

AUTISM SPECTRUM NEWS

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INFORMATION, ADVOCACY, AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

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Autism and the Transition to Adulthood

Transition Planning for the Long Haul - Life Beyond College

By Ernst VanBergeijk, PhD, MSW
Professor and Director
The Threshold Program
at Lesley University

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 stu-



dents 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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See Page 17 for a Feature Article on Our Distinguished Honorees



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Editorial Calendar

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“**Improving Communication Skills**”
Deadline: March 1, 2019

Summer 2019 Issue
“**Supporting Older Adults with Autism**”
Deadline: June 6, 2019

Fall 2019 Issue
“**Autism and Community Engagement**”
Deadline: September 5, 2019

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“**Neurodiversity and Autism**”
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Book: When My Heart Joins the Thousand - A Novel	Melmark	

A Transition Model That Works - Project SEARCH Autism Enhancement

By Patricia Wright, PhD, MPH
V.P. Program Development
NEXT for AUTISM

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 transitioning most of its graduates to competitive employment (Christensen, Hetherington, Daston & Riehle, 2015). Specific to individuals with ASD, Project SEARCH secured com-



Recent Graduates of Project Search Autism Enhancement

petitive 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 re-

quires 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

see *Project SEARCH* on page 22

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Impact U

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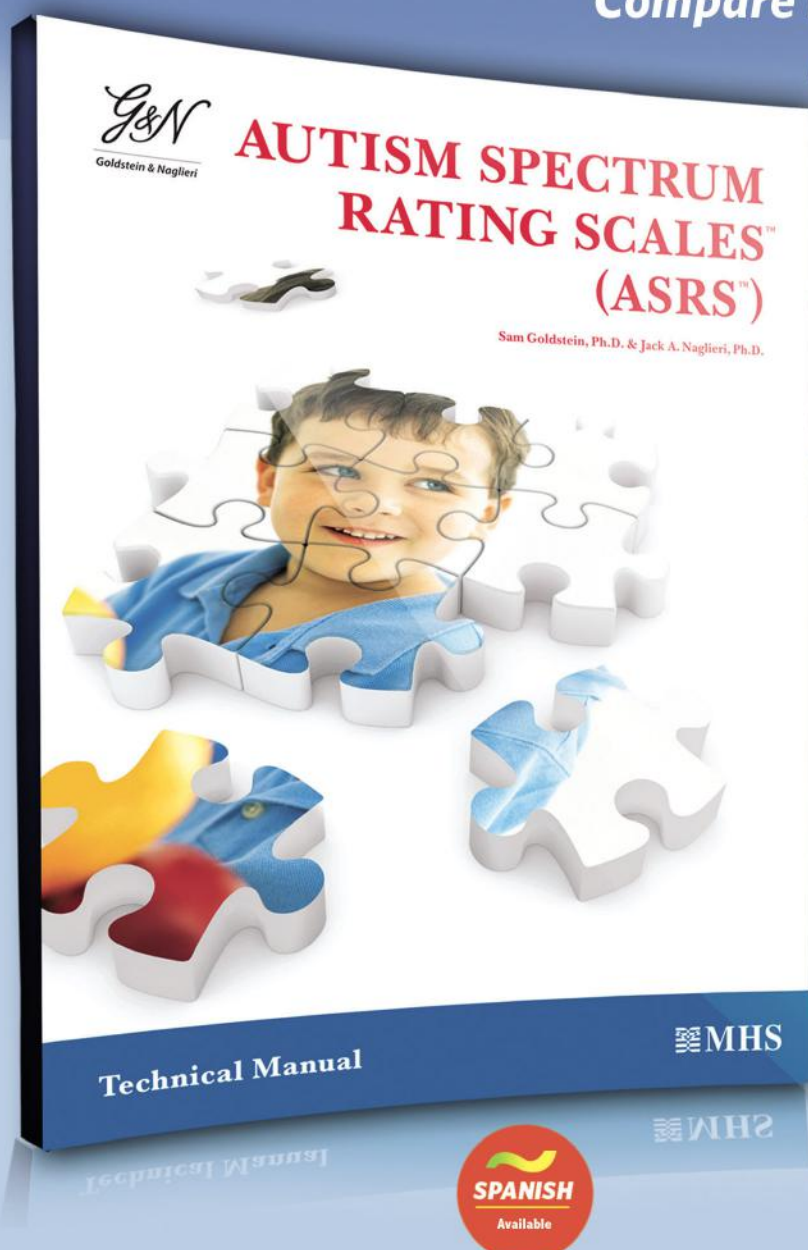
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-Kirsh, Aimee A. Assessment With Aimee, The Ohio School
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Planning from page 1

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 and 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. Families 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. Thanks to early detection 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.

With 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 Plans were 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 assistive 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 federal income tax-free 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 certify that they are blind, disabled, or have a condition listed on the “List of Compassionate 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. Balances below \$100,000 do not impact 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 eight portfolio options, varying in risk and fee. Qualified disability expenses are any expenses for the benefit of the account owner in maintaining or improving his or her health, independence, or quality of life. If the funds in the account are not spent on qualified disability expenses, taxes and a potential 10% federal penalty tax may be owed on earnings associated with the withdrawal. The savings are called a variety of different names and are administered by a number of investment firms which vary by state (Froehlich, 2017).



Ernst VanBergeijk, PhD, MSW

Transition 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 reaching 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 in the transition planning process. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 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 commenters recommended that the regulations clarify that 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 46,668).

