Project Objectives and Steps:

Up to July 2008
(1) Work with school system to continue to consult with and support teachers and Vocational Rehabilitation staff who have enjoyed success from our previous grant training program.
(2) Work with school system and Vocational Rehabilitation staff to prepare for next phase.
(3) Continue to work with businesses to help supervisors and coworkers learn strategies to support coworkers/volunteers/employees with disabilities.
(4) Continue to build community relationships with other businesses.
(5) Train training coordinator regarding assessment tool and programming techniques. (6) Assess and restructure training for school system. Include new training module for employment transition in traditional TEACCH classroom summer training.

July 2008–September 2008
(1) Provide TTAP training for all teachers, school job coaches, VR staff members, involved school administrators, etc. Perform evaluations after training completed.
(2) Continue to develop business sites for volunteer/practice job opportunities/sites.
(3) Work with Vocational Rehabilitation staff to develop evaluation techniques for business sites.

October 2008–Mid January 2009
(1) Teach and train students and teachers at volunteer sites. Perform evaluations after training completed.
(2) Train coworkers/supervisors at businesses as natural supports. Perform evaluations after training completed
(3) Continue with ongoing TTAP assessment and training at volunteer/practice work sites. Perform evaluations after training completed.
(4) Begin evaluations for candidates at business sites.
(5) Involve Vocational_Rehabilitation staff with training at job sites.

January 2009–March 2009
(1) Work with students and Vocational Rehabilitation staff on practice/volunteer job sites as well as on actual job sites. Perform evaluations after training completed
(2) Continue to train job site coworkers and supervisors. Perform evaluations after training completed
(3) Continue to work on establishing new job sites/business partners.
(4) Assess and restructure training for school system.
(5) Pursue and encourage school staff from grant-involved school system and surrounding counties/school systems to participate in this opportunity.
(6) Continue evaluations at business sites.
(7) Compile/analyze data and provide written interim report.
April 2009–July 2009

(1) Introduce new sections of teaching and training program via TTAP for teachers, school job coaches, school administrators, VR staff, and students. Involve new students in beginning process. Possibly involve new schools/classrooms, teachers, etc. in first part of TTAP training. Perform evaluations after training completed

(2) Prepare students, school staff, VR staff and employment site staff for move into competitive employment. Perform evaluations after training completed

(3) Involve new school staff, students and VR staff in learning TTAP. Perform evaluations after training completed

(4) Continue to train job site coworkers and supervisors. Perform evaluations after training completed

(5) Continue to work on establishing new job sites/business partners.

(6) Introduce new sections of teaching and training program via TTAP for teachers, school job coaches, school administrators, VR staff, and students. Involve new students in beginning process. Possibly involve new schools/classrooms, teachers, etc. in first part of TTAP training. Perform evaluations after training completed

(7) Compile/analyze all assessment information for yearly review report.

(8) Present information from yearly review report to Guilford Community Partners, School Board, North Carolina Transition Council, North Carolina Association for Persons in Supported Employment, and other possible presentation sites.

Project Outcomes:

In our initial proposal, we suggested that we would like to train teachers, job coaches, Vocational Rehabilitation staff and other professionals both in how to use the TEACCH Transition Assessment Profile (TTAP) and in how to turn the knowledge gained by using the instrument into real world, longterm jobs for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders throughout Guilford County (the county where Greensboro TEACCH Center is located).

During the months of June and July 2008, we spent time securing and training TEACCH staff, developing our TTAP model, and working with representatives from the school system to plan our training. We continued to work with businesses in our area to help supervisors and coworkers learn strategies to support working individuals who have ASD, as well as to build community relationships with these and other businesses. Sara McGrath, who was working as a job coach with our Supported Employment staff, moved into the position of our Training Coordinator. Sara has proven to be a wonderful asset to the training program, as she brings much experience and knowledge to her work. Sara and Glenna Osborne, our project supervisor, attended several training opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills of ‘best practice’ procedures as they developed the TTAP training model and materials. Glenna and Sara met with school and with Vocational Rehabilitation administrative staff to plan for the project. Glenna also met with several groups involved in transition services for adolescents to describe the project and to advertise our plan. When the grant funding was secured through Autism Speaks, printed announcements were sent and appeared in local newspapers and in school system publications. The response was very encouraging.

The basic training module for the groups included 4 hours of lectures/presentations/discussions and hands-on experience with the TTAP, as well as video presentation of an assessment. Following this training, the participants observed a live demonstration of a TTAP administration with one of their students. This provided information to assist the participants in learning to
administer the test, as well as invaluable information about one of their students. The live demonstration involved three parts: formal testing with the student, parent interview and school or work interview. Following the live demonstration, TEACCH training staff worked with participants to review and discuss the evaluation information and to develop goals for the student to work toward in the classroom and at a worksite. The third step of the project was for participants to practice administration of the TTAP with another one of their students—including a parent and worksite or school interview. This provided another opportunity for the participants to learn more about TTAP administration, as well as to get important information about another student. This administration was followed by meetings for discussion and review of information about the evaluation tools and the student who was evaluated. Various goals were developed to follow students into the next phase of moving to a work site.

