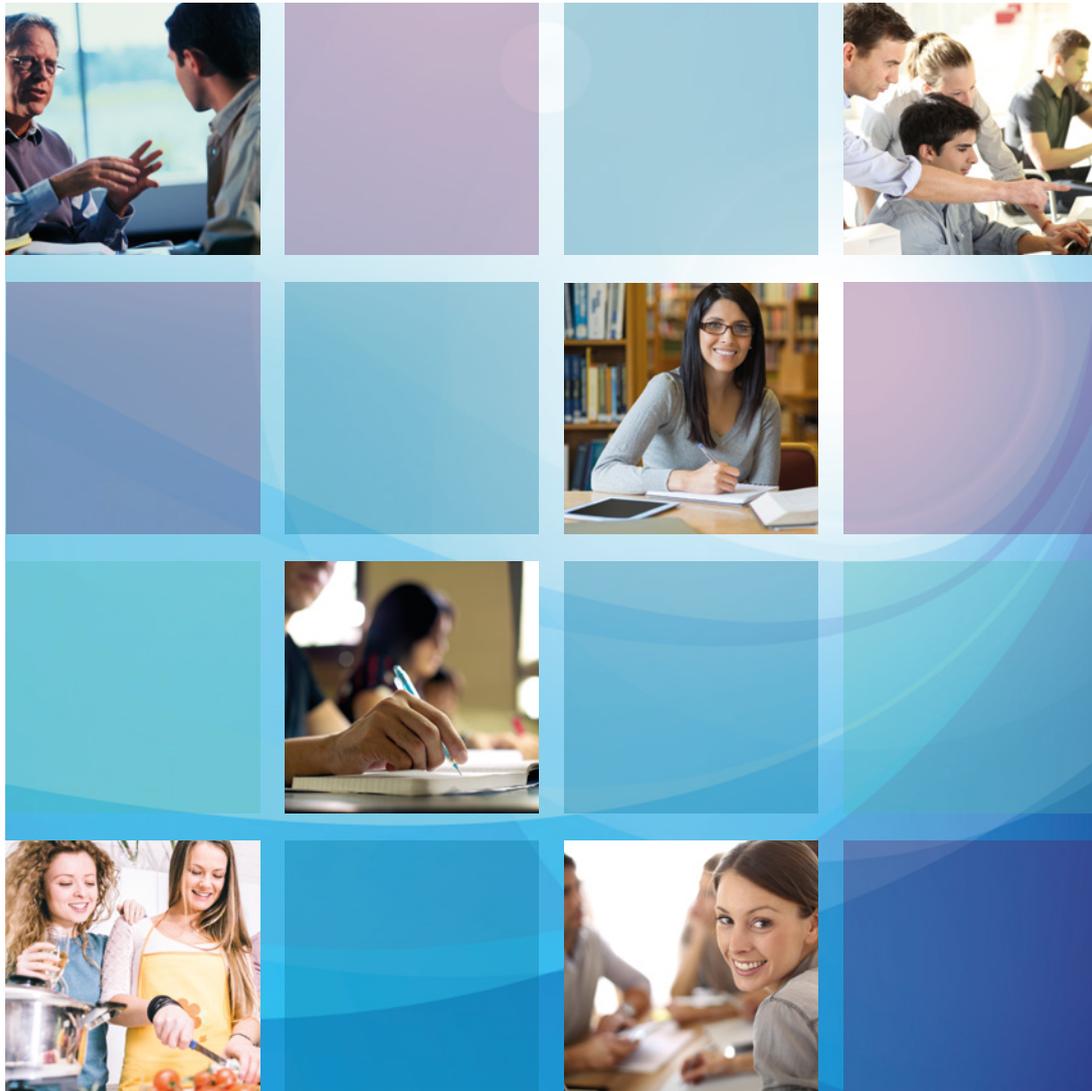
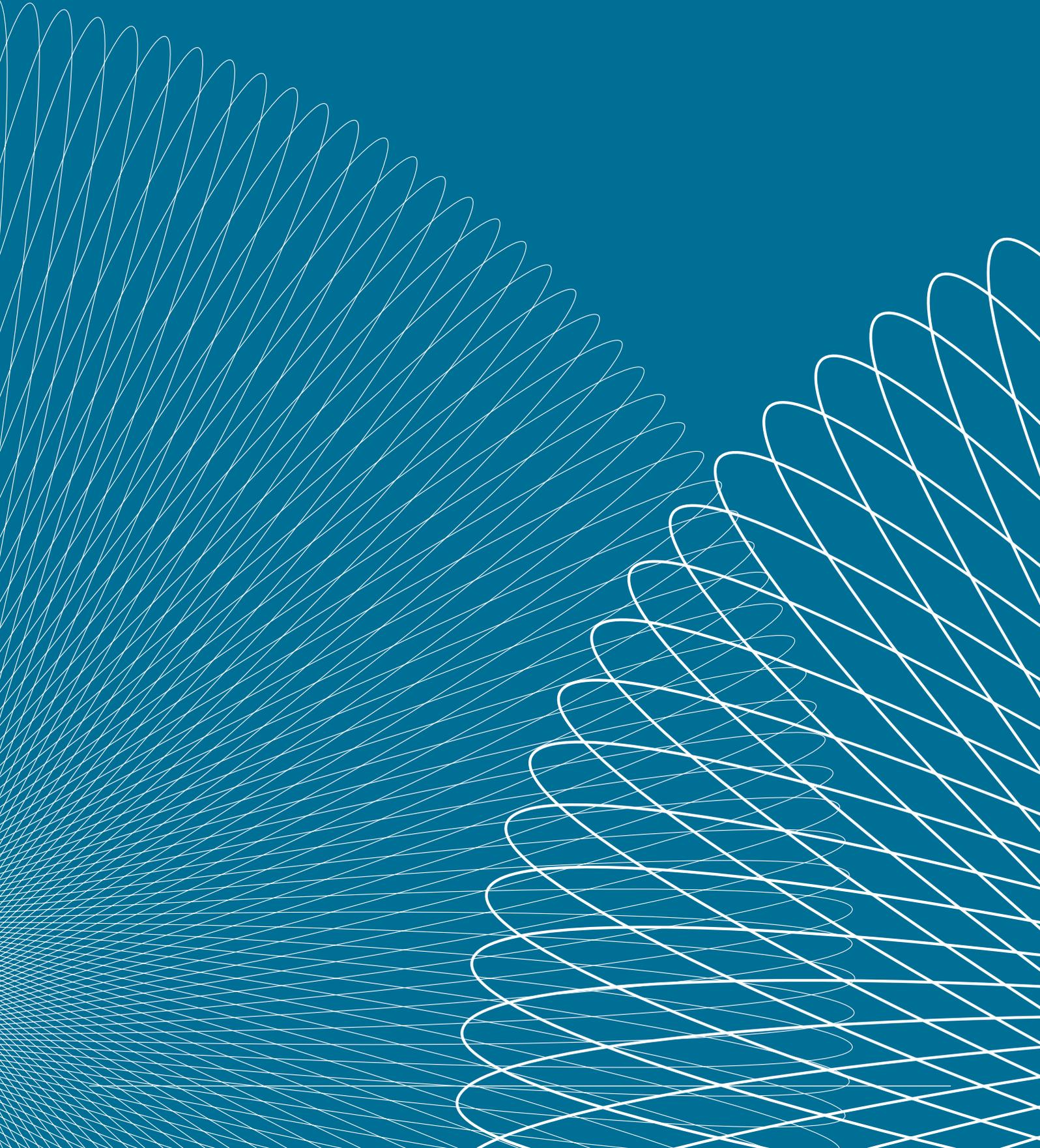




