & Schuttler, 2015). Additionally, social isolation is a common experience for young people with ASD and during the transition to adulthood they experience low levels of social activities (Taylor et al., 2016). During high school, undergraduate and graduate school there are often structured opportunities for women with ASD to find social connectedness, whether through school events, sororities, clubs, student government, afterschool programs, etc. Once formal schooling ends these opportunities may be inaccessible or nonexistent for women with ASD. The best-laid transition plans can become unraveled if women with ASD aren’t happy, engaged, and connected with others who can support and encourage them after they leave the structured educational environment. This is especially true as during adolescence and adulthood social expectations and norms often change.

As women with ASD establish priorities for what their adult life will look like, transition planning and support services need to place more emphasis on preparing them for how they will explore, create and maintain social and community connections. Although there are programs available to some women with ASD that are recreational and social in nature, these often focus on teaching of social skills, changing behavior, or providing habilitation services. While these programs can be beneficial and much needed for some, they may not meet the needs of all women with ASD. Whether she is interested in structured social opportunities, less structured, looking to gain more skills, gain more friends, or just be creative and spend time with others who enjoy the same or similar activities, the end goal should be the same: for her to feel connected and accepted. Locating social communities where women with ASD can be themselves in a safe, welcoming, flexible and accessible environment can be a critical factor in the happiness and success of women with ASD in adulthood.

How do we support women with ASD in building a social circle and community connections once their formal schooling ends? While the answer to this question is complex and should be individualized for each woman, there are some common areas of importance that should be considered when supporting her.

Put Her First and Center

As opportunities are explored for social connections, the interests and motivation for women with ASD needs to be at the forefront. Women on the spectrum need to be heard, but you may have to listen differently. Learning about her talents, strengths, concerns, and apprehensions should not happen in one meeting. Time and patience should play a role in the process so that she can truly be at the center of planning for what her social life will look like as an adult. At Felicity House, a social community for women with ASD from 18 through old age, we learn about a woman’s likes, dislikes, talents and challenges. There is no specified time limit on how long it will take us to explore this to ensure that the woman can truly have the chance to express herself.

Felicity House is a community space just for adult women with autism. Come enjoy a non-clinical program designed for women who are ready and interested in attending social events and activities.

At Felicity House you’ll find:

- The company and support of other women with autism
- Dynamic activities, workshops and guest speakers on a wide range of topics from culinary arts to comic books
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- A safe and welcoming place where you can be yourself
- Spaces like a lounge and art studio
- The expertise of a friendly staff person
- A community

Visit us online: felicity-house.org Talk to us: info@felicity-house.org • 646.362.0002
The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Adds 5th Adult Autism Endowment Fund
Assuring a Focus on Adult Autism Public Policy for Generations to Come

By The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation

The collaborative vision of The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation (DJFF), the nation’s first not-for-profit organization to exclusively focus on adult autism, has been further enhanced by the establishment of a new endowment fund at Arizona State University, adding to DJFF’s existing endowed fund initiatives at Rutgers University, Yale University, Brown University and the University of Miami.

The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Adult Autism Public Policy Fellowship Endowed Fund (Fund) at Arizona State University will provide support for one Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Fellow (Fellow) annually who is attaining a graduate level degree in public policy or who is a post-graduate at the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions. The Fellow will be tasked with developing a national public policy agenda (named The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Agenda) and a national public policy white paper (named The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Adult Autism Public Policy White Paper) relating to prevalent issues that impact the lives of the diverse population of adults diagnosed with Autism and their families. The agenda and white paper will guide the work of the First Place AZ Global Leadership Institute at The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Center for Public Policy. The Fellow will also lead meetings of stakeholders, professionals and legislators to facilitate the creation and implementation of the agenda and white paper. The agenda and white paper will be distributed nationally and statewide to agencies, legislative bodies and policy makers whose work impacts adults diagnosed with Autism and their families.

Linda J. Walder, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Foundation, says: “The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Adult Autism Public Policy Fellowship Endowed Fund is the first endowed fund in the nation to support the creation of a unified, national adult autism public policy agenda and white paper that will bring together stakeholders and professionals to focus on issues that impact the lifelong journey of Autism.”

Denise D. Resnik, Founder and President of First Place, AZ reports: “We’re honored to be part of The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation collection of endowed adult autism funds enabling us to leverage promising adult research, programs and resources that lead to public policy initiatives and systems-level change.”

Jonathan Koppell, Dean of the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions adds: “The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Adult Autism Public Policy Fund builds upon our work with First Place and speaks eloquently to our philosophy of connecting public policy with direct practice.”

The DJFF university endowment initiatives continue to expand the Foundation’s mission for a global focus on adult autism. Designed to increase awareness, opportunities, and knowledge about the diverse...
Empowering Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

By Debra Mandell, OTR/L, MA
Director, Monarch School
Monarch Center for Autism

With the implementation of the Employment First Initiative, integrated community employment has become a nationwide focus that is affording greater opportunities for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). While we're moving in the right direction, there is still work to be done. According to the 2017 National Autism Indicators Report, approximately 50,000 youth with ASD turn 18 each year. Compared to their peers with other types of disabilities, young adults with autism had the lowest rate of employment. Only 58% of those on the autism spectrum ever worked during their early 20's, as compared to more than 90% of young adults with emotional disturbance, speech impairment, or learning disability, and 74% of young adults with intellectual disability who ever worked. Nearly 66% of young adults with ASD did not work at all during their first two years after high school, and among those who did, nearly 80% worked part-time and earned an average of $9.11/hour. Full-time workers earned an average of $8.08/hour. Often, due to communication and/or behavior challenges, students with ASD have limited opportunities for career development and work experience while in high school. The lack of employment for adults with autism creates a heightened sense of isolation, despondency, and dependence on others, which negatively impacts society as a whole.

Effective school-based transition education programs for individuals ages 14 through 21 with ASD are now more critical than ever. As outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Transition Services are designed to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. They are based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and they include: instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation.

An effective transition education program includes a collaborative learning environment that simulates real-world experiences, and incorporates daily community-based instruction in a natural setting. Students are taught self-direction through practice and mastery of functional routines, and experiential learning supports comprehension and skill generalization. Students achieve independence in numerous critical life skills including: executive functioning, health and safety, self-determination, employability, social competency, consumer awareness, recreation, and independent living, which prepares them to live and work to their optimal potential.

Key components of a successful school-based transition education program include:

A staff comprised of speech, occupational, music, art, horticulture, and behavior therapists, intervention specialists and associate teachers - Success is dependent on this multidisciplinary team being well-versed in both autism and vocational education/transition planning, instructing the on-campus school services and off-campus work site/recreational activities.

A detailed Transition Plan and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that drive instruction. Transition plans should be person-centered and results-oriented with a focus on student preferences, interests, needs and strengths. They should be developed based on formal and informal assessments of skills in relation to post-secondary education, integrated competitive employment, and independent living. Transition meetings with the student’s multidisciplinary IEP team and interagency team should be scheduled to review both the transition plan and student progress to identify steps for future planning.

On-site simulated work and living experiences. Environments should be evaluated and adapted to meet the unique sensory needs and learning styles of young adults.

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Transition Education Program Prepares students 14-22 for success after graduation in the areas of employability, independent living and community inclusion.

Therapeutic Residential Treatment Co-ed residential treatment program for individuals ages 8 through 21 who have moderate to severe autism, moderate autism with higher deficits in daily living skills, autism with maladaptive behaviors, or dual diagnosis autism with significant psychiatric disorders.

Adult Vocational and Supported Living Individualized, adapted, and self-directed day habilitation and prevocational training program for ages 18 and older. Prevocational services include community-based and onsite prevocational training. Supported living program is also available.

Monarch Center for Autism A Division of Bellefaire JCB

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The value of connections and collaborations between families, schools and organizations for smooth student transitions from high school to adult supports is immeasurable. This critical time period, often referred to as “the cliff,” deserves renewed attention as we strive for successful transitions for the ever growing number of young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). At The Arc Westchester, we are unique and fortunate in that we are able to dedicate time to making these connections in support of young adults and families. We look to reach families early to prevent having students sit home for long periods of time after exiting high school, regression and isolation happens all too frequently. With these delays in accessing services, young adults see an immediate and significant decrease in structure, support, learning and productivity along with an increased caregiving burden on families.

It is our belief that an increase in the availability of transition professionals and services available to families and schools to connect with will increase the likelihood of success for students in their adult lives. How The Arc Westchester builds these connections, and how students, families, schools and community agencies may benefit, can serve as a guide for those who wish to develop more connective practices in their community.

We begin by simple outreach to high schools. Where are our students? They are found across more than 45 school districts throughout Westchester County, NY, and at our two BOCES programs. It can be challenging to find the right people with whom to connect. Each district has its own structure and culture and many districts do not have dedicated transition staff. Some school districts offer transition specialists, some do not. Some have consultants, while others rely on special education teachers to do the work by carving out a portion of their time for transition related activities. Parents already utilizing service from The Arc Westchester are often the best link into a school. We also rely network opportunities with schools at related fairs, workshops and training programs. However, it is just cold calls and emails that help us reach school staff.

Once connected, The Arc Westchester offers information, education, guidance and support. School personnel, such as teachers, transition specialists, guidance staff, and social workers, are provided information catered to their need and level of knowledge regarding what services and supports are available to their students, how and when to apply for those services and what community resources are available, both before and after transition out of high school. This may include workshops, small group meetings, and other opportunities for school staff to tour programs and meet young adults who have recently transitioned into adult services. The program visits allow school personnel to learn about what the next step might look like for their students, and what skills students may need to be equipped with in order to be successful in post-secondary programs. The school personnel acquire knowledge that they can then translate into practical tools for teaching their students. The more they understand the post-secondary opportunities available to their students, the better able they are to prepare them for those opportunities. When community agencies open their doors to families seeking programs, schools and partner agencies, we better understand the full breadth of services available to more fully support our young people.

Another way to connect and bridge the gap between high school and adulthood is through a variety of family support services like recreation and respite. As an example, The Arc Westchester’s programs support students 17 years and up, individuals and their families are able to take advantage of opportunities while still in high school and foster better community connections. Families connect with other families and learn from their experiences, students begin to form social circles outside of their small school community, and organizations like ours get to know the young adults early in order to identify the most appropriate programs and supports for them upon exiting high school. Also, families who are connected to state funding early can avail themselves of these services and supports, another reason to reach families well before they exit high school.

In direct work with families, information...
Job Skills are Skills for Life

By Marjorie Madfis
Executive Director
Yes She Can

What we learn at work can often help us in our life, outside of our place of employment, and what we learn during our personal experiences can benefit our performance on the job. Sometimes these transferable skills and behaviors are referred to as “soft skills.”

For example, after an IBM attorney required that I get proof of insurance before contracting with a new vendor to produce a video, I started requiring proof of insurance before I had work done on our house. After I became a parent of a child with autism, I became more patient with and less judgmental of my work colleagues which improved my ability to collaborate with people who I originally thought of as “difficult.”

Unlike technical skills, soft skills and behaviors can be difficult to measure. But without these skills, an employee is unlikely to be effective in her job, no matter how simple or complex the work tasks are. Furthermore, without these skills, adults with autism are more likely to be dependent on others to negotiate life for them. Neurotypical people pick up these soft skills, through opportunities in school, through life experiences, and through intuition.

Yes She Can job skills development program helps our trainees build the thinking skills and behaviors that are essential at work but also enhance our participants’ life at home and in the community. At Yes She Can our work skills counselors are clinical professionals, and provide behavioral coaching while trainees are engaged in all aspects of running a resale store. In addition to the typical challenge of the workplace, the counselors intentionally set up opportunities for trainees to experience moments of tension. Our participants learn best when they are engaged in real-life situations.