Under IDEIA, 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 of 1990 because it focuses on transition-aged youth and mandates that 15% of State Vocational Rehabilitative Services budgets be allocated to this population. The goal is to obtain competitive integrated 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 the success of 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 facilitate the transition from school to post-secondary life, such as an employment outcome in competitive integrated employment, or pre-employment services...” (H.R. 803-233). Previously, parents of a transition-aged youth could not rely upon state offices of vocational rehabilitation to fund 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 Schelling (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/>
3. Comprehensive Transition & Post-secondary (CTP) programs: <https://studentaid.gov/sa/eligibility/intellectual-disabilities>
4. Lesley University Threshold Program e-Book - Comprehensive Guide to Transition Programs - <https://www.lesley.edu/six-qualities>

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.

see Planning on page 30



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64% of alumni spend time with friends at least once per week

Social Connections for Women with ASD in Transition: 5 Areas of Importance

By Tracy Kernan, LCSW
Outreach Consultant
Felicity House

Entering 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



Tracy Kernan, LCSW

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

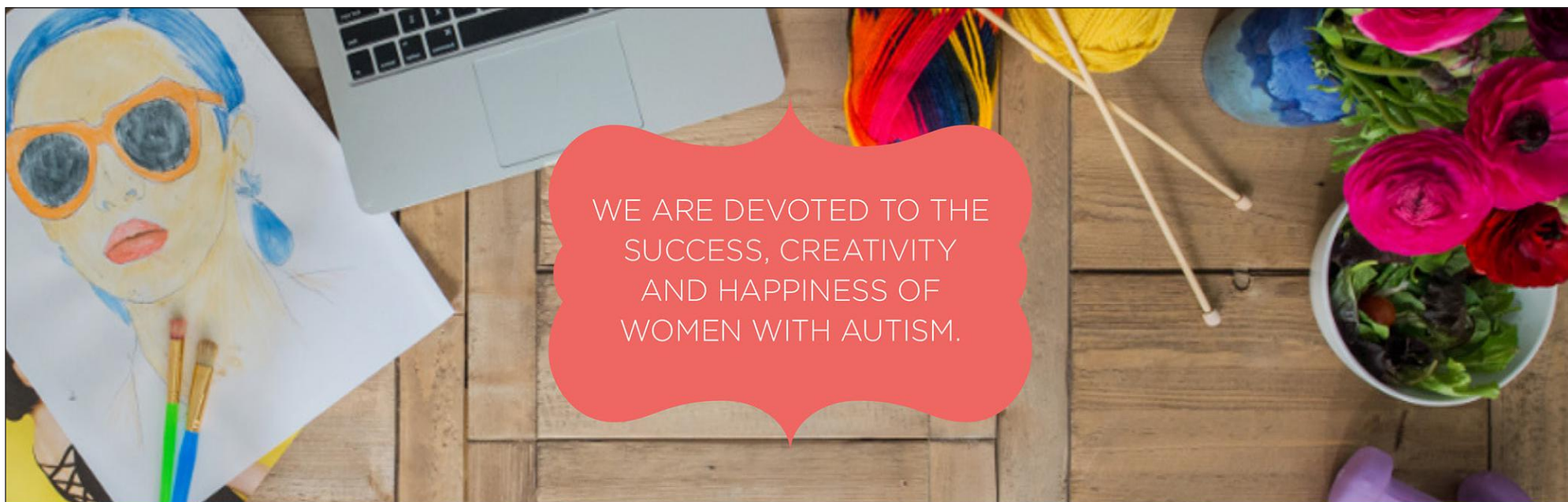
can be themselves in a safe, welcoming, flexible and accessible environment can be a critical factor in the happiness and success of women with ASD in adulthood.

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

see Women on page 22



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
- Small group meetings and special interest clubs
- 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

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 Adult Autism Public Policy 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 Au-



Jonathan Koppell, and Linda J. Walder

tism 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

see *Endowed Fund* on [page 28](#)

This is what success looks like...



This is what an adult living with autism looks like!

Building successful futures for adults living with autism takes innovative program development, advocacy, funding – and a belief in their strengths, talents and promise.

The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Signature Programs provide the blueprints that create opportunities for the diverse population of adults living with autism to build rewarding futures.

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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



Monarch Transition Education Program's Horticulture Fun Friday

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

see Empowering on page 20

Monarch Center for Autism *A Division of Bellefaire JCB*



Little Steps, Big Moments

It's how we celebrate every day – one milestone after another.

Whether expressing an emotion, learning a new job skill, or helping prepare dinner, it is a meaningful accomplishment. At Monarch Center for Autism, we celebrate every success and care about every individual as if they were a member of our own family.

Day School Chartered, non-public school licensed by the Ohio State Board of Education for ages 3 through 21. The Monarch Teaching Model, developed in an ongoing partnership with Dr. Howard Shane of Harvard University Children's Hospital, is an evidence-based, visual language teaching method to enhance communication and learning.

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.

Connections for Transition Success

By Carin Horowitz, LMSW
Transition Services Director
The Arc Westchester

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



Carin Horowitz, LMSW

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.

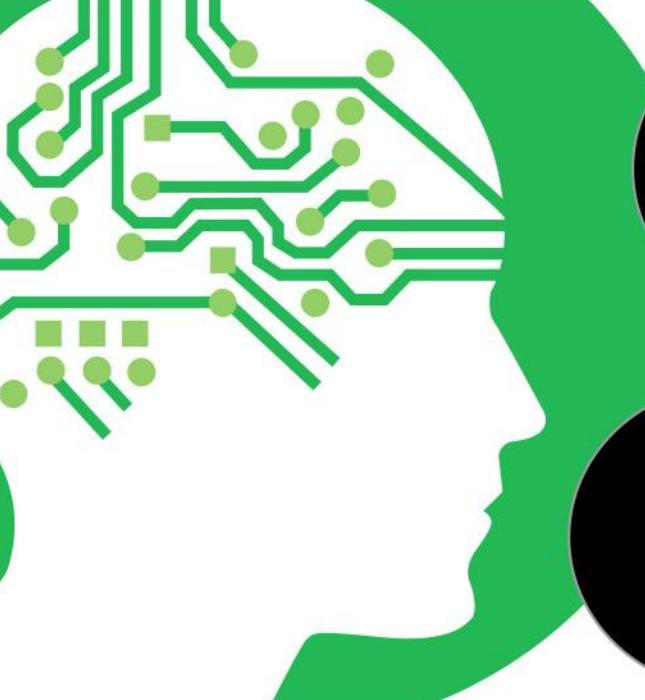
Once connected, The Arc Westchester offers information, education, guidance and support. School personnel, such as teachers, transition specialists, guidance staff, and social workers, are provided information catered to their need and level of knowledge regarding what services and supports are available 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

see *Connections* on [page 28](#)



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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.



