

EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER OPTIONS

What will the day look like when high school ends? There are several different options for individuals with autism when it comes to what they will do when they leave the education system. Some individuals may want a structured vocational or day program, others may choose to focus on community experiences or some type of employment. These options may include sheltered employment, supported employment, or competitive employment. Other young adults with autism may want to attend college or another type of post-secondary education institution before they enter the world of employment.

Employment is an important part of adult life. For many of us, our job defines a big piece of who we are. As outlined in IDEA, one of the most important objectives of transition planning is to develop and implement a plan to secure employment. In order to do this, you and your young adult may want to consider activities that utilize his or her strengths as well as activities that he or she likes to do. Information gathering, assessments, volunteer opportunities, internships, job sampling, and job matching all play important roles in preparing a young adult for employment.



Preparation

IDEA federal special education law requires that school districts help students with disabilities make the transition from school to work and life as an adult. While young adults with autism are still in high school, they may want to begin the process of learning and educating themselves about possible future careers.

Life Journey through Autism: A Guide for Transition to Adulthood, by Organization for Autism Research, Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center and Danya International, Inc., recommends the following for students in high school and middle school:

- Learn more about the wide variety of careers that exist.
- Take part in vocational assessment activities in the community through “job sampling” at the actual places of employment.
- Have the opportunity to learn, by practice and exposure, what his or her work preferences might be.
- Identify training needs and effective strategies to address deficits.
- Be provided with sufficient opportunity to develop basic competencies in independence, self-monitoring, travel training, and life outside the classroom.
- Develop effective disclosure strategies relative to your son or daughter’s abilities and needs.
- Identify critical skill deficits that may impede the transition to post-21 life and provide individualized instruction to minimize the deficits.
- Learn more about school-to-work programs in the community, which offer opportunities for training and employment through job sampling, youth apprenticeships, cooperative education, tech-prep, mentorships, independent study, and internships.



Sometimes working with a career center or Office of Vocational Rehabilitation can be helpful. These agencies can help assess the individual's strengths, as well as his or her likes and dislikes. You may want to discuss the possibility of inviting a representative from your state or local vocational rehabilitation office to be a part of the Transition IEP meeting.

“On Thursdays when Danny was scheduled to work at the distribution center, he was always waiting at the door with his coat on. This was so different than Wednesdays when Danny was scheduled to work at the movie theater. Danny would procrastinate and need several reminders that it was time to go. Without any words Danny told us very clearly that he preferred his job at the distribution center. We are constantly reminded that behavior is a form of communication.”
— Sarah, Danny's job coach

Career Exploration

Volunteer Opportunities, Internships & Job Sampling

Even before adolescents with autism are ready to sample different work experiences in the community, there are opportunities for them to get some work experience right in their own school buildings. This is an important first step in understanding your adolescent's strengths and challenges within different types of work. Strengths can be built upon and challenges minimized before work experiences in the community begin. Some examples of possible work experience in the school building include:



- Working in the school store – filling orders, stocking shelves, completing transactions.
- General office tasks – sorting mail, shredding documents, greeting visitors.
- Volunteer opportunities for community service.
- Maintaining a portion of grounds or garden.
- Participating in a recycling program.
- Collecting canned goods for a food bank.
- Working in the cafeteria.

Internships

During school, or even after graduation, finding a paid or unpaid internship can help individuals with autism gain valuable work experience. Internships can often help with skill building, job training programs, and eventually the job application process. Some students can be connected to a peer or mentor at the internship or volunteer site who can lend a hand if needed.

For young adults with autism with more significant challenges, job coaches can help them reach their full potential. A job coach will assist the adolescent or young adult with



autism in obtaining a job and provide onsite support and assistance. A job coach may spend time at a job site before the individual begins the job in order to understand the requirements of the job and then will provide assistance to the individual with autism to successfully complete the job. Your school district may be able to help you find an agency that can supply a job coach.

“Typical vocational assessment may suggest that people with ASD are not adequately prepared for employment. We need to fight this notion and acknowledge that most jobs are going to require some degree of accommodation and support. The best ways to assess strength, interests, and support needs in a particular environment is to conduct the assessment in the environment in which one is expected to perform. Therefore, by conducting situational assessments across a variety of community jobs, an employment specialist can accurately assess such aspects as a person’s work styles, time management and problem solving skills, and preferences in terms of environments, socialization, communication, and routines.”