Yes She Can’s comprehensive curriculum includes guidelines for how to undertake various tasks. But we teach trainees that guidelines work 80% of the time, the other 20% of the situations require the worker’s discretion. Many of our program participants have had little opportunity to rely on their own judgement. They have no confidence and are afraid to make a mistake. The most frequent expression they use is “I’m sorry.”

We let our program participants know that we trust them and that they can make decisions; that making a mistake is simply a learning opportunity that can be applied not only to the workplace but to their life, enabling them to be more independent.

Here are a few example of challenges our trainees faced at work but with counseling they learned from them to enhance their work and personal life.

1. Be able to make a “good” decision even without complete information, where a “good” decision is one that is reasonable and fits with the business objectives, not your personal preferences.

   At our program at Girl AGain boutique, a trainee had an assignment to dress a particular American Girl doll named Marisol and prepare her for sale. Marisol’s original outfit was not in our inventory but there was something similar available. Our trainee refused to do the task because she said “it’s not authentic.” Her manager acknowledged that this was not ideal, but that an average customer would be happy to have this doll in a similar, not original, outfit. Our trainee could not accept a “good” option for the business because it did not meet her personal perspective. We discussed the implications of losing her job if she refused to follow her manager’s directions, and this was not something she could even comprehend was a possibility. She became agitated and need to decompress in our “cozy corner” in the store. Understanding the business needs and a customer’s perspective is a challenge for our trainees with autism (perhaps due to a lack of theory-of-mind), but it is something we believe is important to work on.

   This ability to make a good decision, not a perfect one, in all aspects of life will reduce frustration and enable the individual to accept limitations and still feel a sense of accomplishment.

2. Be able to wait for a response from a manager, and at the same time, be able to move on to other work in order to be productive.

A former trainee, who is now an associate, was entering hand written sales receipts...
Supporting Parents in the Transition Process

By Elizabeth Roberts, PsyD, National Director, Clinical Support Services College Internship Program

Adulting was on Oxford Dictionary’s 2016 short list for word of the year. “Adulting” is an endearing word that flashes an instant, sympathetic understanding about the scary, confusing, and sometimes dull aspects of being a grown-up. Parents watching their children’s wobbly advances toward adulthood understand their ambivalence. Here are a few points for parents and transition program professionals to consider before and during a transition experience:

Teach Foundation Skills Before Transition

Families are often focused on the long-dreamed of big goals of higher education and/or a job. Proactive teaching of daily living and “me management” skills reduces the likelihood that these big goals will take a backseat because foundation skills were not in place. Starting before high school, parents can implement a roadmap to support the acquisition of daily living skills including meal prep, laundry, medication management, budgeting, event planning, and routines. Teens and young adults also need skills teaching to establish habits that maintain emotional and physical well-being and strategies for creating a meaningful social life. They need support to manage common co-occurring conditions including anxiety, depression, and ADHD. These foundation skills are established by phasing out supports over high school. Assume nothing - true skill mastery can be evaluated with a “final exam” conducted at home or in the community.

Set up a Communication System

When children leave home and high school, parents confront an abrupt change in their role as manager, advocate, and often, close companion and chief cook and bottle washer. Transition staff and the college disabilities office are less accessible than the child study team case manager; ADA-based legal rights differ dramatically than those supported by IDEA. Young adults themselves often have difficulty establishing an appropriate routine of communication with their parents. Anxious young adults may text or phone their parents several times a day whereas others may suddenly drop off the planet or communicate erratically. Mitch Nagler, director of the Bridges Program at Adelphi University, remarks, “It is often far more difficult for parents as they are faced with the loss of communication and sense of control that they had from K-12.” Preparing for the shift from IDEA to ADA and setting up a plan of parent-student communication prior to entry will increase everyone’s confidence and smooth the transition. The plan can include more contact at the start of the transition, with scheduled tapering over subsequent weeks. This helps everyone prepare for the change, sends a loving message, and is a great opportunity to role model the executive function of planning ahead.

Goals Alignment

Transition programming is much more likely to succeed if families and professionals communicate effectively about goals and expectations and locate realistic alignment before and at the start of transition programming. Goals typically revolve around academics, career, social and emotional skills, and selfhood. More simply, parents have a deep desire to see their son or daughter happy, healthy, and as independent as possible. The admission process focuses on discovering what parents and young adults want and expect and at every subsequent phase, alignment is carefully monitored and managed. Are parents’ and young adults’ goals and expectations aligned? Are these expectations, in turn, aligned with the transition program’s best estimate as to what can be accomplished? Goal alignment is a team effort that is crucial to success.

Seek a Trusting Relationship

Feelings are contagious. Nagler remarks, “If the parent’s anxieties are felt by their student, then it is likely that the student will become more anxious as well.” He advises parents and transition staff to commit together to establishing a trusting relationship and to encourage their son or daughter to develop a trusting relationship as well. If a trusting relationship cannot be established, the team needs to ask why, as success rests on this foundation.

see Supporting on page 28

Elizabeth Roberts, PsyD

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Transitioning to Work

By Lois Meszaros, PhD
Director, Behavioral & Autism Services
Chimes Delaware

When students with disabilities turn 21, or receive a high school diploma, their entitlement to special education services ends, and the school bus stops coming to their corner. Before the school bus stops, the school and the adult program need to collaborate and plan for what happens after the school entitlement ends. Unlike entitlements, eligibility for services does not guarantee access to, or acceptance in, a program.

Transition is a formal process that begins by age 16 for a student who receives special education services in the United States. At this time, the school system must begin helping those students plan for their lives after high school, whether it is employment, college attendance, vocational training, or independent living and adult disability services. As part of the transition process, students should be encouraged to consider their interests, abilities and preferences and how these issues will affect their vocational opportunities.

Transition from adolescence to adulthood is a challenging time for all students, regardless of disability, but it is especially problematic for students on the autism spectrum due to social and communication problems. These young adults and their families must learn to navigate multifaceted adult care systems and manage complex service needs.

Paul Wehman’s Project Search (Wehman, P. et al., 2012) demonstrated that setting goals for employment, providing successive internships in community businesses, and establishing collaboration between the school and the adult service staff helped transitioning students to find and retain employment. Wehman’s research also revealed that intensive instruction in social, communication, and job skills, combined with the provision of visual supports and the establishment of work routines and structure, were crucial to successful transitioning. There is a growing body of research that indicates that with the right type, level, and intensity of support, individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can work in a variety of jobs in the community (e.g., Wehman, 2016). This issue is crucial given the fact that the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is approximately 75% (Eckstein, Savak, & Wright, 2017).

Chimes Delaware is committed to the model described by Wehman and provides a variety of employment services to students with ASD who are transitioning from high school to work. Although Chimes offers a continuum of vocational services, an individual can begin the program wherever his interests and abilities place him. Individuals with the requisite skills can directly enter supported or competitive employment without going through the prevocational program. The key to Chimes’ success in transitioning is matching the vocational program to the wants and needs of the person with ASD. Chimes’ philosophy is to place individuals with ASD into positions they find fulfilling. Then as their skill sets develop, opportunities may open for even more gratifying positions.

New from HarperCollins

“Nuttjob.” “Weirdo.” All of her life, 17-year-old Alvie Fitz has dealt with name-calling. This novel presents readers with a fully developed picture of a person with autism; she’s frank, observant, and funny. This is a gorgeous love story of depth and raw emotion that beautifully dismantles the ugly perceptions of autism.

Kirkus Reviews

This is one of those books that upon finishing it, I hugged it tightly to my chest. It was movingly beautiful and painfully heartbreaking.

Goodreads reviews

Alvie Fitz is a girl who loves animals. It’s people she has trouble with. Because of her unusual mind and way of thinking, some people tell her that she is “on the spectrum.” Others just call her odd. As a result, she’s always considered human contact overrated — until she meets Stanley, a boy just as unusual as she is.

A Novel by A.J. Steiger
Available in bookstores & at Amazon

Chimes Delaware is one of the largest providers of community services for adults with autism and developmental disabilities with behavioral challenges.

We offer a wide range of vocational, employment, residential, alternative enrichment, and dual disability (MH/MR) programs for over 500 individuals state-wide. Our employment programs provide a range of work and career-based assessments, training, and job placement opportunities.

The Chimes Family of Services has a rich history spanning over seven decades. We take a client-centered, evidence-based approach to improving the independence, well-being, and success of every person we serve. Learn more about Chimes at www.chimes.org.

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Transdisciplinary Transition Assessment and Instructional Planning

By Candice Baugh, MA, LMHC, and Catherine McDermott, MSE, MEd
Shrub Oak International School

A cornerstone to successful transition from school to work for students on the autism spectrum is individual assessment that yields meaningful information for instructional planning. Transdisciplinary assessment, which involves the student’s full educational team, provides a comprehensive profile of student strengths and weaknesses in both academic and socio-emotional/life skill areas. With a more complete profile, strategic independent living and socioemotional skill goals can be taught throughout the curriculum. Best practices for transition assessment include focusing on skills related to career development, employment, independent living, postsecondary education, community involvement, and social relationships (Morningstar et al., 2016). Thus, transition assessment must be transdisciplinary assessment and an effective transition education plan must include instruction related to multiple life areas.

Educational planning aimed at successful transition begins with thorough assessment, an individualized on-going process of assessing a student’s strengths and weaknesses and gathering salient information for post-secondary planning. Effective transition assessment and instruction involves assessing strengths and interests as well as adaptive functioning including social functioning, executive functioning and transferable skills. The Individual Strengths and Skills Inventory (ISSI) and the Underlying Characteristics Checklist (UCC) can be used to gather qualitative information about student skills and strengths, social and communication behaviors, restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviors and interests and sensory, cognitive and motor differences (Aspy & Grossman, 2008). The UCC (both parent and student reported versions) can also be used to complete a Ziggurat worksheet to help faculty better understand students and to develop thoughtful interventions as needed. Additionally, information gathered about students from parents can be incorporated into their initial education plans in order to better understand the student and to guide lesson planning.

Adaptive functioning scales such as the Vineland-II can inform which practical life goals, e.g., improving daily living skills, will be helpful in an educational plan, particularly related to goals aimed at eventual independent living (Sparrow et al., 2005). An assessment such as the Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Functioning (BRIEF) (Roth et al., 2015) can inform instructional planning related to time management, organization and planning and shifting- all skills which contribute to success in both school and work. Finally, a formal social assessment tool, such as the Social Responsiveness Scale or the Social Skills Rating System, can provide a baseline of student social abilities as well as provide information about which areas of social understanding and skills would most benefit from intervention (Constantino & Gruber, 2012; Gresham and Elliott, 1990).

The transition assessment tools mentioned previously can also be supplemented as needed with additional formal clinical assessment. In addition, faculty can record informal observations that supplement an understanding of the student’s strengths and needs. For example, a student scored poorly on a measure of social reciprocity, but it is observed that he is able to ask questions and be more reciprocal in specific contexts. Student profiles obtained during transition assessment can simultaneously inform instructional planning and help to create good matches and appropriate accommodations at job sites.

Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI)

Evidence indicates that students instructed in the self-determined learning model of instruction (SDLMI) model are more likely to have achieved positive adult outcomes, including being employed at a higher rate than peers who were not self-determined (Wehmeyer, 1997). In the SDLMI model, students are taught how to set goals and revise them as needed; thus, they identify their job/career and educational goals following the SDLMI model (Wehmeyer, 2007). Other self-determination skills include choice and decision making, problem-solving, self-management, self-regulation, self-advocacy/leadership, and self-awareness/knowledge. These skills enable students to make informed decisions which will improve the quality of their lives.