Marjorie Madfis

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 oppor-

tunities 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 needed 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

see Job Skills on page 28



Brookville Center for Children's Services

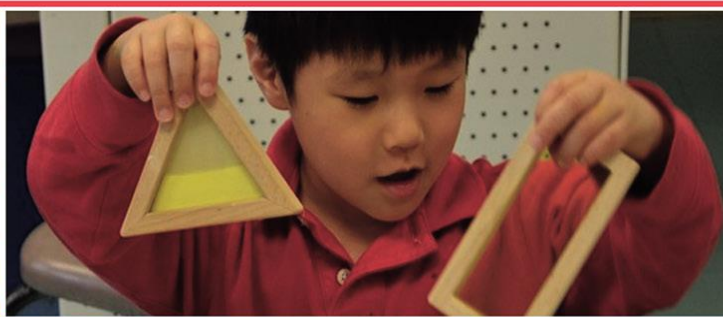
Brookville Center for Children's Services (BCCS) offers therapeutic and educational services to children in their own home, nursery school, preschool and school age programs.

Our programs in Nassau County (Long Island, New York)

have several locations: *New Hyde Park, Westbury, Brookville and Woodbury.*

BCCS has a great reputation in providing research based interventions that focus on maximizing the skills of children within the Autism spectrum and other disabilities in the home and community settings including but not limited to:

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- Neurological screenings
- Psychological evaluations and services
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Speech and Language Therapy
- Special Education
- Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)
- Bilingual social work services
- Family training and support groups



In addition, we offer a Children's Residential Program with sites in Lido Beach and Wantagh.

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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 back seat 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



Elizabeth Roberts, PsyD

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 profes-

sionals 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

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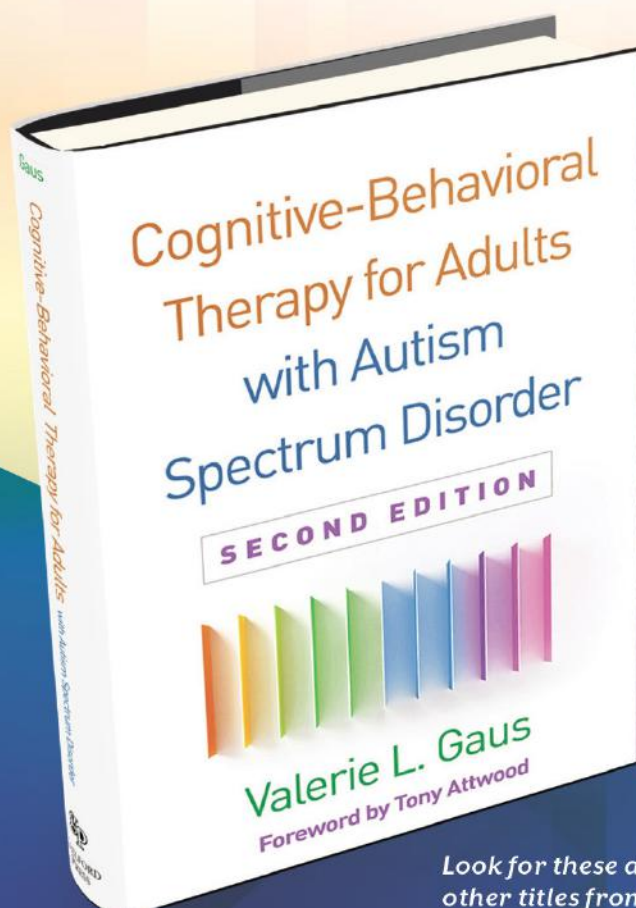
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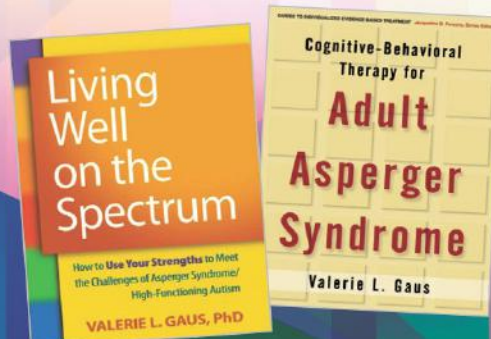
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Transitioning to Work

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



Lois Meszaros, PhD

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.

Day Habilitation Services - Chimes provides a Day Habilitation program that emphasizes the development of the socialization and daily living skills that will allow its participants to achieve a greater degree of independent community living. Chimes' services are based on Individual Service Plans.

Pre-Vocational Services - Pre-Vocational Services teach the general and soft skills that contribute to the person's employability relative to an identified vocational goal in the participant's Individual Service Plan. The services may include activities to improve the person's attendance to task, her engagement in safe employment practices, her ability to solve problems that arise in the work place as well as her social and communication skills.

Supported Employment - Chimes provides *Individual Supported Employment* to "client employees" in 18 community business settings. Each participant is supported by a 1:1 job coach according to his need for on-going support to maintain the job. Job coaches visit the site where the individual is employed and support him for the entire job shift. Average shifts are 3.5 hours per day, 3-4 days per week. Job participants are paid at or above minimum wage. In addition to specific job skills training and support, job coaches also provide additional

see *Transitioning on page 32*



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

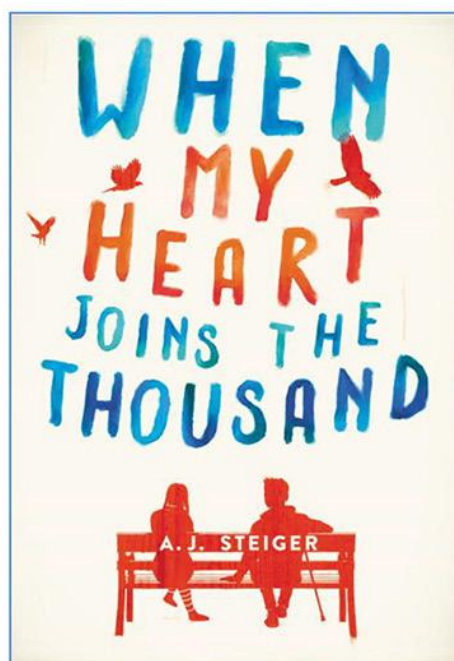
We offer a wide range of vocational, employment, residential, alternative enrichment, and dual disability (MH/MR) programs for over 500 individuals state-wide. Our employment programs provide a range of work and career-based assessments, training, and job placement opportunities.