– As outlined in *Employment Planning for People with Autism Spectrum Disorders* by Speaker’s Journal, The Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Fall 2008

Families may also need to keep in mind that individuals with autism may need to build up the endurance and stamina needed to complete their work day. This needs to be taken into consideration when exploring internships and job sampling options. Adequate time needs to be provided to make sure that the appropriate level of endurance and stamina is achieved. This way, the young adult can meet the requirements of the job.

Types of Employment

There are several different employment options for individuals on the autism spectrum. It should be noted that a young adult with autism can go from one type of employment option to another.

Life Journey Through Autism: A Guide for Transition to Adulthood, by Organization for Autism Research, Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center, and Danya International, Inc. lists several possible types of employment:

Competitive Employment – A full-time or part-time job with market wages and responsibilities is considered competitive. Usually, no long-term support is provided to the employee to help him learn the job or continue to perform the job.

Supported Employment – In supported employment, individuals with autism work in competitive jobs but receive ongoing support services while on the job. The support is provided as long as the person holds the job, although the amount of supervision may be reduced over time as the person learns to do the job more independently. Supported employment, in whatever form it takes, can be funded through state developmental disabilities or vocational rehabilitation agencies, but families will have to advocate strongly that: (1) supported employment, by definition and statute, is intended for people with severe disabilities; and (2)



individuals with autism can, in fact, work if given the proper support, training, and attention to job match characteristics.

Customized Employment – Customized employment involves finding creative ways to identify and using the strengths and abilities of individuals with significant disabilities by actively negotiating job tasks or duties with businesses (*Autism and the Transition to Adulthood*, Wehman Smith, Schall). This avenue of customized employment establishes a unique relationship between employer and employee, in that it enables both parties to get as much from the relationship as possible. Customized employment is similar to supported employment in that it requires learning about the individual and understanding his or her strengths and support needs. In a customized employment situation, however, the job and job description are uniquely created for the individual at hand.

Self Employment – involves matching an individual's interest and strengths to a product or service that could provide an income. For some this can increase the opportunity to tailor the work environment to the needs of the individual, and to tailor the job, or a portion of the job to the strengths of an individual.

Secured or Segregated Employment – In secured or segregated employment, individuals with disabilities (not necessarily autism specifically) work in a self-contained units and are not integrated with workers without disabilities. This type of employment is generally supported by a combination of federal and/or state funds. Some typical tasks include collating, assembling, or packaging. While such programs remain available, critics argue that the sheltered workshop system is more often geared toward the fostering of dependence within a tightly supervised, non-therapeutic environment than toward encouraging independence in the community at large.

Sheltered Employment – Sheltered employment involves programs in a protected environment that provide training and services that will assist adults with autism in developing life skills as well as educational and pre-vocational skills.

Autism Speaks celebrates the success of individuals who are working on the *Autism in the Workplace* page on the Autism Speaks website. For video clips of different individuals with autism who are working, as well as information from their employers and the steps that were put in place to make the job match successful, visit AutismSpeaks.org/community/family_services/autism_in_the_workplace.php.



Job Matching & Searching

The below information comes from: *Achieving a Good Job Match: Considerations for Placement Planning and Assessment* as described in Institute for Community Inclusion – Supporting Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Quality Employment Practices by *The Institute Brief, Issue No. 25*

“The most important consideration in helping an individual with autism find a job is the job match. When helping a person with autism find a good job match, three broad areas must be considered:

- The interests and skills of the person with autism;
- The individual with autism’s learning style; and
- The environmental demands on the worker with autism—including communication, sensory, social, and organizational.

It is imperative to match the job to the unique set of strengths, interests, and passions that the person with autism brings to the situation.

- Jay loves to travel in vehicles and would spend most of his day in a car if he could. His team is trying either to carve out a delivery position for him with an existing company or help him start his own delivery business.
- Alicia is very interested in women’s and baby clothes. She works in a department store re-shelving and re-hanging clothes left in the changing rooms. Alicia hangs the clothes according to size using the color codes on the tags.
- Henn and Henn (2005) describe their daughter with autism as being very limited in her communication and as having a history of challenging behavior. However, she also is very meticulous and detailed oriented. She is extremely efficient in her work shelving books in a library.
- As a child, Dr. Temple Grandin became obsessed with cattle handling equipment at her aunt’s ranch. She was encouraged to pursue her interests and went on to become one of the world’s leading experts on the design of cattle handling facilities.”



