



Preparing for the Job of Life: Effective Transition for Individuals with Autism

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Objectives

- Describe the issues facing young adults on the autism spectrum as they transition from school-based services
- Identify ways to address the diverse needs of young adults on the autism spectrum and their families
- Discuss collaborative strategies designed to assist young adults in developing meaningful, appropriate social participation



Issues

- Communication
- Isolation
- Initiating social interaction
- Intimacy and social connectedness
- Contributions to the community
- Recreation and leisure pursuits



Communication

- Verbal/nonverbal
- Variety of others
- Assistive technology
- Building block of self determination



Isolation

- Desire for interactions with others
- Sensory implications of interactions
- Dearth of opportunities for practice and generalization of skills



Initiating Social Interactions

- Social anxiety
- Generalization of social skills
- "I am only here because my mother made me come"



Intimacy and Social Connectedness

- Relationship development (Gutstein, Burgess, & Montfort, 2007)
- Interactions balanced with solitude
- Sex education
- Safety



Contributions to Community

- Meaningful participation
- Volunteer work
- Paid employment

Gutstein, S. E., Burgess, A. F., Montfort, K. (2007). Evaluation of the relationship development intervention program. *Autism, 11*(5), 397-411.

Kaur, A. & Stokes, M. (2005). High-functioning autism and sexuality: A parental perspective. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, 9*(4), 266-289.



Recreation and Leisure Pursuits

- Expand repertoires to include social participation
- Opportunities to practice emergent social understanding



Goals

- Increase personal **independence** and social **responsibility** (Kavale & Forness, 1999)
- Become **productive** and **welcome** members of their community (Erdman, 2008)
- Live lives of **competency, quality, and dignity** (Gerhardt, 2008)



When to Begin?

- IDEA 2004
- Building supports
- Scaffolding opportunities
- Developing self-determination skills
- Using a multidisciplinary team



Begin with the end in mind. . .

School-to-Adult Life Transition Continuum
The Big Picture

	Preschool/Early Elementary	Intermediate	Middle School	High School	Desired Post High School Outcomes
CAREER DEVELOPMENT	AWARENESS of SELF Activities to learn about one's talents, interests, & hobbies AWARENESS of COMMUNITY AWARENESS of SOCIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT of INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT of WORK HABITS & VALUES	AWARENESS of SELF Activities to learn about one's talents, interests, & hobbies PARTICIPATION in the COMMUNITY AWARENESS of GLOBAL ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT of SOCIAL and EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT of INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT of WORK HABITS & VALUES	AWARENESS of SELF & SELF DETERMINATION PARTICIPATION in the COMMUNITY AWARENESS of GLOBAL ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT of SOCIAL and EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IDENTIFICATION & EXPLORATION OF EMERGING CAREER INTERESTS CAREER PREPARATION • Academic Courses • Voc/Tech Courses • Work-Based Experiences • Connecting Activities • Extracurricular Activities • N.E.T.works DEVELOPMENT of INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT of WORK HABITS & VALUES	AWARENESS of SELF & SELF DETERMINATION PARTICIPATION in the COMMUNITY AWARENESS of GLOBAL ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT of SOCIAL and EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS EXPLORATION of EMERGING CAREER INTERESTS CAREER PREPARATION • Academic Courses • Voc/Tech Courses • Work-Based Experiences • Connecting Activities • Extracurricular Activities • N.E.T.works EMPLOYMENT • Volunteer Jobs • Internships • Apprenticeships • Paid Jobs • N.E.T.works Coop DEVELOPMENT of INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS	Students will be meaningfully engaged in one or more of the following: Employment Related to Interests & Ability Further Education & Training Independent Living Recreation & Leisure Activities Community Participation
TRANSITION ACTIVITIES	Expose parents to long-range picture of transition Instill positive atmosphere in IEP/ special education process Help student cultivate abilities & interests through diverse experiences Identify needs and accommodations Independent living skills Demonstrate relevance of school Community participation and citizenship experiences Orientation to intermediate level	Expose parents to long-range picture of transition Instill positive atmosphere in IEP/ special education process Help student cultivate abilities & interests through diverse experiences Identify needs and accommodations Begin student involvement in IEP process Independent living skills Demonstrate relevance of school Community participation and citizenship experiences Orientation to Middle School	Vocational Assessment (Formal & Informal) Career Interest Inventories Develop Positive Personal Profile Begin Career Portfolio Introduce Post H.S. Planning (by age 14) Develop a high school graduation plan Increase student involvement in IEP process Demonstrate relevance of school Community participation and citizenship experiences Orientation to High School	Appropriate High School program placement and course selection based on post H.S. goals Update Positive Personal Profile annually Continue development of Career Portfolio Provide range of Work-Based experiences Develop a resume Annual review & update of Transition Plan as driving force behind IEP Student-directed IEP Identify needs for Post H.S. support services & resources (by age 16) Identify sources of support Demonstrate relevance of school Connect school-based and work-based experiences Community participation and citizenship experiences	

Developed by SmartCore, Inc., 2001



Preschool/Early Elementary

- Awareness of self
- Awareness of community
- Awareness of social skills
- Development of independent skills
- Development of work habits/values



Intermediate

- Awareness of self
- Participation in the community
- Awareness of global economy
- Development of social/employability skills
- Development of independent skills
- Development of work habits/values



Middle School

- Awareness of self/self determination
- Participation in community
- Awareness of global economy
- Development of social/employability skills
- Identification/exploration of emerging career interests
- Career preparation
- Development of independent skills
- Development of work habits/values



High School

- Awareness of self/self determination
- Participation in community
- Awareness of global economy
- Development of social/employability skills
- Exploration of emerging career interests
- Career preparation
- Employment
- Development of independent skills