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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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's "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.

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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



Candice Baugh, MA, LMHC, and
Catherine McDermott, MSE, MEd

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 incor-

porated 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




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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,



Helena L. Maguire, MS, LABA, BCBA

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

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



Steve Coe



Daniel Etra and Eran Rosenthal



Peter Provet, PhD



Joyce Wale

**By Staff Writer
Autism Spectrum News**

Mental Health News Education, Inc. (MHNE), the nonprofit organization that publishes *Autism Spectrum News* and *Behavioral Health News*, will be honoring five outstanding champions of the autism and behavioral health community at its annual Leadership Awards Reception on May 22, 2019, at the NYU Kimmel Center in NYC from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm. See the following page for registration information.

Debbie Pantin, MSW, MSHCM, President and CEO of Outreach, and MHNE Board Chair, made the announcement stating, “MHNE has selected five outstanding leaders from prominent organizations representing some of the very best in the fields of autism and behavioral health.”

Ira Minot, Founder and Executive Director of MHNE stated, “We are indeed honored to have this opportunity to recognize these champions of the communities we serve. We are also pleased to announce that Yvette Brissett-André, MPA, Executive Director and CEO of Unique People Services, and MHNE Board member, will serve as Event Chair for our 2019 Leadership Awards Reception.”

Proceeds from this event will go towards expanding and developing the nonprofit educational mission of *Autism Spectrum News* and *Behavioral Health News*.

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 Foothold 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 manag-

es 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 Eran 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 health-care, 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. Eran 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 Mental Health from Tufts University. He 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 ma-

jor 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

Register online at www.mhnews.org or complete the form below and mail this page to:
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For more information contact Ira Minot, Executive Director, at (570) 629-5960 or iraminot@mhnews.org

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Daniel Etra and Eran Rosenthal

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Rethink Autism

Leadership Award



Peter Provet, PhD

President and CEO

Odyssey House

Community Service Award



Joyce Wale

Regional Executive Director

United Healthcare

Corporate Leadership Award

Wednesday, May 22, 2019

5:00 PM - 8:00 PM

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NYU Kimmel Center - Rosenthal Pavilion, 10th Floor

60 Washington Square South, New York City

Online Registration: www.mhnews.org

Journal Ad Deadline: April 19, 2019

Registration Deadline - May 3, 2019

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

Moving Forward with Will Power

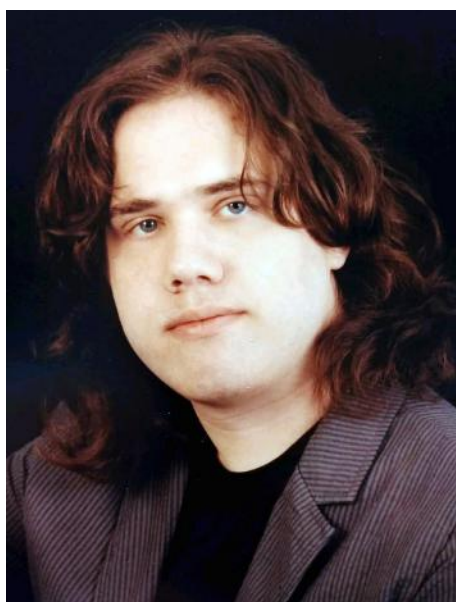
By Will Peters

Graduate of AHRC New York City's
Melissa Riggio Higher Education
Program at the College of Staten Island

My name is Will Peters, I am a recent graduate of AHRC New York City's [Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program](#) (MRHEP) at the College of Staten Island. The College of Staten Island is one of the colleges of the City University of New York, which provides students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities (IDD) an opportunity to partake in a college environment. This setting allowed me to explore new things about the world and my place in it.

Thanks to a partnership with [The City University of New York](#) and the New York State [Office for People With Developmental Disabilities](#), students with IDD can enjoy a fully inclusive higher education. MRHEP prepares young adults with IDD to be competitively employed and to obtain higher earnings.

I was able to try new challenges, activities, and pick my own classes. Sometimes picking classes was difficult, because you have



Will Peters

to keep your class workload in mind. Every class is different, with different amounts of homework, but somehow everything is always due on the same day. Everyone always concentrates on their classes.

I am on the autism spectrum, however I never let that stop me from accomplishing

my goals. When I first started college, I felt that I couldn't follow instructions very well. While I still struggle with understanding certain directions, I have improved myself greatly. I found that one of my weaknesses was keeping myself motivated and focused to complete tasks on time. Time management has always been a struggle. Yet after my years at college and with the help of my student mentors I find that I am on my way to becoming more confident in myself when it comes to reaching deadlines and accomplishing my goals.

With the help of a student mentor by my side, I was able to get work done at my own pace, comprehend college material in a way that I could understand, and expand my creative work to places that I never thought I could reach on my own. But what I really liked were the internships I worked with. I'm currently in my alumni year doing an internship for a studio where I set up for interviews, podcasts, and photoshoots. I put up lighting, props, and also work with the cameras to record.

I actually graduated from the MRHEP last May. Since graduating, I am now spending a year looking for my next steps while still in the program. Staff work with recent alumni to help them get ready for

what comes after college, like work or more schooling. I'd like to pursue part-time employment while also looking for opportunities within the arts. I hope to use the things I learned while at college to do better in my field.

College taught me a lot. I learned that we all have limitations, and I mean everyone. There are some things you just cannot do on your own at the start. Some times you need to work with others before you can really be successful. High school was not the end for me, as my journey was just about to begin. For anyone in high school who thinks that how it is in high school is how it will be forever, don't worry! While high school is a popularity contest, the people in college are more open-minded, and definitely more mature. Be happy with who you are. High school is not the end.