Job Match Components

The below information regarding job matching is excerpted from *Life Journey Through Autism: A Guide for Transition to Adulthood*, by Organization for Autism Research, Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center and Danya International, Inc.

Individuals with autism may not be as motivated by money. So, for the majority of individuals with autism, their motivation to work will be directly related to the extent to which they enjoy the work they are being asked to do. A good match is of critical importance in these cases. When considering things that contribute to job match, they can be classified into physical and social components, as shown below:

<i>Components of the Physical Job Match</i>	<i>Components of the Social Job Match</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Hours of employment▪ Acceptable noise levels at the job site▪ Pay, leave, and other benefits▪ Acceptable activity levels▪ Physical requirements of the job (e.g., lifting)▪ Acceptable margin of error (quality control)▪ Production requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Acceptable level of interaction with coworkers and supervisors▪ Clear job expectations▪ Grooming and hygiene requirements▪ Demands on communication skills▪ Personal space available▪ Phone/vending machine/cafeteria▪ Coworker training and support▪ Community Status

What Skills Do We Need for the Workplace?

There are a variety of skills that you may want to think about for your young adult with autism as he or she enters the workplace. Many of the necessary social skills in the workplace have been outlined by Dr. Paul Wehman in *Autism and the Transition to Adulthood*. For a full description of each bullet point below, see the COMMUNITY LIVING section of this kit.

- Using Social Amenities
- Using Appropriate Greetings.
- Terminating Conversations
- Sharing Workspace
- Accepting Correction
- Responding Assertively
- Accepting Suggestions
- Asking for Help and Revealing a Problem
- Waiting in Line and Taking Turns

In addition, there are some skills that are more specific to the job that an individual with autism will be doing in the workplace. These skills might include:

- Walking in the hallways (Keep to the right)
- What to say and/or do during an interview
- What to do during breaks and lunch
- Appropriate topics to discuss at work
- Travel skills
- Proper dress and grooming
- Maintaining a schedule
- Self Advocacy skills



Agencies that May Help with the Employment Process

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) has provided information about the following agencies:

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agency

The VR agency has traditionally been a primary player in determining the way transition services are delivered. Typically, VR helps persons with cognitive, sensory, physical, or emotional disabilities to find employment and achieve increased independence. Funded by federal and state money, VR agencies typically operate regional and local offices. VR services usually last for a limited period of time and are based on an individual's rehabilitation plan. If needed, an individual with disabilities can request services at a later time, and a new rehabilitation plan will be developed.

VR has its own eligibility requirements. Therefore, not all students receiving special education services can receive VR services. You will need to check with the VR agency in your own area to learn what eligibility requirements apply. Find that agency by visiting NICHCY's State Resource Sheets (www.nichcy.org/Pages/StateSpecificInfo.aspx) and selecting your state. The VR agency will be listed near the beginning of the list.

Examples of *employment services* that may be available through VR include:

- vocational guidance and counseling
- medical, psychological, vocational, and other types of assessments to determine vocational potential
- job development, placement, and follow-up services
- rehabilitation, technological services, and adaptive devices, tools, equipment and supplies

Examples of *postsecondary education services* that may be available through VR include:

- apprenticeship programs, usually in conjunction with the Department of Labor
- vocational training
- college training towards a vocational goal as part of an eligible student's financial aid package

Examples of *independent living and adult services* that may be available through VR include:

- housing or transportation supports needed to maintain employment
- interpreter services
- orientation and mobility services

To learn more about vocational rehabilitation, see the two resources below:

- *Vocational Rehabilitation Services: Can It Help You?* An online module at the HEATH Resource Center:
www.heath.gwu.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1059&Itemid=65
- *Getting the Most from the Public Vocational Rehabilitation System:*
www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=129



Refer to your state page of the *Autism Speaks Resource Guide*, AutismSpeaks.org/community/fsdb/search.php, or the specific state page of this tool kit for information about the Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies in your state.

There are also some other websites that may be helpful:

ODEP | Office of Disability Employment Policy.