Transdisciplinary Job Assessment and Compatibility Analysis

Since work experience has been identified as a major predictor of post-school see Assessment on page 26
Preparing for the Challenges of Adulthood

By Helena L. Maguire, MS, LABA, BCBA
Executive Director
Melmark New England

The transition for individuals affected by autism from special education services to adult services often poses a great deal of anxiety and barriers for the individual in transition, as well as for their parents, caregivers and service professionals. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), students are entitled to a range of special education services and the associated funding of those services until they receive a high school diploma or have aged out of the school system (this differs in age from 18 to 21 years old). Once their special education services have concluded, these same services and funding options are no longer available. Therefore, it becomes critical to have appropriate transition services in place while the student is in the school system. These services should provide a strong foundation of acquired daily living skills, employment options, and community participation that will assist the young adult to access a meaningful post-school experience.

Quite often, experts stress to educators and parents the importance of preparing for the transition process early. The transition planning process is conducted collaboratively among the school district, educators, parents and the student. The goal of these transition planning meetings is to ensure that students with autism receive comprehensive transition services as provided under IDEA (2004). It is the school district’s responsibility to provide the needed supports to that student in order to meet his or her goals for after high school to the best of his or her abilities. Given the complexity of the needs of most students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), appropriate planning is a multi-year process. Through the student’s Individual Education Program (IEP) process, transition planning services must be included for all special education students at age 14. However, as indicated by all the messages to parents and educators to “start early,” it is important to emphasize that the process should begin as early as 12 years old, and can begin even earlier.

As young adults with autism face the challenges of adulthood, they are also presented with many opportunities that can be made available with proper planning, training, and skills development. As a collaborative team, planning for this transition before the critical date is perhaps the key to addressing potential barriers of success. Thinking about what the young adult’s life should include typically involves an evaluation of the following:

- Further vocational education or post-secondary education
- Job-supported employment
- Day habilitation programs
- Community volunteerism
- Recreational interests
- Living arrangements

Deciding upon these goals and then developing the corresponding plans in order to maximize skills instruction becomes the next step. Additionally, at any time in the transition years that it is warranted, these goals should be altered to reflect the best plan for the student as he or she reaches adulthood. It is important that the student develops the necessary skills during the school years that will enable him or her to achieve these goals in his or her adult life.

The incidence increase, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in autism rates over the past few years (Baio et al., 2018) has increased awareness and created more opportunities for young adults with autism for post-school life options. Most community colleges have created programs that support students through their college programs. Employers have developed relationships with service providers to support the employment for individuals with varying degrees of specialized disabilities and needs. Through each state’s developmental disabilities service departments, resources are available to assist with employment counseling, on the job training, community activities for recreation, social groups and volunteerism. Accessing this information of available resources and synthesizing the options into a well-planned approach is often one of the challenges for parents and educators.

see Preparing on page 26
Leaders of the Autism and Behavioral Health Communities
To Be Honored at May 22nd Reception in New York City

By Staff Writer
Autism Spectrum News

Steve Coe
Daniel Etra and Erin Rosenthal
Peter Provet, PhD
Joyce Wale

Steve Coe, CEO
Community Access

“Lifetime Achievement Award”

Steve Coe has dedicated his career to advancing the rights of people with mental health concerns. As CEO of Community Access, since 1979, he leads by example, affirmatively hiring people with a lived experience in the mental health system at all levels of the organization.

Under Mr. Coe’s leadership, Community Access has developed many innovative programs such as the Howie the Harp peer training academy, the AWARDS EHR (acquired by Foot Hold Technology), affordable housing for formerly homeless people recovering from mental health concerns and for working families with children, Pet Access adoption service, and New York’s first peer-operated crisis respite center that is a cost-effective alternative to hospital care.

The agency currently owns and manages over 1,100 units of affordable and supportive housing at 20 sites, and has 590 units in active development and proposals for 700 more.

Steve was one of the first board members of Coalition for the Homeless and the Supportive Housing Network of New York, and is former president of the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation and the NYS Association for Community Living. He chaired two NY/NY Campaigns, led the statewide Campaign for Mental Health Housing, which helped secure financing for thousands of new housing units, and testified before Congress on the “Examining H.R. 2646, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act” in June, 2015.

In 2012, Steve was instrumental in forming a broad coalition calling for increased police training for officers dealing with ‘emotionally disturbed persons’ 911 calls. As a result of this campaign, the NYPD began Crisis Intervention Team training for 5,000 officers in 2015. In recognition for his efforts, Steve received the 2016 National Council for Behavioral Health Advocate of the Year Award.

Daniel Etra and Erin Rosenthal
CEO and President & COO
Rethink Autism

“Leadership Award”

Mr. Daniel A. Etra currently serves as Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Rethink Autism, Inc. With over two decades of successful international business experience, including 15 years as a serial entrepreneur, Mr. Etra was Co-Founder & CEO of R.E.R. International, a global supplier of printed materials to the retail industry. He was a Consultant at Bain & Company, helping establish their NY office and also served as a Managing Director of Promodex Ltd., an importer and distributor of consumer appliances and industrial equipment in the Middle East. In addition, Mr. Etra served in the Israel Defense Forces and worked at Wasserstein, Perella & Co., specializing in M&A in the fields of healthcare, technology and natural resources.

Mr. Etra has won numerous awards including the Inc. 500 Award, the SmartCEO Future 50 Award, and CEO of the Year from Industry Era and Corporate Vision Magazines. He is also a member of the Young Presidents’ Organization (YPO). Mr. Etra has an MBA from Harvard Business School and a BA in Economics from Yale University. Born and raised in New York City, he is active in variety of children’s causes and volunteers with organizations such as NY Cares and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

Mr. Etra and Rosenthal currently serves as a Co-Founder and President and COO of Rethink Autism, Inc. Prior to co-founding the Company, Mr. Rosenthal was Co-Founder & President and COO of R.E.R. International, a global supplier of printed materials to the retail industry. Previously, Mr. Rosenthal was Director of Operations at QRS Corp., a public company providing e-commerce solutions to the retail industry. Mr. Rosenthal served in the Israel Defense Forces as a Captain in the Navy. Mr. Rosenthal has an MBA from University of Illinois and a BA in Political Science from Tel Aviv University. Born and raised in Tel Aviv, Israel, he is the father of three children.

Peter Provet, PhD
President and CEO
Odyssey House

“Community Service Award”

Dr. Peter Provet joined Odyssey House as President and CEO in 1999. Previously, Dr. Provet was Vice President and Director of Adolescent Programs and Clinical Support Services at Phoenix House, where he ran the largest adolescent treatment system in the country. He has more than 25 years of clinical experience treating people with addictions and mental illness.

He was awarded a doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Boston University; a Master of Arts in Psychology from City College of New York; and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from City College of New York. Dr. Provet is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist and formerly an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

Peter holds memberships with Treatment Communities of America (TCA); New York Association of Alcoholism & Substance Abuse Providers (ASAP); and serves on the Boards of the Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies and the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. He has authored several articles and op-eds on substance abuse issues including help for cocaine abusers and their families, guidelines for psychologists in assessing and treating substance abuse, and adapting treatment techniques for special populations. Dr. Provet is an expert spokesperson on substance abuse and health issues. Extensive media commentary includes: letters to the editor and opinion pieces published in major media outlets (The New York Times, USA Today, Newsday, and New York Daily News); national and local television and radio news features and documentaries.

Joyce Wale
Regional Executive Director
United Healthcare

“Corporate Leadership Award”

Joyce Wale began her career in high school, where she started her school’s Social Action Committee and volunteered at health and human services organizations. Her dedication led her to obtain both a Bachelor and Master’s degree in Social Work, with honors. Ms. Wale worked in child and adolescent behavioral health programs at both the direct clinical services level as well as administration in clinic, residential and day treatment services. With an extensive clinical and administrative program background, she went on to direct a National Institute of Mental Health State Planning grant in New Jersey. Moving up quickly to take over the leadership of the state’s Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services while continuing to serve as the Project Manager and Principal Investigator of the multi-year planning grant.

The lack of direct clinical work led Ms. Wale to establish a small clinical private practice. In addition Ms. Wale taught at the university level and served in various capacities on the Board of Directors for the NJ State Chapter of the Mental Health Association. She served on a variety of legislative and NY State Committees while leading the New York City Health & Hospitals Corporate Behavioral Health Services. Under her leadership was the implementation of AOT, the development of numerous services across the city as well as establishing roles for peer leadership and publishing multiple articles on service delivery.

She is a fellow of the New York Academy of Medicine and Vice President of the Board of Directors of the Institute of Behavioral Healthcare Improvement.

Currently Ms. Wale is the Northeast Regional Executive Director for Behavioral Health at United Healthcare Community. In this role she has oversight of the Insurance Company’s Health and Recovery Plan, and its Mainstream and Essential Health Plan Behavioral Health Services. Additionally, she oversees the public sector behavior health services in the northeast. She is passionate about including individuals with lived experience in service delivery and administration.
Annual Leadership Awards Reception

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Annual Leadership Awards Reception

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Leadership Award

Peter Provet, PhD
President and CEO
Odyssey House
Community Service Award

Joyce Wale
Regional Executive Director
United Healthcare
Corporate Leadership Award

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5:00 PM - 8:00 PM

5:00 pm Networking Reception - 6:00 pm Awards Presentation

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Proceeds from this event will go towards expanding and developing the nonprofit educational mission of Autism Spectrum News and Behavioral Health News. With these publications, Mental Health News Education, Inc. aims to reduce stigma, promote awareness and disseminate evidence-based information that serves to improve the lives of individuals with mental illness, substance use disorders and autism spectrum disorders, their families, and the provider community that serves them.

For more information contact Ira Minot, Executive Director, at (570) 629-5960 or iraminot@mhnews.org
Empowering from page 10

with ASD. Sample environments might include a fitness center, student-run store, janitorial cart, clerical skills center, assembly/packing center, greenhouse/outdoor garden, technology center, microenterprise shop, student café, and independent living centers such as a laundry room and full kitchen.

Community-based work experiences. Schools should create partnerships with a variety of community stakeholders including local stores, hotels, universities, and non-profit organizations. These partnerships provide a wide-range of experiences, which afford students exposure to different career paths and help them make informed choices in future planning. These work experiences enable students to generalize learned skills in a real-life setting, with the oversight of a teacher or therapist. These experiences help students broaden employment networks, enhance social circles, build self-esteem, identify their preferences, interests, needs, and strengths, and foster a sense of purpose through meaningful contribution.

Recreational and leisure skills. These skills should initially be systematically taught and then practiced via formed clubs such as game club, fitness club, music groups, and cooking club, which nurture positive socialization and friendship development based on common interests. The incorporation of daily community “explorers” groups that venture to locations including the bank, grocery store, restaurants, parks, and the library, provide important opportunities for students to practice practical, everyday skills.

Life skills. Daily living skills such as hygiene, health, nutrition, personal safety, money management, sexuality, and social boundaries, should be taught and practiced throughout the breadth of a transition education program in a variety of settings to encourage independence and community safety.

Technology and visual supports. The integration of technology is often key to reaching and motivating young adults with ASD. Therapists and teachers can use technology to create individualized visual supports for students which include social stories, visual schedules, topic display boards, video models, and more.

The goal of an effective school-based Transition Education Program is to provide its students with the services and supports they need to make a successful move into adult life, so they are as empowered and independent as possible. With the rising prevalence of ASD diagnoses, the scale of the adult unemployment problem is growing. Improving employment outcomes for those living with ASD is incredibly important. Work opportunities enhance quality of life, economic independence, social integration, and ultimately, they benefit society as a whole.

Thoughtful transition planning, facilitated by qualified therapists/instructors who provide meaningful real-world experiences in varied settings with accompanying supports, can help students with ASD experience opportunities that lead to fulfilling adult lives and meaningful employment.

Debra Mandell can be reached at mandell@bellefairjcb.org. For more information, visit www.monarchcenterforautism.org.