Will Peters is 2-year-old graduate of the AHRC New York City's Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program at the College of Staten Island. He is pursuing a career in media. He is interested in videography and performing arts. He currently has an internship at Hub 17, a photography and videography studio in Staten Island and is performing in local community theater.

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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@bellefairejcb.org. For more information, visit www.monarchcenterforautism.org.

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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



Karl Wittig, P.E.

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.

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



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Thank You &
God Bless!

Project SEARCH from page 4

(Wong et al, 2015) are also intentionally incorporated into the PSAE program. Additionally, professionals implementing PSAE must receive ASD-specific training on how to address the social, communication and behavioral needs of the interns with ASD. These ASD-tailored interventions were designed to ensure optimal outcomes for people with ASD who choose to enroll in Project SEARCH.

PSAE was initially piloted in collaboration with NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, ARC Westchester and the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) in White Plains, New York. Between 2012 to 2016, participants of PSAE were students attending the program during their final year of high school. In 2017, the program expanded to accept only those young adults with ASD who had already completed their high school education therefore eliminating the role for BOCES the institutional education partner. The 2017-18 PSAE graduating class had nine interns, all of whom graduated into competitive employment. Since the program's inception, almost three quarters of overall graduates have gained employment. Of those, 89 percent have retained jobs in a variety of work places including a law firm, biotechnology company, court house, grocery store, and restaurants.

When the 2018-19 interns currently attending the program at NewYork-Presby-

terian were asked about their decision to enroll in PSAE and what they hoped to get out of the year-long program here's what they shared:

- Tyler said that he chose to participate in Project SEARCH because "I wanted to learn how to be a responsible adult along with learning transferable skills that I can use everywhere in my life."
- Carly shared that she hopes to learn to be more independent.
- Shannon hopes to "learn the skills that will help me in the work field."
- James is an intern who "wants to learn how to get a job."

All of the Project SEARCH Autism Enhancement program interns are motivated to work and hope to use Project Search as a bridge to employment.

The PSAE training package is now being disseminated nationally to organizations and educational institutions which have successfully implemented the program in places as diverse as the urban core of Philadelphia, PA to Rogers, AR. Given the need for quality transition programs for youth with ASD, NEXT for AUTISM hopes to continue to champion the dissemination of PSAE nationally and internationally.

Employment is a possibility for many

young adults living with ASD. The data are clear that the current model of high school completion and entry into adulthood is not garnering the desired vocational outcomes. The skills taught by NEXT for AUTISM's Project SEARCH Autism Enhancement are the critical skills that young adults with ASD need to master to step confidently into adulthood and secure their first jobs.

For more information about Project SEARCH Autism Enhancement, contact NEXT for AUTISM info@nextforautism.org or 212.759.3775.

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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 can 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, just as friends do. At Felicity House, women can join at any time and they become community members for the long term, similar to how you would be a member of your house of worship no matter your age. In addition, social opportunities should allow participants to lead decision making and guide program content, which too will 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, who and what they are attracted to, what brings them joy, and what challenges them can help to shape who they want to be as an adult.

Accessibility

When looking for social opportunities we cannot forget about the basics of accessibility. How will she get there? Is it accessible by public transportation? If mobility is an issue is there an elevator? But beyond the basics we must also think about the accessibility of the people involved in the social community. If there are leaders or staff members involved are they accessible, approachable, friendly, and easy to talk to? Does the programming take into account the differences in learning or

communication styles? You also want to support the woman in seeking opportunities that cover a range of interests and participation experiences.

Fun, Creative and Engaging

What is life without fun, relaxing, creative, intriguing and engaging activities done within a comfortable, safe environment in the company of and with the support of others? Social experiences for women with ASD can widen their social circles but also enrich their understanding on a variety of topics and areas of interest. Finding a social community that is engaging is important, but this often begins first with shared, positive experiences. Local parks and recreation departments, alumni associations, meetup.com, adult and continuing education classes, local libraries and places such as Felicity House all provide free opportunities for women with ASD to explore opportunities for social connection. In particular, at Felicity House women are exposed to high level speakers from cultural institutions throughout New York, providing them with a rich, robust social experience. Additionally, talking to other women 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 Kernan, 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.

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Neurology Matters in Couples Therapy - and Training is Now Available

By Grace Myhill, MSW
Director, Peter M. Friedman
Neurodiverse Couples Institute
AANE

“Working with neurodiverse couples is more complicated than neurotypical couples. In order to help the couple work as a unified team, the therapist first has to help the partners understand each other’s neurological differences. The therapist has to understand each partner’s unique language so that they can help the couple begin to build a language of common connection.”

- Grace Myhill, MSW, from Training 101: Fundamentals of Working with Neurodiverse Couples in Therapy

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:

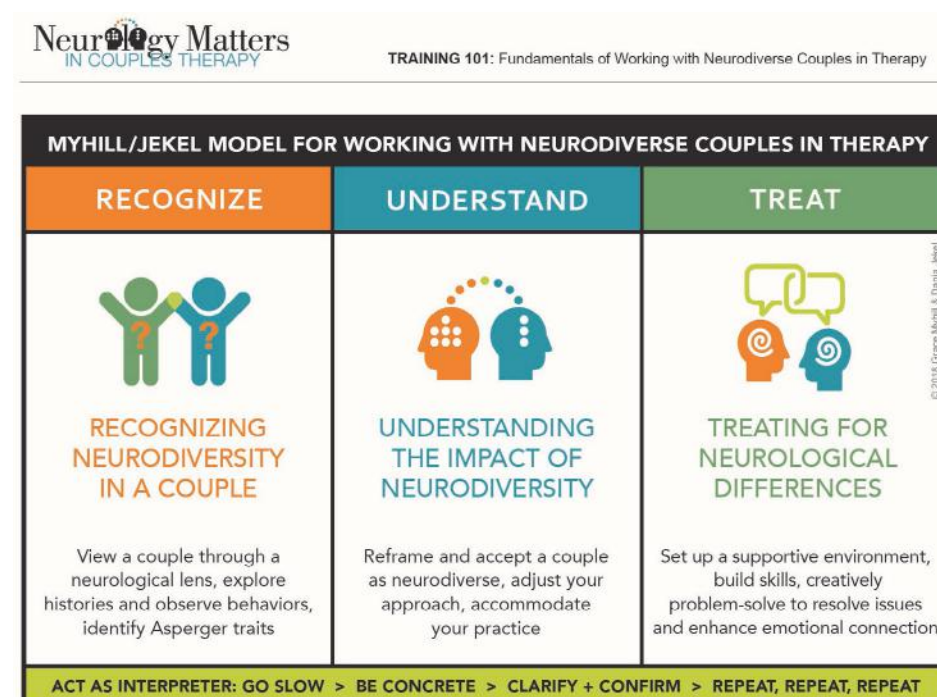
When the therapist met David and Cheryl they had been married ten years. They had already been to four therapists but their relationship had not improved.