Begin with the end in mind. . .
Towson University
Center for Adults with Autism



Mission

- Assist young adults with autism in leading productive and fulfilling lives as integrated members within their communities by:
 - Supporting education for professionals who serve this population
 - Offering and evaluating best models for programs and services
 - Supporting applied research by faculty and students
 - Providing links between community and academic resources



Models for Programs and Services

- Social Group
- The Challenge Course Program
- The Challenge Continues! A Personalized Wellness Program
- The Challenge Continues: Reaching New Heights
- Adult Language and Pragmatic Skills (ALPS) Program
- Drumming and Movement Series
- Women's Group
- Employment Workshops



Integrated Members of the College Community

"The best part of the Challenge Program was that the mentors **treated me as an equal**, not as an inferior person. It was much easier to enjoy the interactions with everyone."

-Participant in the Summer 2008 Challenge Course Program

"Excellent opportunity to interact with peer mentors who treated him as an equal. He had an **opportunity to discuss social issues** that concerned him"

-Parent of a participant in the Summer 2008 Challenge Course Program

"I see autism as a characteristic of a person now, not as a disability. I hope to keep learning more about it"

-Mentor, Wellness Program 2009

Applied Research Projects

Faculty and student applied research projects

Advocacy efforts of families
Balance, coordination, and gait patterns
Use of virtual reality

Program evaluation

Mentor skills and knowledge
Attitudes towards individuals on the autism spectrum
Perceptions of competence and efficacy
Qualitative evaluation from families, participants, facilitators



Social Group & TU Crew

Activities Include

- Bowling
- Buffalo Wings at Bateman's
- Basketball Game at Towson U
- Game Nights
- Dinner & Pool at PAWS
- Impromptu Talent Show
- Parties
- Ice Cream Social
- Movie Night
- Orioles game
- Shopping



Challenge Course

- Fully funded by a grant from *Autism Speaks*
- Young adults on the spectrum paired with a trained Towson University student mentors to complete elements of an outdoor obstacle course
- Participants practiced problem-solving, communication, decision-making and stress management skills
- Towson University students learned firsthand about the unique learning styles and challenges of adults on the autism spectrum



Continuing the Challenge: Individualized Wellness Program

- Program developed in partnership with the Wellness Center at Towson University
- Participants worked one-on-one with kinesiology student personal trainers to identify individual goals and a customized fitness plan
- Experienced Towson University student mentors provided additional guidance and support
- Faculty from kinesiology, occupational therapy and speech-language therapy departments supervised the program



Reach for New Heights

- Rock climbing program
- Incorporation of young adults on the autism spectrum as student mentors
- Leadership opportunities
- Opportunities to practice social initiation



Adult Language and Pragmatic Skills

- Skill acquisition program led by ASHA certified speech language pathologist and supported by graduate students from speech therapy and occupational therapy
- Emphasis on applied skills



Drumming and Movement

- Opportunities for self expression
- Nonverbal communication skills
- Collaboration of the Dance department and the Autism Center





Women's Group

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- Developed by graduate students in close collaboration with young women on the autism spectrum
 - Located in and supported by the Women's Center on campus
 - Addresses women's issues of health, relationships, and self advocacy



Employment Workshops

- Vocational Rehabilitation
- SSI
- Resume building
- Job Interview skills
- Agency collaboration



Outcome Studies

- Increase in services for children has not resulted in significant improvement in adult outcomes
Howlin, Goode, Hutton, & Rutter (2004)
- For 57% of adults, outcome was very poor Billstedt, Gillberg, & Gillberg (2005)
- People, rather than particular methods, made a difference
Eaves & Ho(2008)

Eaves, L. C., & Ho, H. H. (2008). Young adult outcome of autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 38, 739-747.
Howlin, P., Goode, S., Hutton, J., & Rutter, M. (2004). Adult outcome for children with autism. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 45(2), 212-219.
Billstedt, E., Gillberg, C., & Gillberg, C. (2005). Autism after adolescence: Population-based 13-22 year follow-up study of 120 individuals with autism diagnosed in childhood. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 15(3), 351-360.



Meaningful Social Participation

- Personal growth
 - Social skills seminars
 - Generalized practice
- Environmental modifications
 - Safe, welcoming environments
 - Supported employment, housing
 - Peers, job coaches, social coaches, ambassadors to 'neurotypical culture'
- Opportunities for participation
 - Address issues related to isolation



Parent Feedback

- “I knew from the look on his face. I knew from the way he talked about it. He was psyched up, happy, had energy” -parent
- “He was talking to the mentors. He doesn’t do that” -parent
- “When he got in the car after the first session, he said it was fun. I cannot remember the last time I heard him say anything was fun.” -parent



Mentor Feedback

- “I had an opportunity to learn a lot about autistic adults. Now I’m much more passionate about putting forth efforts to **serve as an advocate for autistic people.**” -Mentor
- After the first session, I began to recognize that what I saw as limitations – utilizing scripts to initiate conversation, fiddling with and object to restore calm – were in reality **resources to problem solving.** I stopped focusing more on ‘doing for’ him or her, and began to enjoy ‘doing with’.” -Mentor



Participant Feedback

- “Some of us communicate our thoughts with greater struggle than others, but we all have something to say. The true test of any program or organization aiming to support autistic people is the approval of the autistic people being served.” -participant
- “To have an outlet to interact with people who have similar issues is great.” -participant



Final Words

As a community of diverse individuals, we can all make a difference in how young adults on the autism spectrum feel accepted, included, and supported. Each of us can assist them in leading productive and fulfilling lives as integrated members within their communities



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