View Our Sister Publication, Behavioral Health News at www.mhnews.org

Your Trusted Source of Information, Education, Advocacy and Resources on Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment and Services
Transition to Adulthood: Many Difficult yet Essential Challenges for Autistics

By Karl Wittig, P.E.
Advisory Board Chair
Aspies For Social Success (AFSS)

As a group, autistics are well-known for having difficulty with many kinds of changes in their lives. The transition to adulthood constitutes one of the most difficult and, at the same time, one of the most important that most people ever make. For autistics, then, this transition usually presents challenges that are often very difficult and even formidable. Ironically, these challenges largely involve skills that society expects everyone to develop innately and effortlessly, and thereby provides the least amount of instruction, accommodation or support to those who are deficient in such.

As an unidentified twice-exceptional student (many years prior to my autism diagnosis), I recall being aware of how greatly inadequate my otherwise academically-rigorous education was in preparing me for many important aspects of life, particularly socialization and daily living. Following my diagnosis, I learned that these are the most common areas of difficulty for most autistics. I subsequently observed that their greatest challenges involve things that are rarely (if ever) taught in schools, or anywhere else for that matter.

Preparation for adulthood requires, perhaps foremost, the development of daily living skills. The skills for maintaining a residence and tending to the fundamental necessities of life are clearly essential for living independently. Also required are not only the formal training for one’s occupation or profession, but the interpersonal, social, and communications (implicitly nonverbal) skills needed in the workplace. I should note here that, in a recent TV news interview, the CEO of a major employment website made the point that these three areas are exactly the ones that employers are most looking for nowadays. These skills are, for that matter, required in just about every aspect of adult life, be it finding friends, romantic partners, or other companions; participating in communities that one belongs to; or interacting with organizations and institutions of any kind. Instruction in these areas is probably beneficial for just about everyone, but it is nothing less than an absolute necessity for those anywhere on the autism spectrum.

Karl Wittig, P.E.

Independent and Daily Living

For autistics, who often have difficulty with changes in their regular routines, making the transition to independent living can be very demanding. Learning the requisite skills can be challenging in itself, and applying them to their lives even more so; this has long been known to be the case. Learning to deal with unexpected or unfamiliar situations presents still more significant challenges. What is not often considered, however, is that most activities of daily life are periodic routines that are performed daily (e.g., food preparation, personal hygiene), weekly (laundry, housecleaning), monthly (rent, bill-paying), annually (filing tax returns), or at other regular intervals. Autistics are known for being very good at following and adhering to repetitive routines. If a person on the spectrum can overcome the hurdle of learning and mastering these routines, even at the most rudimentary level, it becomes much easier to incorporate them into their lives and thereby live independently with far fewer (if any) supports than would otherwise be necessary.

As such, explicit instruction in these areas needs to be provided to young autistics before they reach adulthood. It can be done in a school setting, in the home, through appropriate support services, or by professionals who understand the needs and challenges of autistics. In particular, personal hygiene, clothing and dress, food and diet, home maintenance and housekeeping, financial management and budgeting, and other practical life matters have to be addressed. This must be done for everyone on the autism spectrum, regardless of cognitive intelligence, unusual abilities, or degree of autistic impairment. It also needs to be done in advance of actual transition to adulthood (i.e., graduation from high school). The level of instruction should be tailored to individual autistics, but it cannot be neglected in any case. In particular, the commonly-held belief that any person of minimal or higher intelligence can learn these “on their own” needs to be permanently discarded. Although some costs may be incurred in providing such instruction, they will be miniscule when compared to the lifetime costs of providing supports and see Challenges on page 30
Women from page 8

in order to create an individualized social experience.

Seek Flexible, Participant-Led Opportunities

With the transition to adulthood comes pressure to be flexible with changing roles, having to multitask, and coping with shifting life systems. With flexibility being a challenge for some women with ASD, this new pressure may be exhausting. Therefore, seeking social communities that are flexible, understanding and empathetic can support women during this challenging time. Programs and opportunities that allow women to come and go as they please, attend when it works best for them, sparks their interests, and treats them as adults will likely keep them engaged and connected. Social communities should grow with women as they age. Social opportunities should be allowed to participants to lead decision making and guide program content, which will too aid in their level of engagement.

Identity Affirming

Exploring one’s identity can take a leap when a woman with ASD transitions from formal schooling to adulthood. This transition is a woman’s opportunity to explore her identity and the process should be an evolving one throughout her life. Our identity makes all of us individuals and helps us to better understand ourselves and to be better understood by others. When we become adults we can take steps to explore more opportunities that may not have been available until we turned 18. Certain clubs, movies, and events may now be accessible, allowing a woman with ASD to explore interests that may have previously been unavailable.

Having opportunities to participate in social events that can support women with ASD in learning more about themselves, and to be better understood by others. When we become adults we can take steps to explore more opportunities that may not have been available until we turned 18. Certain clubs, movies, and events may now be accessible, allowing a woman with ASD to explore interests that may have previously been unavailable.

Authentication

Social opportunities in the urban core, public transportation, and that may have previously been unavailable. Additionally, talking to others with ASD, parents, caregivers, and other professionals can provide ideas of places to go and things to do to connect socially. The process of finding someone’s social niche can be challenging but thinking of creative and engaging ways to support women socially can be rewarding for them.

Social engagement does not look the same for everyone. Each woman with ASD has her own unique desires, needs, wants and wishes for social connection. More emphasis is needed during transition to prepare women with ASD for how they will explore, create and maintain social and community connections during adulthood.

Tracy Kerman, LCSW is an outreach consultant for Felicity House, a community space devoted to the success, creativity and happiness of women with autism. For more information about Felicity House, please visit www.felicity-house.org.

References


Neurodiverse couples—couples in which one or both partners has an Asperger profile—find it difficult to locate therapists who understand their complex issues.

In response to this need, with the support of Rita and Andre Friedman, the Asperger/Autism Network (AANE) founded the Peter M. Friedman Neurodiverse Couples Institute in 2017. Our mission is to increase awareness, support, and resources for neurodiverse couples by training therapists to recognize, understand, and treat this unique population. In September, the institute launched two online trainings, open to therapists anywhere.

This article will discuss unique challenges faced by couples with neurological differences, why ordinary couples therapy is ineffective or even harmful, and how a neurodiverse perspective benefits the therapeutic process and the couple’s relationship. Finally, we will introduce the Myhill/Jekel model for working with neurodiverse couples, and describe the therapist training now available on aane.thinkific.com.

How Neurodiversity Impacts Couples

The saying that every marriage is a cross-cultural one is even more true for neurodiverse couples. When two people with different neurologies meet, it is indeed as though they come from different cultures and speak different languages. Their experiences, assumptions, and expectations diverge widely, blocking mutual understanding and impeding communication. Let’s examine this dynamic in a therapy session:

When the therapist met David and Cheryl they had been married ten years. They had already been to four therapists but their relationship had not improved.

Cheryl: When I try to tell David something, he constantly interrupts me, corrects my grammar, and criticizes my words. I’m not an idiot! Nobody else corrects my words!

David says nothing.

Therapist: Is there anything you would like to say?

David: I never called Cheryl an idiot.

Cheryl: And then this happens! He misses the point and just takes exception to a detail! He may not have literally called me an idiot but his constant corrections make me feel like one. Maybe I really am idiot for expecting that we can have a meaningful conversation!

What’s going on here? David has an Asperger profile and Cheryl is neurotypical. From Cheryl’s perspective, every time David interrupts and corrects her, she feels he’s being rude, condescending, and uncaring. David doesn’t understand why Cheryl gets upset. Doesn’t everyone want to speak as correctly and precisely as possible?

David is very bright and has developed strategies for “passing” as neurotypical. These strategies allow him to get by at work and in social situations—but do not work with his wife.

In therapy sessions, David appears very calm, patient, logical, and eager to make the changes that are being asked of him, while Cheryl appears highly emotional.

The calmer David acts, denying Cheryl’s reality, the more emotional Cheryl becomes. Lacking a neurological lens, it was easy for therapists to view Cheryl as hysterical, and David as reasonable and cooperative.

It is not unusual for neurodiverse couples to go to several therapists, sometimes six or more, because therapists unfamiliar with neurodiversity use the same tools that have proven effective with neurotypical couples—but those tools are ineffective with neurodiverse couples.

Learning from AANE’s Survey of Neurodiverse Couples

In 2017, AANE surveyed partners in neurodiverse relationships to learn about their needs. Of the 469 respondents:

• Almost 100% felt that neurodiverse couples have unique challenges.

• Almost 70% who had worked with therapists experienced with neurodiverse couples rated the therapy “helpful” or “very helpful.”

• Of those who worked with couples, therapists who did not have experience with neurodiverse couples, less than 20% found it helpful and 44% found it to be “harmful” or “very harmful.”

Comments from respondents:

“It was a struggle for years until we figured out the AS diagnosis. It is still difficult but so much more manageable now that we’re developing tools to address the unique issues associated with Asperger’s.”

“Working with traditional therapists was harmful for us because they treated our situation like we just needed to work a little harder; when there was this giant problem to deal with that no one had any idea about. They treated my husband like he would actually do the things they said. And when he nodded in agreement he assumed he understood. The Asperger specialist knew better to ask confirming questions about his understanding.”

Flexible, Affordable, Online Training for Couples Therapists Everywhere

Neurology Matters in Couples Therapy training was designed for therapists who already know they are working with neurodiverse couples, and for those who do not yet know that neurodiversity is the hidden obstacle to effective treatment. When the couples and the therapists are stuck, our training will get them unstuck.

Therapists who complete the following two-course sequence will be listed on the AANE website, so neurodiverse couples can find them.

TRAINING 101:
Fundamentals of Working with Neurodiverse Couples in Therapy

Therapists come away with tools to treat neurodiverse couples effectively. Included in this course:

• 10 hours of self-paced online study, from any place on any device, for 10 APA CE credits.

• In-depth lectures about Asperger’s, co-occurring mental health conditions, diagnosis, intimacy and sexuality, and tools therapists can teach their clients.

• Videos: Ten neurodiverse couples and four therapists speak candidly about their experiences.

• One year membership in online forum with expert therapists and fellow trainees.

CERTIFICATION 201:
Case Presentations and Advanced Topics in Neurodiverse Couples Therapy

Therapists who have completed Training 101 can apply their new skills to their actual clients with case consultation. There will be eight 90 minute meetings by video conference with 5 - 8 other clinicians, facilitated by Grace Myhill.

All training is based on the Myhill/Jekel model. The core concept is that in order to treat a neurodiverse couple successfully one must recognize that they are neurodiverse, understand their issues, and treat them using strategies derived from that understanding.

Our training will give therapists the tools they need to help couples understand their strengths and challenges, as individuals and as a couple, to learn to communicate better.

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Transition Readiness for an Individual with Autism Spectrum Disorder

By Solandy Forte, PhD, LCSW, BCBA-D and Aimee Haray, MS, BCBA
Milestones Behavioral Services

Planning for the transition into adulthood for an individual with autism can be a daunting task for both the individual and their family. Most parents begin to query their community providers, support groups, and educational teams about the transition process well into an individual’s secondary schooling and discover that the planning must begin now. The transition planning process presents with a wide range of barriers (e.g., financial, cultural, service delivery models, supports, resources, etc.) that were likely unexpected. Families will find themselves diving into navigating through these challenges in order to ensure that their loved one transitions into adulthood successfully and is provided with the supports they will require in order to meet their individual needs. So, when should transition planning begin? What should you expect? What should transition planning include? These are all valid questions and are dependent solely on the individual and their particular needs. We will discuss these briefly and offer information for you to consider when deciding to initiate transition planning.

There is no such thing as starting too early. Two of the biggest challenges will be identifying team members who will contribute to the planning process and identifying the next steps needed to achieve the best outcome. Educational programs tend to focus on academic performance rather than focusing on teaching individuals the skills they will need in order to effectively plan for their transition into adulthood. It is important for transition teams to evaluate the need for teaching functional skills that will contribute to the individual’s success in a vocational or employment setting, independent living, community participation, and engagement in leisure opportunities, to name a few. By examining functional learning, teams will be more likely to be prepared to answer and ask questions in order to inform an effective transition plan.