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 many 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 they 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 neuro-

diverse 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, learn to communicate better,

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“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 the field of neurodiverse couples therapy!”

— Peggy Kriss, PhD, clinical psychologist

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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? Who will support the transition process? 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.



Solandy Forte, PhD, LCSW, BCBA-D

A "one size fits all" transition plan for individuals on the autism spectrum does not exist. A plan that was successful for one student with job coaching and independent living targets is likely not going to be appropriate for the next individual. A successful plan will be a plan that is individualized meaning that it identifies the individual's strengths, needs, and interests. This requires the transition team to begin transition planning early. There is no such thing as starting too early.

Two of the biggest challenges will be identifying team members who will con-



Aimee Haray, MS, BCBA

tribute 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 In-



Adil Imran Sanai and James Lawler

clusive 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:

- Creating Applications (Apps) on Internet;
- Data Base Management Principles;

- 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 Demystified;
- 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, concluded 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 similar organizational commitment and turnover intention (Schur, Han, Kim, A. 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,



Kelly Elton, MEd

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. Brittany states “As a college instructor, I have deep concerns about the growing number of students identified with an Autism Spectrum Disorder in our public schools today and 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, ideally, 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, Direct Instruction 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 compliment 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.

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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 the 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.

Creating a business advisory council of participating organizations and businesses in order to support the community in helping to integrate students with autism into the working world is also a key component in ensuring ongoing school-business partnerships (Luecking et al., 2015). By developing a network of community support, continued opportunities are created for both students and businesses. In addition, long-term goals of increased employer awareness and improved percentages of people on the spectrum and with disabilities working in the labor market can be achieved.

A future with employment, independence, social opportunity and relationships, community participation and self-directed goals should be possible for all students. Using a transdisciplinary approach to assessing and understanding individual strengths and capabilities along with targeted instruction and an evidence-based transition protocol will help ensure that more students are able to lead productive, meaningful lives.

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Preparing from page 16

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.

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 indi-

viduals 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 initially 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 skills 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 sug-

gestions 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

see *Preparing on page 31*

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). We-



William Killion, PhD, BCBA

stra's vision behind the business was twofold: 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

see *Communication* on page 33

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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 creativity 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 establishment of *in perpetuity* adult-autism-focused 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 expand 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



Denise D. Resnik and Linda J. Walder

adult autism and to create as many paths as we can for adults to participate in and contribute to community life. It is a matter of human rights for all autistic adults to be accepted for who they are and to live the fullest lives possible."

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 credential or diploma they may receive. At The Arc Westchester, we have the opportunity 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 include day programs, vocational training, transition programs or college programs. Information is shared regarding supports offered by The Arc Westchester as well as other programs throughout Westchester County.

Community agencies, such as The Arc Westchester, also greatly benefit from these connections. The more that community agencies and programs know and understand about students who will be transitioning in the coming years, the better able we are all able to prepare 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 provides education for schools and community 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 benefit, but most importantly our young adults will benefit.

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

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 mild ASD face steep challenges in higher education. Research 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 majoring in STEM fields were more likely to persist and twice as likely to transfer from 2- to 4-year institutions than their non-STEM peers.^{3,4} Another critical set of facts concerns an individual student's personal life story. Was college or employment attempted in the past? What happened? What worked and what didn't? If a previous college experience was unsuccessful, what has changed? Often it is wise for the team to agree on a modest "experiment" to test out college-readiness such as enrollment in a single online or campus course. While relevant research data is still woefully limited, 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 remarks, "Students' attempts to self-advocate are sometimes foreign to parents, 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 healthy initiative toward 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 special needs triggers parents' intense, hard-wired drive to go into protection mode. Sharona Somer, director of Family Services at College Internship Program, comments, "Teams can work together to support parents to attend to what their instincts tell them but to also consider reframing those messages. The separation can feel like a danger or an obstacle but it is also a gift 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 relationship 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 new reality. Successful transition programming 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 taking 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 experts 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 others.

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.

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Job Skills from page 12

into QuickBooks. Sometimes the handwriting is hard to read, so she would ask for assistance after each receipt she couldn't read. That meant interrupting the manager 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 under 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 responsibilities 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 assigned data input task, was asked by her manager to help a customer who just walked into the store. In fact, the trainee's favorite work task it to sell American Girl merchandise to customers. But, the trainee's response was "not now, I'm busy." She could not shift from one priority to another. She did not understand that an interruption

did not mean she could not return to her original assignment after helping the customer. This was not explicitly stated but a Neurotypical person would intuit that. The business priorities changed instantly because a customer comes first, yet the trainee could not recognize she needed to shift.

At home, this young woman now responds to requests that are interruptions with a "sure, give me a minute." She is learning that she needs to be 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 environment. And it is never too early to start.

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

www.spectrumnews.org/news/autistic-children-may-mute-perspective-grasp-others

Marjorie Madfis is Executive Director of Yes She Can, a nonprofit dedicated to helping young women with autism develop transferable 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 Girl AGain 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 30-year career in business and an MBA before founding Yes She Can in 2013.

For more information, email Marjorie@YesSheCanInc.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 fam-



Rebecca Sachs, PhD, ABPP

ily 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?