As students moved into work sites, TEACCH training staff developed materials and strategies to help students learn and achieve goals that were developed from the TTAP evaluation. TEACCH training staff worked with training participants to help them learn how to use and develop the materials and strategies, as well as how to evaluate progress of the students. TEACCH staff also worked with supervisors and coworkers at the worksites to help them learn how to develop and use the materials and strategies. TEACCH staff helped develop new work sites for students to transition into, as the students continued to learn and progress.

Our first group of participants began their training program with the initial training workshop in August. Six educators (both teachers and job coaches) and two transition facilitators were involved in this initial training. These educators represented three different schools, and the transition facilitators cover the entire county. A second round of training took place in November. Two educators from different schools attended this training workshop. A third training took place in March and consisted of two educators and the Vocational Job Specialist from Vocational Rehabilitation. A final training workshop took place in May and consisted of three educators from three different schools in Guilford County and the Vocational Evaluator from Vocational Rehabilitation.

With all the trainees, we have completed:
1) live demonstration of TTAP with a student,  
2) live parent and school/worksite interview,  
3) discussion/review of these sessions including goal planning from the information gained, and  
4) work to train educators, job coaches, transition facilitators, supervisors and coworkers at work sites on how to help the ASD individual.

Every training group except the final training group also completed
1) development of materials and strategies for working on goals in the classroom and at a worksite, and
2) development and preparation of new worksites.

All the trainees performed the TTAP with a second student as part of their training, and all trainees except those involved in the final training workshop also completed all of the steps above with a second student. Many of the trainees involved in the initial workshops tested their other students using the TTAP and quickly developed similar strategies and materials for these students in their classrooms and at the worksites. The participants based their strategies and materials on the training information provided during the workshop.
Feedback from the four training groups was very positive. These professionals said that they learned and understood a great deal more about autism spectrum disorders than they had previously. They also told us that they better understood the transition challenges and needs of their students, and feel better about their work to help students more successfully transition from school. Training participants reported seeing more progress from the students with whom they worked than they ever thought possible. We also built stronger collaborative relationships with several community sites where the students successfully completed worksite experiences. We were able to foster more collaborative relationships between these groups.

To evaluate the success of the TTAP training workshops, we developed a specific evaluation form to formulate feedback from the training participants. This form asked participants on a rating scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating a rating of “poor” and 5 indicating rating of “excellent,” to rate a variety of aspects of the training. The average score of the overall training experience for all participants was a 4.0. Some of the specific comments from these participants included: “Great program!” “This needs to be made more available, it’s great!” and, “This was a wonderful experience, TEACCH has provided a structured tool that can help this population gain employment.”

With the collaboration of Vocational Rehabilitation administrators, we developed a new employee evaluation form for students at worksites. Several supervisors and coworkers completed these evaluations throughout the year to assess the growth of the students. Students’ initial scores, prior to the TTAP training workshop, were around 70-80% productivity, and supervisors commented, “XX can be easily distracted and does not actively greet coworkers.” Another manager commented, “XX can be very unproductive.” The final evaluation from the worksites indicated that students were scoring in the 90-100% with “Excellent” or “Good” remarks. Comments from supervisors and coworkers on this second set of forms included: “XX is doing a great job on his new tasks,” “In the beginning; XX was showing antisocial and behavioral problems. Now that certain tools and criteria have been put in place, XX is doing quite well and has shown great improvement,” and “XX has improved so much over the past few weeks. He comes in, requests his directions, and goes right to work. He has even been suggesting tasks that need to be completed around the store. A few days ago, he actually came up to me and said that he had finished his work and had about five minutes left and asked if I had anything that he could do for me in five minutes. When he started working here he would not even say, ‘Hello’ when spoken to. What a turnaround!” By the end of the year another manager stated, “Through time XX has become a completely different person! He comes in every day with a smile on his face, gives a friendly ‘Hello,’ and has even begun to look at areas to determine what he thinks needs to be done.” Other supervisors commented, “It has been a pleasure having XX on our team,” “XX is a true pleasure to work with. XX is doing a great job on all his work and interacting well with others,” and “XX is a very soft spoken student. He comes in and gets the job done, only with less words. Does a great job at his new tasks!”

We developed an evaluation form that assessed many aspects of the grant work experience from the training participants involved in all four trainings. This form asked participants on a rating scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating a rating of “poor” and 5 indicating a rating of “excellent,” to rate a variety of aspects of the overall training experience. Participants indicated that they understood how to use the TTAP instrument very well, with an average rating of 4.2. Some commented that, “Since I had to give the test myself, I have to say it was not that hard. The experience of doing it increases learning.” Training participants commented that the training was very helpful in learning about the TTAP instrument, with an average rating of 4.0. One training
participant commented that they enjoyed, “The rationale for the test and how it would help focus our teaching.” When asked how the TTAP process helped develop forms of structured teaching within the work sites and prepare students for competitive employment, training participants remarked that the training and experience was very helpful, with an average rating of 4.0. Some participants commented, “It helped me learn to structure tasks so that my students became proficient at them,” “My students would not have structured support in the workplace without TEACCH. Because of this process, their areas of need have been pinpointed and addressed. I hope we can affect even more students next year,” and “Under the guidance of the TTAP trainers, we were able to use the information gained from the TTAP to develop work goals and structure the students’ work sites to help them achieve those goals. Results from the TTAP provided us with a better understanding of the students’ emerging needs, and this in turn, enabled us to develop a work plan that would help the students master their work skills and behaviors.”