It is never too early to start thinking about, talking about and/or considering what it will look like following transition from the educational setting to adult services. Keep in mind that the transition can occur between the age of 18 and 21. Transition planning begins at the age of 16; however, for an individual with autism, transition should be discussed annually with the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) team. The individual with autism can receive services until he/she graduates or turns 21. There is no guarantee that an individual with autism will receive adult services after they turn 21. Ultimately, the family is responsible for planning, organizing, and financially supporting adult services once the individual reaches adulthood. The resources and funding for adults with special needs is vastly different from what is received during their primary and secondary school age years. Due to the lack of resources and underfunded programs, it is important to identify key skills (e.g., money management, self-advocacy, maintaining good hygiene, social skills, etc.) that are important to the family and the individual as early as possible. Transition for an individual with autism may occur

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Computer Science Inclusion Program Gives Marketable Skills for Adulthood

By James Lawler and Adil Imran Sanai
Pace University

Businesses are anxious for computer science professionals. However, colleges currently do not graduate enough students knowledgeable in cutting-edge STEM (i.e., science, technology, engineering and mathematics) skills (United States Equal Opportunity Commission, 2014). Computer science programs can better benefit businesses if more determined higher-functioning students with disabilities (Boccella, 2016) are included in the programs and if included can benefit such students in employment opportunities.

Computer Science Inclusion Program

At Pace University in New York City, the Seidenberg School of Computer Science and Information System designed a computer science certificate non-degree program in computer science for motivated but nimble students with IDD having individualized education plans (IEP). The program is modeled on requirements from the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 2008: Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Higher Education (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012) and the Think College! Standards and Benchmarks for Inclusive Higher Education Initiative (Grigal et.al., 2012). The students are included in the program with peer students without disabilities, in a fully inclusive setting in the school.

The program in the Seidenberg School is devised as an exciting experience in exploring and in learning computer science and information systems that can help the students in identifying opportunities in STEM, with a curricular and extra-curricular focus as follows:

Computer Science Courses

The program is focused on intermediate courses on leading edge technologies, such as the following:

• Java Programming I and II;
• Problem-Solving with Lego Robotics; and
• Programming in Python.

The students have already engaged in basic courses in community colleges or in high schools so that engagements in intermediate tools are a new opportunity, not a problem, for them. Most of the experiences in the courses involve projects with students without disabilities on self-directed teams, from which the students with IDD are learning not only from the instructors but also from the other students.

The courses in the program are held weekly.

Computer Science Enrichment Seminars

The program is also focused on learning the technologies from formal seminars, such as the following:

• Blockchain and Cryptocurrency De-mystified;
• Building Internet of Things (IoT) Solutions; and
• CyberStorm: Depth of the CyberSecurity Threat.

see Computer Science on page 34
Using Community Collaboration to Support Transition-Aged Students

By Kelly Elton, MEd
Executive Director

Venture Bound

In 2017, the Autism Provider Network of Northwest Ohio conducted a full scope community needs assessment which included a national best practice review, community provider audit, stakeholder focus groups, and an on-line needs assessment distributed to individuals and families. The data collected from this needs assessment clearly indicated poor employment and post-secondary opportunities for students with disabilities. Using this valuable information, nonprofit autism advocacy groups in Northwest Ohio created Venture Bound, a transition to employment program, to assist schools in creating unique and individualized transition programs for their students.

The Ohio Longitudinal Transition Study, Spring 2017, confirmed that credible predictors of success for students with disabilities were access to general education curriculum more than 80% of the time, work study programs and job training opportunities. This population of students is reported to be struggling in postsecondary education (Murray, Lombardi, & Kosty, 2014). Further evidence to incorporate community collaboration with local employers is based upon research that shows employees with disabilities “report: lower pay levels, job security, and flexibility; more negative treatment by management; and, lower job satisfaction but stable salaries” (Schur, Han, Kim, et al., 2017).” Recognizing the diverse needs of each student, the NW Ohio community has taken a new approach to supporting their local schools and students with disabilities through the development of Venture Bound.

Venture Bound initially began as a collaborative endeavor between Great Lakes Collaborative for Autism (GLCA) and Bittersweet Inc., both independent 501(C) (3) nonprofit organizations. As the program grew, GLCA took the lead with the program and in January 2018 established Venture Bound as a charitable LLC under GLCA. The collaboration highlights the ability to provide support to local schools implementing the Ohio Employment First, and Evidence Based Predictors for Post School Success according to the National Center on Transition. GLCA fully funded the implementation of Venture Bound in NW Ohio suburban school for the first two years, including the funding of the teacher.

The vision of the program is “To provide young people with the necessary skills, confidence, and support to obtain meaningful and rewarding employment—and recognize them as valuable contributors to the community.” Currently, Venture Bound is in two school districts in NW Ohio, one rural and one suburban. Each school district has identified a teacher to implement the program where as Venture Bound provides curriculum and external supports, such as professional development for teachers, finding job training and volunteer sites. One of the unique factors leading to the successful implementation of the program in schools is due to the local community commitment and support. The Venture Bound Program team makes mindful approaches to the local businesses and nonprofits to engage them into the program at their local high school. The growth of enrollment has increased from 6 in the 2016-2017 school year to 32 in the 2018-2019 school year along with numerous businesses and nonprofits providing additional learning opportunities for the students in their own community. Students are successfully transitioning to post-secondary opportunities and employment.

The collaboration between Venture Bound and each school helps build a transition program which not only supports each student but the district as a whole. A variety of professionals from the community contribute to Venture Bound by serving on its advisory board which is an indicator of successful outcomes from Ohio Employment First Initiative. The advisory board members consist of a Self-Advocate and co-founder of Autism Advantage, three local university professors with differing focuses including Business, Special Education and Occupational Therapy, a local public school special education teacher, a Creative Director from a local marketing firm, and a former executive director of an autism advocacy non-profit. The program directly benefits from each area of expertise of its advisory board members.

Through the collaboration with local universities, existing programs within the schools have been enhanced which has resulted in a decrease in the work load upon the teacher. Most recently, a doctoral student from the University of Toledo’s Occupational Therapy program created an independent living curriculum for the living skills center utilized by both the junior high and high school. This allows educators to document individual mastery of skills by students while creating an opportunity of continuous learning despite the student changing buildings as they progress in grades from junior high to high school.

Additionally, through a unique collaboration with Bowling Green State University (BGSU), Tom Daniels of the Graduate and Executive Business program coordinates a Mock Job Fair for all the students at the end of second semester at BGSU’s, Levis Common’s facility. This collaboration allows the teacher to focus each student’s preparation for interviewing, rather than coordination of the entire event. The degree of which a school can be supported through local high education institutions and professionals is limitless.

The following sentiments of Brittany Joseph, a Venture Bound Advisory board member, is often shared by others. Brittanysen: “As a college instructor, I have deep concerns about the growing number of students identified with an Autism Spectrum Disorder in our public schools towards what opportunities lie ahead for them after high school. Volunteering my time to support Venture Bound filled that gap in my heart, knowing that I can make an impact in the lives of students living in my nearby communities. I am motivated by the stories of our students and the obstacles that they have overcome before joining us in the Venture Bound program.”

Venture Bound was created as a three-year program with the goal of sophomores in high school entering Venture Bound for year one. The program’s curriculum includes Effective Practices for Transition Planning, Education, and Services according to the National Technical Center on Transition which includes Self Determination and Student Participation. The program objectives include students completing two self-reflections weekly and participating in a Likes and Dislikes interactive activity once a week. The first semester exam project has the students completing a Student Led Meeting slide presentation. At the end of Venture Bound One, students will complete a Person Centered Plan for their adult life.

Venture Bound One (Introduction/ The Basics) focuses on Self Advocacy, Self Determination, Financial Literacy, Completing Applications, Independent Living, Setting Goals, Safety, Actions & Consequences in the Workplace and Accommodations in the Workplace. In order to prepare students for employment and based upon research where increased exposure to job trainings enhances post-secondary outcomes, Venture Bound Two (Supported Exploratory) focuses on students are learning “how to work” at a job training or volunteer site. Dirk’s Action in Independent Living, Completing Applications, Creating a Resume & Portfolio. Venture Bound Three (Independent Employment) focuses on Independent, Competitive Employment. If a student requires more supports and training before entering Year Three, individualized opportunities to continue working towards their transition goals will be offered in Venture Bound Two. Within each year of the program, the curriculum is able to be individualized for each student, thus promoting the overall mission, “To help young people with cognitive and/or social challenges prepare for successful and sustainable employment.” The program’s success is completely dependent upon the collaboration with its community. At a time when the workload for each teacher increases, the community begins to complement the teacher and their efforts by providing invaluable resources in which students succeed.

If you are interested in learning more about developing a community of collaboration in your area, please contact Kelly Elton at 419-509-0707 or kelly@venturebound.org and visit www.venturebound.org.

References
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Understanding as a collaborative team that the eligibility and provisions of special education services are not equivalent to the eligibility and services in the adult sector is critical and requires transparency of those differences early in the collaborative planning process. As increasing numbers of students with ASD age out of special education services across the nation, challenges include funding as well as the sufficiency of service providers with expertise in meeting the range of needs for young adults. As stated by Dr. Peter Gerhardt (Gerhardt, 2009; Gerhardt & Lainer, 2011), “We know there’s a crisis coming. It’s not just a money crisis. It’s a service crisis.”

Part of this service crisis is the infusion of the adult service agency to participate in the planning process currently occurs too late in the process. Typically, representatives from the adult service system do not join the team prior to the student being 18; yet the planning process has begun by age 14 as a formal IEP process. An additional service crisis is that special educators and districts are not aware of the options available at the state level, and therefore cannot provide guidance during the early transition planning meetings. The level of education and training needed for practitioners, parents, and service agency representatives is significant, and meeting this need is critical for successful transition planning. As waiting lists for adult services in the areas of housing, day programs, employment, and transportation can be daunting—eligibility and priority are often made available only to those in behavioral crises.

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success in employment (Test, 2009), it follows that every student needs at least one job or internship opportunity before they graduate. Also, the process must be undertaken in a strategic way to set students up for success. Effective job development includes a full ecological assessment with a site visit to observe the environment and suggest any modifications that may be needed as well as a task analysis for each component of the job (Berkell, 1987). After this, a compatibility matching process with the demands of the job, e.g. related to appearance, physical strength and socio-emotional requirements can be completed (Powell et al., 1991).

During this matching process, the transition coordinators and clinical team can review details of the work environment as well as job specifics to suggest any recommended adaptations. For example, the speech therapist may recommend a task analysis be taught to a student using pictures or the occupational therapist may recommend a student wear headphones, if possible, to prevent dysregulation from loud stimuli in a factory environment. For ongoing adjustments and feedback, an employment consultant can work closely with the student and employer to ensure modifications are made on both ends that will contribute to tasks being completed successfully.

Therefore, teaching self-advocacy skills is vital for the young adult, as well as advocacy skills for the parent and caregivers.

Given that the nature of services and supports change after the transition into adulthood, preparing someone with autism to potentially live on his or her own, work in some capacity, or participate in his or her community requires practitioners to become focused on critical educational areas. Educators need to concentrate instructional efforts on key development skills as well as ensure the student achieves those outcomes in order to be as independent as possible in his or her new service systems. Practitioners need to focus on:

• the skills of activities of daily living
• independent living abilities
• organizational skills
• money management skills
• job seeking skills
• travel and community access skills
• social skills, including social survival skills

Once goals are developed, then, evidence-based treatments can be selected to assist the individual in meeting his or her goals. It is imperative that the main focus be on those skills that will be truly functional. In recent years, social vulnerability has been discussed as an important area. Individuals with ASD may be bullied, taken advantage of, harassed, or victimized. Teaching individual with ASD to identify appropriate and inappropriate treatment by others is crucial to maintaining their health and safety.