Once people can articulate, in their own way, these therapy goals and what they’re hoping to gain, there are some boring but essential questions to ask about logistics. Moreover, individuals should have a good understanding of their mental health/behavioral health insurance benefits (including out-of-network benefits and limitations), their budget, their availability, and how far they are willing to travel. Important questions to ask the professionals are:

- 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?

see Matchmaker on page 33

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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 on-going 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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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 supports, 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, be it school, work, community, independent living, or just about any of the things that, for most people, even 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 adult-

hood. 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 these days). In particular, 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

AUTISM SPECTRUM NEWS DESK

Noncoding Mutations Contribute to Autism Risk

By Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative (SFARI)

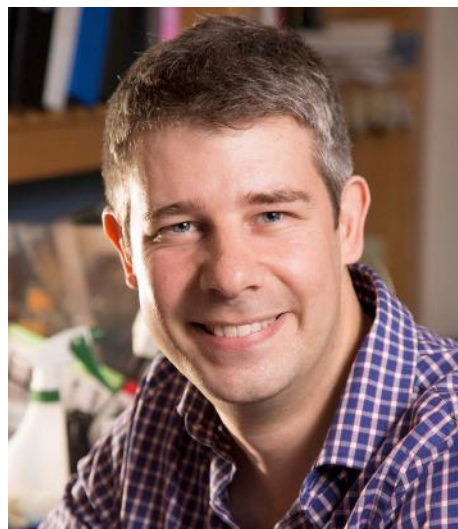
A whole-genome sequencing study of nearly 2,000 families has implicated mutations in ‘promoter regions’ of the genome - regions that precede the start of a gene - in autism. The study, which appears in the December 14 issue of *Science*, is the first genome-wide analysis to uncover a role for mutations 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 Stephan 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



Stephan Sanders, BMBS, PhD

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 un-



Wendy K. Chung, MD, PhD

derstood 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.

Preparing from [page 26](#)

children and adults with ASD the necessary skills to live more independently, we have the technology and knowledge to provide successful outcomes through the life span. Through successful collaboration that is coordinated to begin early in a student’s educational experience, we can successfully support the young adult with ASD in overcoming the many challenges he or she will face in adulthood and navigate all challenges to lead meaningful and enriched lives as adults.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Helena L. Maguire, Executive Director, Melmark New England, 461 River Road, Andover, MA 01810. Email: hmaguire@melmarkne.org. For more information, visit www.melmarkne.org.

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Transitioning from page 14

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



Chimes Community Partners

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 paratransit 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 302-452-3400 or lois.meszaros@chimes.org. For more information about Chimes locations and services please visit our website at www.chimes.org.

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Autism Spectrum News Editorial Calendar

Spring 2019 Issue	Summer 2019 Issue	Fall 2019 Issue
“Improving Communication Skills”	“Supporting Older Adults with Autism”	“Autism and Community Engagement”
Deadline: March 1, 2019	Deadline: June 6, 2019	Deadline: September 5, 2019

To participate in an issue with an article or display ad, please contact David Minot at dminot@mhnews.org

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 Myhill 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 Partners 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 on-line 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:

- [Neurology Matters: Recognizing, Understanding, and Treating Neurodiverse Couples in Therapy](#), NASW FOCUS, March 2015
- [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 “hid-

den 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.

Karl may be contacted at kwittig@earthlink.net.

Communication from page 27

behavior in certain situations. For example, can an autistic person adapt their behavior to their work environment, control their emotions and keep their anxiety under control? Socialization is very important because effective communication is necessary when it comes to getting a job. You have to be able to effectively communicate to get a job – basic communication skills to build on as they grow into adults.

Teaching functional independence skills as soon as possible is important (Sarris, 2014). Regardless, it is never too late to begin teaching these skills, and it’s never too late for a child or adult to learn them. In one case study from Springbrook, we worked with patient who was nonverbal and on the autism spectrum who did not begin therapy until he was 33. Using the F.I.S.H. curriculum, we were able to break through speech barriers, and the patient learned to talk.

The key to teaching functional independence skills is giving a person with autism the tools to be successful long-term so we build on the skills they already have. For example, if a child needs assistance to put on his socks, work on that from start to finish – break the process down into several small steps – to help the child master the task. Teach the starting point even though he can already do it to give them a

positive experience. Once the skill is mastered, he will see the pattern of reinforcement and learn about successful by doing something he can already do; Then, build on that success.

For adults with autism, the same ‘sock’ theory applies, but with a bigger project. Whatever the task is – getting a job application, finding an apartment, responding to a supervisor – break it down into small, measurable steps and teach each of those steps sequentially to put it all together into one event.

The key is to focus on developmentally appropriate tasks. For example, there is a section in the F.I.S.H. curriculum that covers employment skills and basic functional skills that are necessary to be fully independent. When looking at that section, we may cover concepts like getting a job application and filling it out, picking out color-coordinated clothes appropriate for work and how to respond to a supervisor’s request.

People with autism learn basic functional independence skills as children that create a crucial foundation for their lives. As they get older and learn more tasks, those skills are built upon and added to create a full set of living skills. Eventually, what starts as learning to put on socks or pick out clothes will lead to concepts like grocery shopping, putting away groceries and being able to cook basic meals.

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 disabilities. 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.

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Matchmaker from page 29

- Believe it or not this is important for families with children of all ages.
- What conditions do you treat and how many years have you been working with these patients? What percentage of your practice consists of work with people with this/these conditions? Additionally, which conditions do you NOT treat?
 - After about a month, are you willing to articulate a diagnosis, treatment plan, and what our therapy goals are? *Hint- if a therapist cannot do this, I encourage you to look for another therapist.*
 - How do you typically collaborate with other professionals, such as psychiatrists and speech therapists? Is this something standard you do or something you wait for the patient to request? Will you make referrals to other professionals if applicable?
 - How will I know I am/my child/my

- family member getting better? How do you measure progress? *While there are no guarantees in therapy, and while the answer may change as your therapist learns more about you, if a therapist has a difficult time answering these questions, I encourage you to look for another therapist.*
- What are your views on medications? *For certain conditions, medicine can play an important role. The key is to look for a therapist who is open-minded, collaborative, and questioning in this area.*
 - What are the techniques/specific skills for (fill-in-the-blank-for-specific-condition)? Can you provide an example of that? Is that a first-line treatment for this condition? *Some therapists will say they “treat” a condition, but when pressed, it is difficult for them to articulate the important components of its treatment, know what is the first recommended treatment for that disorder and what research and evidence say about treatments for a condition.*