(866) 487-2365 (Department of Labor, toll-free)

(877) 889-5627 (Department of Labor, TTY)

www.dol.gov/odep

NCWD/Youth | Navigating the Road to Work.

www.ncwd-youth.info

Career One-Stops | Your pathway to career success.

careeronestop.org

Disability.gov | On jobs & self-employment.

www.disability.gov/employment

Options other than employment

Some individuals with autism and their families may feel that employment and/or post secondary educational opportunities are not right for them. There are other options that families and young adults with autism may consider and they include:

Day Programs

■ Many day programs for individuals with autism are administered through the Department of Developmental Disabilities (state specific). You may need to contact your local office for more information (see the *Autism Speaks Resource Guide*) on the programs available in your area. It is also important to note that many programs may have waiting lists, so it is important to start the process of getting on a waiting list as soon as possible.

Day Treatment Programs

■ Day treatment programs are for individuals that may need the most intensive level of supervision and support. Day Treatment Programs combine therapeutic treatment with daily life skills. This type of program is administered at a program site rather than in the community. To find out about day treatment programs in your area you should contact the Department of Developmental Disabilities.

Day Habilitation

■ Day habilitation programs provide structured activities and specialized supports that will allow individuals with autism to participate in non-employment related activities on site and in the community.





Brian Merring has never considered himself much of a cook. But there he was, dressed in kitchen whites at the helm of a professional-grade stove and armed with a spoon and a palette of tasty ingredients. Merring, was diagnosed with autism when he was 6, and he has never held a job. He wasn't sure if he would be able to complete the task at hand—turn the raw flavors before him into retail-worthy soups— but he was willing to try. It was the experience that he craved, and that's exactly what the Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC) is serving up with this newest addition to its Vocational & Life Skills Academy. Called CulinaryWorks®, this program was recently launched by SARRC through a partnership with notable Arizona chefs, and the program offers adults with autism spectrum disorders hands-on job training through the preparation, packaging, distribution and sale of classic soups. The program is supported through grants from the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust and the Noah Family Foundation. Like most programs in the academy, CulinaryWorks provides those with autism vital trade skills that can be translated into employment opportunities in the future that will allow them to live and work independently.

"It's about creating a quality of life and a sense of independence for our adults with autism," says Jeri Kendle, Vocational & Life Skills Academy director. "Our participants are trained in a variety of skills, with opportunities in bookkeeping, sales and cooking. We want to give these individuals valuable skills so they can find jobs, have meaningful experiences and build self-esteem."

Developing skills and working toward employment and independence is crucial for many in this program. Brian's parents, Mildred and Dr. Leroy Merring, want their son to have every advantage possible in the job market. Both worry about what will happen to their son when they are no longer around to take care of him.

"He has never had a job, and we're not going to be here forever," Leroy Merring says. "This is the first program out there that does something for the future of people like Brian. And it's a relief that this program is now available."

For more information about the Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center, visit www.autismcenter.org.



Employment Resources

A Systematic Process for Carving Supported Employment Positions for People with Severe Disabilities

Nietupski, J. A. and Hamre-Nietupski, S.
Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities
www.springerlink.com/content/g17288456h568706

Employment Training for People with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Speaker's Journal, The Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Fall 2008
www.house.state.pa.us/SpkrJournal/documents/8/v8_a15.pdf

Working in the Community: A Guide for Employers of Individuals with Disabilities

Supported Employment & Supported Volunteerism Training Manual

Written and produced by the Alpine Learning Group with the support of the Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation
www.djfiddlefoundation.org/userdocs/alpine_employment_manual.pdf

Supporting Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Quality Employment Practices

The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) Professional Development Series, December 2008
by Melanie Jordan
www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=266

Autism Speaks: Autism in the Workplace

www.autismspeaks.org/community/family_services/autism_in_the_workplace.php

Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports and Job Retention

www.worksupport.com

More General Transition Resources

Guiding Your Teenager with Special Needs Through the Transition from School to Adult Life: Tools for Parents

by Mary Korpi

Life's Journey Through Autism, a Guide for Transition to Adulthood

Organization for Autism Research, Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center and Danya International, Inc.

www.researchautism.org/resources/reading/documents/transitionguide.pdf



Autism & the Transition to Adulthood: Success Beyond the Classroom

by Paul Wehman, Marcia Datlow Smith and Carol Schall

Growing Up on the Spectrum: A Guide to Life, Love and Learning for Teens and Young Adults with Autism and Asperger's

by Lynn Kern Koegel, Ph.D. and Claire LaZebnik