Targeting specific instruction for these skills should begin early in the special education setting. There is a clear disadvantage if these skills are not adequately addressed at age 14 or later. As we know with students with autism, multiple and plentiful opportunities for skill development are often needed in order to ensure the acquisition of a skill and the maintenance of that skill in student’s repertoire. By delaying the introduction of vital skills that will be needed lifelong, the transitioning young adult is now facing a barrier for future success. Practitioners assist students and parents who potentially face these barriers when they focus intensive instruction on these skills. A 2014 study of adults with ASD found that those with better daily living skills were more independent in their job and educational activities. (Hume, Boyd, Hamm, & Kucharczyk 2014). The concepts of quality of life and independence are often broadly defined, but usually include independence. Numerous studies have focused on variety of effective teaching procedures and interventions to increase independent performance without the need of caregiver prompting (Hume, Boyd, Hamm, & Kucharczyk, 2014) as well as the early development of independence skills in instruction (McClannahan, MacDuff, & Krantz, 2002).

When developing long-term goals for adults with ASD, careful consideration should be given to how those goals will improve quality of life (Hume, Boyd, Hamm, & Kucharczyk, 2014). Some suggestions for practitioners and parents for careful transition planning include:

1. Development of Daily Living Skills throughout the special education years alongside academic and adaptive behavior;
2. Adaptive behavior skills include: communication, social and relationship skills and need to be taught explicitly and transferred to generalized settings to include nuances and contexts of the “real world”;
3. Support and develop access for students with disabilities into workplaces during the transition years with frequent assessment of interests and preferences; and
4. Teach self-advocacy skills including social survival skills.

The transition to adulthood for a young individual with autism can be daunting. For many educators and parents, the numerous barriers and challenges that are faced often provoke a great deal of anxiety and fear about the unknown future. Further magnifying this fear may be the continued instability of funding and the lack of availability of service programs for adults with significant disabilities and needs. An understanding of how educators, parents and the supporting service agencies can assist with increasing opportunities and information early in the school-age years and throughout the transition process can aid in successful outcomes. Given the numerous evidence-based approaches to teach...
Communication is Key to Building Functional Independence Skills in Adults with Autism

By William Killion, PhD, BCBA
Springbrook Autism Behavioral Health

Over the past year, cities across the country have made great strides in creating an atmosphere where people with autism feel welcome and comfortable. Multiple cities have become certified autism-friendly cities, sports teams have designated certain nights as sensory-friendly events and autism advocates are beginning to find ways to create a community for people with autism.

In October 2018, First Place Arizona, a residential development built for adults with autism and other disabilities, opened in Phoenix (Reagor, 2018). Founder Denise Resnik said her 27-year-old autistic son was the inspiration the autism-friendly independent living community. Along with her son’s diagnosis more than 20 years ago, Resnik was told he would likely need to be institutionalized. Displeased with the conditions of the institutions she toured, Resnik began working on the concept that later became First Place Arizona.

Vicky Westra, a business owner in Tampa, FL and head of the nonprofit Autism Shifts, took her autism advocacy one step further by developing a business that only employs autistic adults (Guzzo, 2018). Westra’s vision behind the business was two-fold: 1) She wanted to show the community that adults with autism are employable, and 2) She wanted to create a place for autistic adults to learn skills and emphasize the positive reinforcement that learning those skills creates.

While the approaches are different, Resnik and Westra are both working toward the same goal – helping adults with autism gain the functional independence and career-readiness skills necessary to live on their own. Through transition training, adults at the Phoenix residential facility are taught everything from how to cook and clean to proper business etiquette. In Tampa, Westra owns multiple businesses that hire only autistic adults so they can learn a number of different job skills.

Functional independence skills are necessary for daily living, learning how to communicate with people and for establishing quality of life. And it’s not just about behavior. Personal hygiene and self-care, for example, are the cornerstones of functional independence skills. For a person to be successful, they have to understand the basic skills of bathing, feeding and clothing themselves. These skills also include communication, decision making, personal safety, recreational play and vocational skills.

Neuro-typical individuals use these skills every day without thinking much about them, awakening on time, getting bathed, dressed, fed and out the door instinctually. But for many people with autism, those skills must be taught. If possible, the foundation for these skills should begin at childhood and be built on and added to as the individual moves closer to adulthood. It’s important to develop functional independence skills in order to foster the ability for an individual with autism to achieve greater independence as they advance through life ("Independent Living Skills," 2018).

The residents of First Place Arizona are a great example of that concept. In order to live on their own, each person had to learn some kind of functional independence skills. Those skills could range from getting a job to getting ready for work to grocery shopping.

At Springbrook Autism Behavioral Health, we work to establish these types of skills in children and adolescents. We start by breaking down functional independence skills into several domains: adaptive behavior, emotional issues, behavioral issues, cognitive issues, sensory motor issues socialization and speech and language. The whole idea of success in adulthood is having a foundation of basic adaptive behavior. The F.I.S.H. (Functional Independence Skills Handbook) program focuses on that.

Adaptive, behavioral and socialization domains are the most important focus areas. Adaptive behavior is the most critical aspect for adulthood; it is the behavior that tells a person everything they have to do in order to get ready for their work day – wake up, shower, get dressed, eat breakfast, etc. The behavioral domain looks at the...
Endowed Fund from page 9

population of adults, each of the five DJFF endowed funds serve a specific area relating to adult autism: research, program development, fostering creat-

ivity and expression through the arts, and counseling and resources for family members of adults on the spectrum, and public policy. The DJFF endowed program funds are opening new doors with the establish-

ment of in perpetuity adult-autism-focu-

sed collaborations with the nation’s leading researchers and practitioners at renowned universities. They are poised to lead and address critical issues in adult autism and will advance the creation of new research and model programs to ex-

and opportunities for the diverse adult autistic population.

Says Linda J. Walder: “Our aim is to ensure that for generations to come there will be an impactful focus on adult autism. Today more than 3.5 million Americans live with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, and we need to do more to understand

Connections from page 11 related to supports and services available to their transitioning young adult children is provided on an individualized basis, regardless of the exiting creden-
tial or diploma they may receive. At The Arc Westchester, we have the oppor-
tunity to dig deep into the students’ interests, goals and support needs to identify what types of programs would be a good match. Those supports may in-
clude day programs, vocational training, transition programs or college programs. Information has been shared regarding supports offered by The Arc Westchester as well as other programs throughout Westches-
ter County.

Community agencies, such as The Arc Westchester, also greatly benefit from these connections. The more that commu-

nity agencies and programs know and understand about students who will be transitioning in the coming years, the bet-
ter they can all prepare to for those students and build programs and supports that meet their clinical, habilitation and vocational needs.

Within our Westchester community, there is great variety of transition support. The result is uneven information sharing which leaves many students entering adult

hood on rocky ground and unsure of their path. How can we increase the availability of supports for students toward a smooth transition and increase the possibilities to make connections early? Schools in New York can take advantage of their Regional Special Education Technical Assistance Support Centers, RSE-TASC, which pro-
vides education for schools and commu-
nity agencies on transition related matters. Families can work with their local school districts to urge the addition of transition specialists to the team of professionals on staff. Schools, community groups and families can all advocate at their state education departments to require that all districts provide transition specialists to insure that all young adults are given the guidance and support they need to have a smooth transition.

Schools know education, agencies know adult services and families know their young adult children. When we can become more connected, we will all bene-
fit, but most importantly our young adults will benefit.

For additional transition information, you may contact Carin Honowitz at chоворитавсrarcwestchester.org. To learn more about The Arc Westchester visit www.arcwestchester.org.

Denise D. Resnik and Linda J. Walder

Supporting from page 13 Relationship Is Central But Facts Are Important, Too

It is an accepted fact that a 4-year degree improves employment outcome. Also true is that young adults with ASD face steep challenges in higher education. Re-

search has found that a third of high school graduates with ASD will enroll in college1 but that at 5-years after HS graduation, only about 20% of these had earned a degree.2 A separate set of studies demonstrated that the majority of college students with ASD (80%) enroll in 2-year programs; those ma-

joring in STEM fields were more likely to persist and twice as likely to transfer from a single institution or campus course. While relevant research data is still woefully lim-

ited, these and personal facts should be considered in goal planning.

Support a Young Adult’s Journey Toward Self-Advocacy

Michael Noel, regional director for College Internship Program’s California centers comments, “Students’ attempts to self-advocate are sometimes foreign to par-
tents, and misunderstood.” Often a young adult will assert themselves with a choice related to academics, spending, or dating. The transition experience will go better if parents acknowledge the importance of self-advocacy and identity that the choice represents, and are supported to consider the choice on multiple levels.

Understand the Emotional Frame

Separation from a son or daughter with a special needs triggers parents’ intense, hard-

wired drive to go into protection mode. Many parents acknowledge the healthy initiative to seek support from a local mental health agency or opportunity for young adults to forge a new, interdependent relationship with their parents. In an effective transition program, parents feel safe to reorganize their rela-
tionship to their worries, relinquish some of the responsibility, and take the opportunity to replenish their own reserves.

Expect the Unexpected

Most of the time our expectations for ourselves and our loved ones shifts slowly. At other times, events rudely jolt us into a non-reality. Successful transition pro-
gramming supports parents to be ready for unpredictability and the unexpected twists and turns that occur when a young adult begins to experience the satisfaction of tak-

ing the helm. It is important to remember that progress is usually non-linear.

Ask for Help

The road is bumpy, winding, and often smothered in a dense fog. Transition ex-

perts encourage parents to get help wherever they can, whether by connecting with other parents who share their experience or seeking support from a local mental health counselor. These venues offer a sounding board from sympathetic but objective oth-

ers.

Elizabeth Roberts, PsyD is National Director of Clinical Support Services for College Internship Program (CIP), a comprehensive transition program for young adults 18-26. For more information, visit www.cipworldwide.org.

References


atics (STEM) participation among college students with an autism spectrum disorder J Autism Dev Disord 43(7): 1539-1546.

Job Skills from page 12

into QuickBooks. Sometimes the hand-

writing is hard to read, so she would ask for assistance after each receipt she couldn’t read. That means interrupting the manag-

er every 10 minutes. She learned to put all the receipts that were not legible in a pile and keep moving on through the rest. Her manager explained that QuickBooks didn’t care that the receipt numbers would be out of order as a result of holding back some. With the receipts that were hard to read we asked her to first make a recommendation before expecting her manager to come up with a solution. She had to overcome her anxiety of waiting, and of accepting that receipts out of order were not always un-
der her control, and also realizing that she could solve the problem herself.

At home, her mother reports that she has since taken more initiative in responsibili-
ties and decisions in her personal life.

1. Accepting your manager’s change in priorities, although it may result in an unexpected - and annoying - shift in your work tasks.

One trainee who was working on an original assignment after helping the cus-
tomer’s response was “not now, I’m busy.” She is learning that she needs to be flexible and respond to requests that are interruptions plus a “sure, give me a minute.” She is learning that she needs to be fit flexible and be responsive to spontaneous requests in a way that she feels she is still in control.

These skills need to be directly taught in an authentic environment - at school, at work, in the community - and practiced in a safe en-

vironment. And it is never too early to start.

Recommended reading: www.spectrumnews.org/news/autistic-children-may-mute-per-
spective-grasp-others

Marjorie Madfis is Executive Director of Yes She Can, a nonprofit dedicated to help-

ing young women with autism succeed. She believes in the need for relevant and ferable job skills leading to employment and greater independence. Yes She Can operates its job skills training program at Girl AGain boutique. We welcome visitors to see our program in action at GirlAGain boutique, located at 4 Martine Avenue, White Plains, NY 10606. Marjorie is the mother of a 22-year-old daughter with ASD. She had a 20-year career in business and an MBA before founding Yes She Can in 2013.