TEACCH staff also questioned the participants on how well the TTAP information helped create IEP/transition goals that more fully adhered to IDEA guidelines for the students involved in the training process. The participants indicated that the TTAP results were very helpful in creating these goals, with an average rating of 3.7. Training participants stated that “The TTAP results were helpful in the area of independent living and employment especially. The direction is clear,” and “It is simple to develop IEP goals/objectives from TTAP results and input them into the students’ IEP. Results from the TTAP provided evidence of why these goals were appropriate for students.”

Finally, TEACCH staff addressed whether or not the Training participants would recommend the TTAP training workshop and experience to other peer professionals. With an average rating of 4.0, the participants noted that they would definitely recommend the TTAP training to others. A few training participants commented, “Absolutely!! This has been a wonderful experience for my students and me. It has been extremely helpful at the job sites. My students learned so many new vocational skills and behaviors,” “Yes, the experience could provide teachers with more confidence to develop work plans that would address their students’ emerging skills and behaviors. The TTAP could help teachers know what to look for when assessing their students’ skills across the different domains and settings and put them to good use as they prepare their students for life after graduation,” and “TEACCH is very knowledgeable. They provide the necessary tools to train AU citizens for independence. This has been a very broadening experience.”

TEACCH staff also created an evaluation form to assess the growth and improvement of the educators involved in the grant work, in broadening their understanding of autism, creating structured supports to transition from school to work opportunities, and developing better IEP goals that abided by the IDEA guidelines. The evaluation form was also rated on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 indicated a “poor” rating and 5 indicated an “excellent” rating. Program administrators from the school system evaluated the various educators from all four TTAP trainings. The program administrators found that the grant work experience was helpful in broadening the educators’ understanding of autism, with an average rating of 3.9. The program administrators commented that, “This training broadened the teacher’s knowledge of best practices.” TEACCH staff learned that the grant work experience was helpful in creating new methods of structured teaching for transition from school to work opportunities, with an average rating of 4.1. Program administrators indicated that, “The teacher noted that the assessment piece helped her put everything together,” and “The grant helped the teacher see expanded possibilities within existing work sites.” The TTAP training and experience was also helpful with developing IEP
goals that abided by IDEA guidelines, with an average rating of 3.8. Program administrators stated that, “Teacher included transition assessment in new IEP goals” and noted that she “kinda knew where students were, but did not have the assessment piece to back it up,” “Very helpful in writing transition plans and work related goals,” and “Much improved vocational goals!! More specific goals including social work behaviors.”

The program administrators noted other positives from the TTAP training such as “The teacher is excited about opportunities in the fall,” “The teacher is very excited about next year. Noted to me that parents have very positive things to say,” “This teacher loved the assessment and structure within the work sites!! She would love for TEACCH to come back! She will follow through with TEACCH’s strategies,” and “Marked differences in her IEP goals. Could definitely see the influence of the TTAP and TEACCH intervention!!”

TEACCH staff videotaped all pre- and post-TTAP administrations to document evidence of progress and the training participants’ ability to successfully and accurately use the formal part of the TTAP. In all pre- and post-comparisons, participants showed marked improvements in their performance and ability to use the formal part of the TTAP.

Educators, program administrators, and local businesses expressed appreciation for all they are learning, and mentioned how wonderful it was to see the progress and growth of the students. Several individuals who saw parts of the training work asked to be involved in a training in the future. Throughout the summer, many students have begun working with Vocational Rehabilitation to continue the student’s assessment in various work settings. After these assessments, the students will begin searching for employment opportunities in the community and use the structured teaching techniques to help them transition from school to work settings.

Due to the economy and the historically high unemployment rate in North Carolina, it has been very difficult for individuals to find jobs, especially individuals who have a disability. This has slowed the process of establishing jobs for high school graduates. All the proposed seniors, except one (this student was involved late in the process, and he graduated before TEACCH could create supports and assess him at the work site), decided to extend their senior year for another year (as was possible because of their birthdates) in the hopes that they will have better job prospects after graduating next year. During the end-of-year meetings to make these decisions, staff and parents noted that the students who participated in the grant training showed great benefits from their involvement and exhibited brighter prospects for securing jobs. Involved business supervisors related desire to hire students involved in the grant work, but claimed inability to do so because of budget challenges.

We are pursuing more grant opportunities for future work. The Guilford County school system has asked if there is a chance to be involved for a second year, and we are in contact with interested administrators from neighboring school systems. Many supervisors and coworkers from worksites have also expressed interest in our future work. We are very grateful to Autism Speaks for this opportunity, and we look forward to our continued collaboration.