- Just as you would want antibiotics for strep throat (a first line treatment with good scientific evidence to support that it works) and a doctor who knows the proper dosage and days to prescribe for the antibiotic to be most effective, you would want a therapist to be able to similarly do this for a mental health condition.*
- How often is HW assigned planned? *My recommendation is that out of session work is given almost every week and central to therapy. It is unrealistic to expect much change to happen from just 45 minutes a week. As I tell my patients, “I’m good, but I’m not that good.”*
- Last but not least, just like in a marriage, there are important intangibles in therapy. In fact, previous research indicates that the therapeutic alliance is one of the main factors in determining successful outcomes of psychotherapy. There should be a certain “chemistry” (or in therapist-speak, “rapport and alliance”) between therapist and patient. Experience does not always increase the odds of success in therapy.

When talking to a therapist, ask as many questions as you want. Pay attention to how much time they give you, their style in answering these questions and their patience with you. And just like in marriage, it is totally appropriate to divorce a therapist; in fact terminating at any point is a patient’s right. If you are working with a therapist and you don’t feel like they are the right fit, it is appropriate to seek out someone else. Life is hard enough. Therapy is the one place where the therapy may be challenging, but you want understanding, empathy, expertise, a clear plan, and a good match.

Rebecca Sachs, PhD, is a New York City-based psychologist specializing in treatment of autism, OCD, and anxiety. For more information, visit www.cbtspectrum.com.

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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

Meeting Dates 2019: 1/27, 2/24, 3/24, 4/28, 5/19, 6/9

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

Readiness from page 24

several times during their educational career. It is important that each transition team member understand and be aware of the necessary teaching targets in order to achieve the ultimate goals of the individual and family. There will likely be some shifts within the goals originally established as the student gains skills and that is to be expected.

Who should be a part of the transitions team? Similar to each transition plan varying, it is likely that what makes up a team for one individual may not be the same for the next individual. There are a number of different people that should be considered: current teachers within the school program, family (which may include extended fam-

ily), related service providers, doctors, social service agencies, and state agencies that may be providing the services following the school program. The transition teams should include any person who will assist the individual in preparing for adulthood.

Every individual has strengths and interests, for an individual with autism, it is imperative that these be identified and capitalized on. Being able to capitalize on an individual's strengths will aid in the planning on the premise of functional learning. For example, if an individual's strength is using technology and he or she enjoys numbers then the team should explore potential opportunities to advance his/her skills within this domain by teaching skills that can be used in an employment setting such as data

entry, taking inventory, tracking inventory, and completing purchase orders. In order to be successful the team will need to identify the skills needed to achieve proficiency in any given domain. Does the individual know how to navigate a computer? How long can the individual remain on task? If something is not working does the individual have a way to manage this situation? This is just one scenario; however, for each functional learning opportunity similar questions need to be raised and answered.

We cannot emphasize enough that it is never too early to begin the discussion about transition to adulthood. The discussions should lead to further gathering information (typically through assessment) about the individual's current needs and

the development of a comprehensive transition plan. It is expected that the transition team will support the implementation of the transition plan as well as map out a reasonable timeline for each phase or target to be met. Remember the goal of the transition team is to prepare the individual for a successful transition to adulthood, which means teaching the skills necessary to promote their readiness for transition.

Solandy Forte, Ph.D., LCSW, BCBA-D, is Director of Consultation and Community Outreach, and Aimee Haray, MS, BCBA, is Clinical Director at Milestones Behavioral Services. For more information, please visit our website at www.mbs-inc.org or contact us directly at (203) 799-4110.

Computer Science 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.

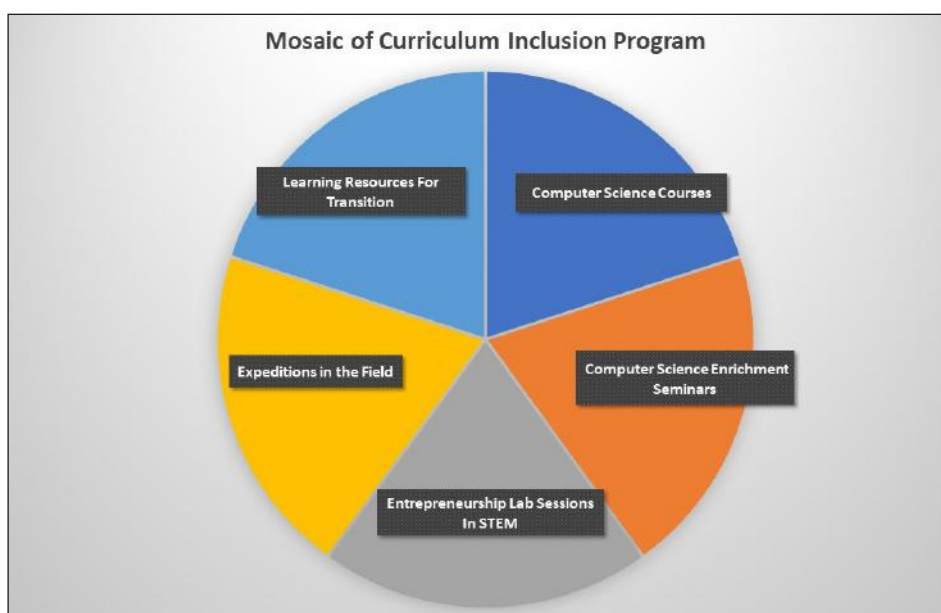
Expeditions in the Field

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

- Curriculum and Community Enterprise for Restoration Science (CCERS) Collaboration in STEM;
- IBM ThinkLab Tour and Quantum and Watson Workshops; and
- Leadership in Technology Series: JP-MorganChase Workshops.

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.



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 high-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 indi-

vidualized 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 their 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, & DeClouette, 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 Tech-

nologies, 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 lawlerj@aol.com.

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