For more information, email Marjorie@ Y esSheCanInc.org and visit www.YesSheCanInc.org and www.GirlAGain.com.
**Matchmaker, Matchmaker, Make Me a Therapist Match**

By Rebecca Sachs, PhD, ABPP
Founder and Clinical Psychologist
CBT Spectrum

I often get asked by family and friends “do you know someone?” Their hope is that I will have a colleague who will be a good fit to work with them in therapy. Over the years, I believe I have gotten better in making these “matches.” Partly this is a result of my “Yenta-Superpower-Skills”; as my professional network has expanded I know many more great therapists. But another critical part of my learning curve has come from personal experience. Several years ago, when I hit “re-set” on my life, I sought out therapy. From my own experience in seeking out a therapist, I gained a better understanding of the critical questions to ask and the information to seek when selecting a therapist.

Additionally, I now realize how the initial step of deciding to do therapy is critical to finding the right therapist. Since this first step is so important to making the right match, when I now make a referral I try to understand why a person is seeking therapy and what has led up to that point. If the answer isn’t obvious, I encourage my friends, family or clients to ask themselves and answer these important questions:

- What’s going on in your life/your family member’s or your child’s life that you want to change? For how long has that been going on?
- Do you/your family member/your child have a diagnosis or label? Do you agree with that diagnosis/label?
- How have the difficulties been impacting your life/your family member’s or your child’s life?
- Who would be involved in therapy?
- What are your fees? Do you have a sliding scale option?
- Do you accept insurance?
- Where is your office located?
- How flexible is your availability?
- Are you available for case management, such as speaking to or going to a school for IEP meetings, working with service coordinators, and completing important paperwork?
- What is your communication policy and the best way to be in touch with you?
- How quickly do you return calls? And are you available for emergency?

While these details may seem unimportant, they can play a significant role in the delivery of your care. As a therapist, I put a lot of time into how I want to answer these questions. For instance, as I realized that my typical fees may be out of reach for some people and thus have therapy be less accessible, I worked hard to institute a fair and transparent sliding scale policy, as well as a commitment and plan to train and supervise other professionals in my area of expertise who would charge less. Also, as I transitioned from single woman to single Mommy, I recognized that my ability to return calls and communicate by email would be impacted. As a result, I put a lot of thought into a realistic communication policy and tried my hardest to educate current and potential patients of my new policies and limitations.

Equally important is understanding a professional’s training, expertise, and general approach to being a therapist. In asking this question, I think it’s key to focus on what a person actually does, not just their training. Important questions to ask:

- What are your privacy and confidentiality policies, and what are the limits? This is especially important for work with teens and young adults.
- How do you involve parents in work?
- How do you involve parents in work?

see Matchmaker on page 33
Planning from page 6

After interviewing numerous families of students with disabilities and soliciting feedback regarding what would help their students transition into adulthood, Lesley University Threshold Program fund raised and built an alumni center dedicated to the ongoing support of students with disabilities who graduated from their transition program. The goals of this center are continued employment, social engagement in the community, and the provision of a variety of support services. Transition planning for the long-haul includes trying to find a community in which transition-aged youth on the autism spectrum can engage, find gainful employment, and have a good quality of life.

Ernst VanBergeijk, PhD, MSW is a professor at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA, and is the Director of the Threshold Program which is a post-secondary transition program for students with a variety of disabilities. For more information, visit www.lesley.edu/threshold.

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34 CFR Parts 300 and 301 Assistance to States for the Education of Children With Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children With Disabilities; Final Rule


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State Vocational Rehabilitation Services program; State Supported Employment Services program; Limitations on Use of Subminimum Wage https://s3.amazonaws.com/public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2015-05538.pdf


Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004.


The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (H.R. 803).


Challenges from page 21

services for autistics who are not able to live independently.

For autistics who are able and want to attend college or university, the experience of living in campus housing provides an excellent opportunity for developing daily living skills. In this environment, the student has to be responsible for some activities of daily life (e.g., personal hygiene, cleaning one's room, doing laundry), while others are often supported by the institution (household maintenance, food preparation). This can greatly serve to ease the transition between fully supported living (e.g., at home) and subsequent independent living where one becomes responsible for all daily living activities (as was the case for me, even though as an undiagnosed teenager I did not appreciate it at the time). For those in need of more intensive support, many institutions now provide such services for students on the autism spectrum. In any case, it is in the best interest of autistics who have access to such opportunities to recognize their value (or have it emphasized to them), and take as much advantage of these as they can.

Driving and Transportation

One very common area of autistic challenge involves learning to drive a car. Historically, an alarmingly low percentage of autistics are even able to drive. While this may not be a significant problem for those who live in large cities with extensive mass transit systems, it is far more serious for anyone living in suburban, small town, or rural areas where public transportation ranges from minimal and infrequent to nonexistent. Consequently, transportation independence in such locations requires the ability to drive. As such, autistics who cannot do so need to depend on others (family, neighbors, friends, or services for the disabled if such are even available) to get anywhere (school, work, dining, shopping, social activities, medical appointments, meetings with service providers, etc.). This can place significant restrictions on the lives of autistics and considerable burdens on those providing transportation for them. It is therefore in everybody's interest to provide autistics with driving skills wherever at all possible.

Having faced challenges of my own when learning to drive (a story onto itself), I eventually recognized that these were mostly due to poor gross motor skills (coordination), limited awareness of much of my environment, and deficits in executive functioning (needed for rapid response to unexpected or hazardous situations). All of these are well-known and common challenges for autistics. It should not come as a surprise, then, that many will have great difficulty learning to drive, even when they are able (sometimes effortlessly) to learn the "rules of the road" and pass the written driving test.

Innovative programs to teach autistics how to drive have recently been developed, and these need to be implemented as widely as possible. Furthermore, existing driving instruction programs, including driver’s education classes in high schools, need to be expanded to provide "remedial" assistance for autistics and others facing comparable challenges in much the same manner that such instruction is provided in reading, English, math, etc. for academically deficient students. For autistics who live in regions with adequate mass transit, programs to instruct them in its use have also been developed (it is ironic that more than a few autistics, particularly those interested in rail transportation, will know the routes, schedules, and other aspects of the system better than most transit employees!). This is yet another essential skill that has to be taught whenever needed. Once again, the lifetime benefits in these areas will greatly exceed the small immediate costs.

Social Skills and Socialization

Typical socialization challenges for autistics include getting along with others, being part of a group, meeting people, making friends, and finding and maintaining romantic relationships. These skills are essential in just about every aspect of life on this planet (the self in community, independent living, or just about any of the things that, for most people, make life worth living. Consequently, deficits in these skills can have adverse consequences resulting from social marginalization, isolation, or ostracism; ranging from academic difficulties for those in school (including failure), workplace problems (up to loss of job), exclusion from communities, and the inability to make friends or find romantic partners. These in turn can result in anxiety, stress, mild or severe depression, and in some cases even suicide.

As with daily living, socialization skills are rarely if ever taught explicitly; once again, such instruction needs to be provided to all autistics as early as feasible and well in advance of transition into adulthood. Also, as before, the notion that these skills are instinctive or “acquired naturally” needs to be eliminated entirely, especially for those anywhere on the autism spectrum. The cost of not doing so in the lives of autistics is clearly without measure here, as it cannot even be quantified financially.

Employment and Work

Autistics often have difficulties finding and keeping employment, yet a regular source of income is essential for independent living. Young people on the spectrum who are approaching adulthood need to be well-advised about their career options, and make educational plans to further these objectives as much as possible. Choices should be made by considering areas of strong ability and interest (typical of autistics), combined with current and expected future labor market demands (which can change very rapidly by these days). It is particularly vocational, career, or professional training that leads to potential employment should be emphasized over pure liberal arts education. At the very least, coursework should be planned with as much consideration given to future job prospects as possible. I attribute my own employment success to pursuing autistic perseverations (not known as such at the time) with anything electrical or mechanical and interests in physics and mathematics, attending an engineering college, and becoming an electronics engineer.

Finally, autistics nearing adulthood have to be prepared for aspects of the work environment other than the formal skills and

see Challenges on page 32
A whole-genome sequencing study of nearly 2,000 families has implicated mutations in ‘promoter regions’ of the genome—regions that precede the start of a gene—in autism. The study, which appears in the December 14 issue of Science, is the first genome-wide analysis to uncover a role for mutations in the noncoding portion of the genome in any human condition.

Most sequencing studies of autism and other conditions have focused on the coding portion of the genome—that is, the genes, which encode the recipe for each protein a cell can build. But more than 98 percent of the human genome consists of material other than genes. “We wouldn’t have that DNA if it didn’t do something,” says Stephen Sanders of the University of California, San Francisco, one of the scientists who led the new study.

Mapping the role of these noncoding regions in conditions such as autism is vastly more difficult than mapping the role of genes, both because of the volume of data and because the functions of these noncoding regions are poorly understood. But the new study shows that 2,000 families’ worth of data is enough to start extracting a signal from the noise.

Sanders’ team looked at 1,902 ‘quartets’—families that include one child with autism, unaffected parents and an unaffected sibling—in the Simons Simplex Collection, a repository of data from families with autism. In promoter regions of the genome, the study found, children with autism have more de novo mutations (spontaneous mutations that aren’t inherited from a parent) than their siblings do.

“Being able to show that de novo mutations in noncoding regions contribute to autism is phenomenally exciting,” Sanders says. “It’s our first chance to really come to grips with rare mutations in the other 98 percent of the genome.”

Some of the mutations, the team found, are in promoters for genes involved in neuronal differentiation or developmental delay, as well as genes that interact with CHD8, one of the most common autism risk genes.

“All of that collectively fits,” says Alan Packer, a senior scientist at the Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative. “It’s a reassuring sign that they’re on the right track.”

The signal appears strongest in promoter regions that are conserved across many different animal species, rather than parts of the genome that are uniquely human. “Although autism is a very human trait, the mechanisms involved are potentially ones that have been with us for millions of years,” Sanders says. The finding suggests, encouragingly, that animal models of autism may indeed help illuminate the condition, despite the differences among species.

Promoter regions play a key role in determining which types of cells express a particular gene, and during which stages of development. So the new finding may shed light on autism traits that cannot be understood by looking at genes alone. “The eventual long-term payoff of the study may be in pointing to particular places and times in brain development that you want to focus on, from among the many possibilities,” Packer says.

The study was made possible by the unique design of the Simons Simplex Collection, which not only makes available whole-blood samples that allow for sequencing studies, but also focuses on ‘simplex’ families, which have one affected child and unaffected parents and siblings—precisely the families in which de novo mutations are most likely to be found. The structure of the collection, which was launched in 2006, “has been hugely influential,” Packer says, not just for autism research but also for completely different conditions, such as congenital heart disease. Researchers of such conditions have followed the collection’s lead in looking for de novo mutations in simplex families.

Researchers can soon take the new study’s approach to an entirely different level, via whole-genome sequencing of families in the SPARK cohort study. SPARK includes behavioral data and DNA from about 21,000 families. The New York Genome Center has begun whole-genome sequencing on 400 SPARK families, with another 400 families in the pipeline and many more planned for 2019. “SPARK is the largest study of autism in the United States,” says lead investigator Wendy Chung of Columbia University. “With a goal of studying over 50,000 individuals with autism, we will be confident of the genetic factors we identify.”

About the Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative (SFARI)

Launched in 2003, SFARI is a scientific initiative within the Simons Foundation’s suite of programs. SFARI’s mission is to improve the understanding, diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders by funding innovative research of the highest quality and relevance. In 2007, SFARI issued its first request for applications, its goal being to attract top researchers to the field of autism research. Today, with a budget of approximately $78 million per year, SFARI supports more than 250 investigators. Since its launch, the initiative has provided or committed more than $480 million in external research support to more than 480 investigators in the United States and abroad.

About SPARK

Until now, only a small number of individuals and families affected by autism have ever participated in research. SPARK invites the entire autism community to dramatically expand its participation in research by providing genetic samples and medical information to the entire research community. These data will power even more research, with the goal of advancing our understanding of autism and providing meaningful information and resources to participants. If you or your child has a professional diagnosis of autism, learn more about SPARK at www.sparkforautism.org.
services that help the individual to be successful in the job setting.

Small Group Supported Employment is provided to “client employees” in 39 community business settings. Job coaches work with the participants and employers to ensure satisfactory performance and to take corrective actions when needed. The job coaches teach skills in addition to those required to complete a task. These may include: social skills training, training in appropriate communication and work place conduct, and teaching other skills necessary to be successful in a job.

Chimes is able to transition individuals through a continuum of services based on their preferences, growth toward independence or the need for more intensive supports. Our partnerships with government and public sector businesses throughout Delaware allow our participants to move into fully integrated employment, consistent with Delaware’s Employment First goal.

Chimes Delaware also provides transitioning services to people with challenging behaviors. Behavior analysts work closely with job coaches to assure that inappropriate behaviors do not interfere with job performance. When an individual enters the employment program, a thorough assessment is performed to determine the abilities and the interests of the individual. A functional behavioral assessment is performed to determine the reason for any inappropriate behaviors. A behavior plan is written to decrease inappropriate behaviors that could interfere with job performance. Data are collected and analyzed by the Behavior Analysts to assure that inappropriate behaviors are decreasing and that the Behavior Support Plan is effective. Chimes is currently piloting a Virtual Health Automated Data System. Research is being conducted comparing the old paper and pencil system with the new automated data collection system.

With Chimes, jobs are tailored to fit the needs and desires of the individual. Some employees work a morning job, take a para-transit home, and are home for several hours before going for a second job. They need that break. Some individuals have worked at the same company for 20 years. Other individuals prefer to change jobs and have new experiences. Volunteer opportunities are used as a way to give back to the community and to offer participants the experience and confidence they need to find paying jobs.

Data are collected throughout the employment process. The data are used to predict when an individual needs a change in job sites before a behavioral incident occurs. By analyzing data, an individual can move from the job site, thus preserving that site for other individuals in the future. Production data are collected daily. Time away from the job data, due to behavioral issues, are collected and analyzed. Data are used to determine job success or the need to change jobs. If the individual working in the community has a “melt down,” she can return to the pre-vocational program and work on behavioral issues until she is able to return to employment. In order to retain the job, another employee, who has been trained to perform the job, will work in her place until she is able to return to work.

Chimes has provided employees to more than 30 companies throughout Delaware using a variety of models to fit the needs of the individual. Chimes is constantly searching for ways to expand employment opportunities. Behavior analysts work closely with job coaches to assure that inappropriate behaviors do not interfere with job performance. Earning a pay check and having money to spend on desired items is very gratifying for most of our workers. Individuals who need more immediate rewards can earn a daily token which can be exchanged at the end of the week at the Chimes store.

Chimes employment program capitalizes on what people can do and has demonstrated that people with autism can be highly productive citizens when given the opportunity. If you have any questions or need additional information please contact Dr. Meszaros at 302-432-5400 or lois.meszaros@chimes.org. For more information about Chimes locations and services please visit our website at www.chimes.org.

References


Wehman, P., (2016). Article written for Community Connections


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**Autism Spectrum News Editorial Calendar**

<table>
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**Neurology from page 23**

and enhance their emotional connection with each other.

“The content in this training is the most valuable I have gotten from a training course. I learned a tremendous amount and it has already influenced my own clinical work. Training 101 is an amazing advancement in our field of working with neurodiverse couples.”

- Peggy Kriss, PhD, clinical psychologist

We hope that many therapists will take advantage of this unique opportunity to learn from the experts—the neurodiverse couples themselves—as well as from experienced therapists—so that in the future neurodiverse couples will have access to the specialized help they need to live more meaningful, connected, harmonious, and rewarding lives.

To learn more about training, or to register for 25% off, use promo code: NEUROLOGY25: www.aane.thinkific.com

To learn more about the Peter M. Friedman Neurodiverse Couples Institute, see: www.aane.org/neurodiverse-couples-institute

Grace Mhlyll is a pioneer and leader in the field of neurodiverse couples therapy. Currently, Grace serves as Director of the Peter M. Friedman Neurodiverse Couples Institute and Director of Couples and Partner Services at AANE. Since 2004, she has worked with hundreds of neurodiverse partners together or separately in her private practice and through the AANE neurodiverse couples coaching program. Grace offers a variety of groups, in-person and by video conference, for the many facets of this unique population: for neurodiverse couples together, for partners with an Asperger’s profile, for neurotypical partners who are currently in a neurodiverse relationship, and for neurotypical partners who are co-parenting with an ex-partner with an Asperger’s profile. Grace moderates online discussion forums for the neurotypical partners in a neurodiverse couple and for neurodiverse couples therapists who have taken TRAINING 101. She diagnoses adults with Asperger’s/Autism Spectrum Disorder and offers professional consultations for clinicians about understanding and treating neurodiverse couples.

Articles that Grace co-authored with Dania Jekel, MSW, Executive Director of AANE:

- Asperger Marriage: Viewing Partnerships Through a Different Lens, NASW FOCUS, December 2008

**Challenges from page 30**

knowledge base required for their job. In particular, they need to be taught about the interpersonal and social aspects of the workplace—most significantly the “hidden curriculum” of unwritten rules, the violation of which can have adverse consequences ranging from a very unpleasant work environment (at best) to termination (at worst). Formal education, including vocational training, rarely if ever addresses any of these issues. As such, autistics need to be prepared for them as much as possible in advance of entering the workplace as they transition into adulthood. This is yet another area where the cost of providing instruction dwarfs the cost of having to support unemployed autistics who could otherwise be productive, tax-paying contributors to society.

Kurt may be contacted at kwittig@earthlink.net.
We all want to feel a sense of independence, and people with autism are no different. When adults with autism can perform basic tasks, it helps with their self-esteem and self-image. Rather than seeing a dependent or handicapped individual, they see someone who can take care of himself. That feeling will, in turn, create a more positive outlook about how they approach the work world and social world, which is the ultimate goal we’re all trying to achieve.

At Springbrook Autism Behavioral Health, we work with your child to discover which treatments and therapies will have the best result. Our goal is to promote growth and independent living for every child, using the means that are most effective for each individual. Contact us today for a private consultation or to tour our campus by visiting https://springbrookbehavioral.com/contact-us/

About William Killion
Dr. Killion is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and a Speech and Language Pathologist with 40-plus years of direct experience with individuals with developmental disabilities, including autism. After receiving his B.S. in Speech Pathology with a minor in Psychology, Dr. Killion went on to attain an M.Ed. in Special Education and a PhD in Developmental Psychology.

He is the owner of ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis), a practice that services many areas of the state, and has served as adjunct psychology professor and consultant to psychiatric and behavioral facilities for behavioral plans for children and adult with Autism and other developmental disabilites. He is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) at Springbrook. He is the author of the Functional Independence Skills Handbook or F.I.S.H. Developmental Program which is a curriculum for ABA used in 83 countries and translated into many languages. Dr. Killion is a frequent national speaker on ABA and how to address significant negative behaviors.

References

Free Support Group for Families of Adults with Asperger’s Syndrome and High Functioning Autism
The focus of the support group is to assist families in understanding the complex issues related to their adult child impaired with Asperger’s Syndrome or High Functioning Autism. At many of our meetings, we have speakers address various topics of importance related to these syndromes.

Website: www.FAAHFA.com
Facilitators: Bonnie Kaplan, Parenttalk@gmail.com
Judith Omidvaran, Judyomid@aol.com

Location: Westchester Arc - The Gleeson-Israel Gateway Center 265 Saw Mill River Road (Route 9A), Hawthorne, NY 10532

Socialization and Life Skills Group for Adults with Asperger’s Syndrome and High Functioning Autism
This group is focused on Employment and Vocational Issues, College Coaching and Supports, Socialization, Self-Advocacy, Dating, and Relationships

Website: www.ASDGroupsWestchester.com
Facilitators: Robin Kaufman, PhD, and Lauren Greiner, PhD
ASDGroupsWestchester@gmail.com (914) 497-1590

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Readiness from page 24

From experts in businesses, the students are learning initiatives in the latest technologies not covered enough in the curriculum of the program. Their marketability is improving in learning the initiatives and in meeting in informal networking opportunities with the seminar speakers.

The seminars are held bi-weekly in the school.

Entrepreneurship Lab Sessions in STEM

The program is concurrently focused on the students learning to be members of teams relative to the technologies, such as from the following:

- Computing Nerd Fights;
- CyberSecurity Hackathons; and
- Mobile Applications (Apps) Contests.

The students with IDD are learning to be contributors, and especially for those with ASD, even innovators (Mone, 2017) on student teams in initiating ideas for the technologies as if they are in start-ups. From cooperative group-learning (Gregory & Chapman, 2013), they pitch solutions with the technologies to decision managers in businesses and start-ups that hire promising students. Their presentation skills are increasing with the sessions. These sessions are held monthly in the school and in the university.

Expeditions in the Field

The program is involving the students in events or expeditions to businesses and start-ups, such as the following:

- Curriculum and Community Enterprise in STEM;
- IBM ThinkLab Tour and Quantum and Watson Workshops; and

The students are intimately learning more of the perspectives of scientists and technologists, and of the technological trends (Loten, 2018), than they are learning in the courses and the seminars, increasing their marketability in STEM.

These expeditions are generally held quarterly in the school.

Computer Science from page 24

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These expeditions are generally held quarterly in the school.

Learning Resources for Transition

Finally, the program is involving the students with IDD in Career Technology Day Fairs and Technology Meet-ups, and with the resources of the university, so that their dreams to be in STEM might be realities, such as from the following:

- Computing Society Club Workshops;
- Crack the Job Interview Workshops;
- Enterprise Executive Speaker Series Workshops;
- Rock Your Resume Workshops; and
- Women in Technology Club Workshops.

The resources are offered by the internal Career Services department and by the Seidenberg School. This portion of the program is preparing the students for industry transition.

These resources are generally hosted bi-monthly in the school and in the university.

Impacts of the Program

The program is engaging 13 higher-functioning nimble students with IDD including ASD - 13 as a national norm for a post-secondary program for such students (Grigal & Hart, 2010) - in an aggregate of 12-15 courses in the fall and spring semesters (1-2 courses a semester) of 14 semester weeks in overall periods of 3 years.

The learning of intermediate skills in STEM (e.g., computer science and information systems) is a foundation for individualized plans for employment (IPE) that can be initiated by the students, plans from which most of them are migrating into industry jobs.

“Marketable skills for industry positions in technology are highly motivating for us,” says Adil Imran Sanai, an IDD participant student in the program who is planning to be a data base technologist with the City of New York. Moreover, the students are learning other skills, such as perseverance, presentation, problem-solving, thinking and time management, from group-learning (Gregory & Chapman, 2013) on mutual problem-solving teams.

“The students have electronic portfolios of the skills in STEM, and these other skills, which are presentable to hiring managers in technology,” says Jim Lawler, organizer and professor of the program.

Essentially, most of these students in the program are being enabled for employment – an obligation for entrance into adulthood (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). In summary, the benefits of computer science inclusion programs are clear for higher-functioning nimble students with IDD. These students are benefiting from a diversity of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities (Causton-Theoharis, Ashby, & DeCloutette, 2009) as a post-secondary option that can benefit businesses and critically themselves – meaningful possibilities, moving beyond disabilities to abilities (Gay, 2013) - in key STEM technologies that lead to jobs. Computer science inclusion programs are definitely a fruitful proposition for transition into adulthood.

James Lawler, DPS, is Professor of Disability Studies and Information Technology, Seidenberg School of Computer Science and Information Systems, Pace University, and organizer of the inclusion program in the school. Adil Imran Sanai is a participating student and one of the original pioneers in the program in the school.

For more information about the computer science inclusion program in the school, please contact Dr. Lawler at lawler@pace.edu.

References


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