CENTRE FOR AUTISM  
MIDDLETOWN

# Autism and Post Primary Education: Preparing for Adulthood

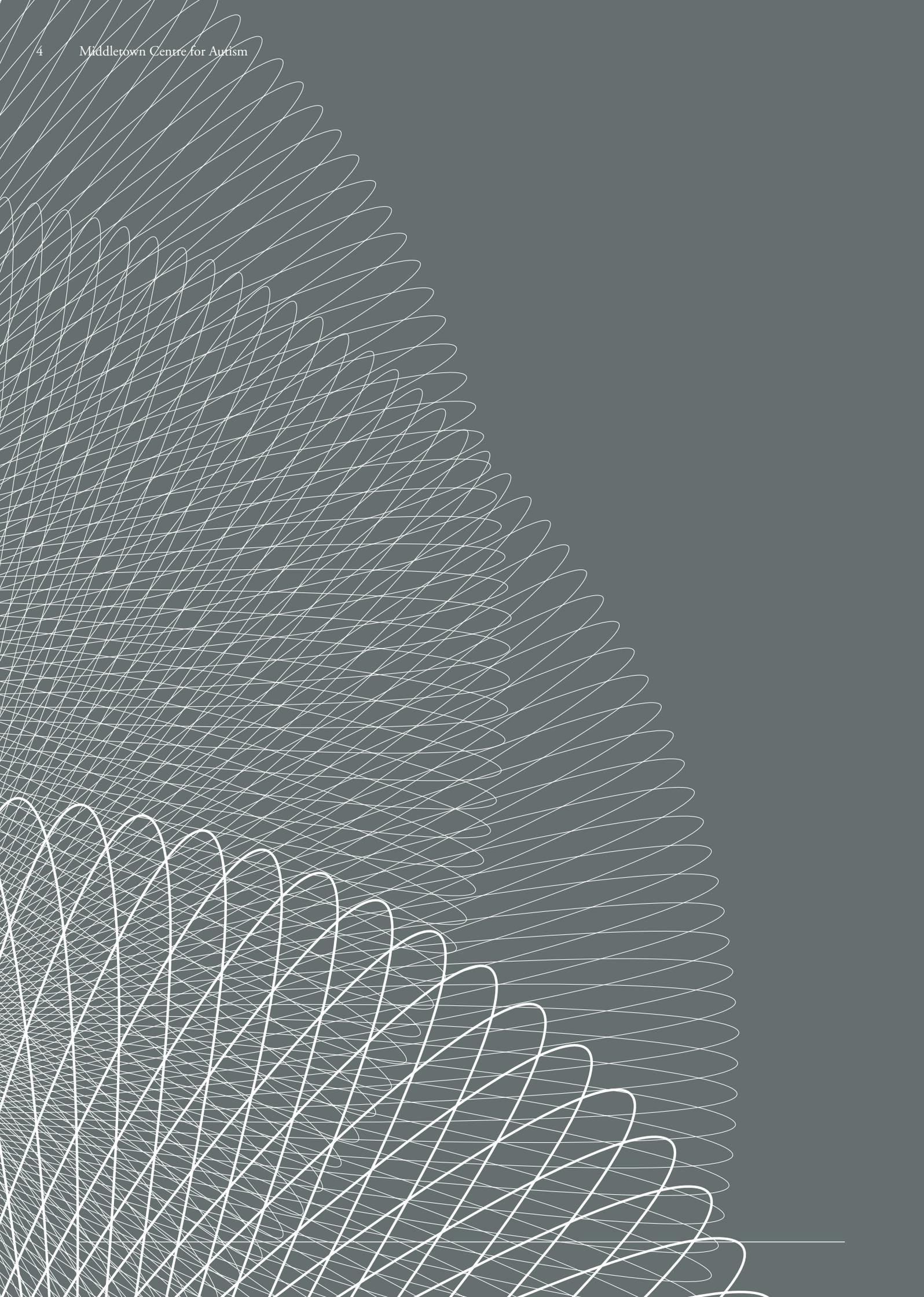




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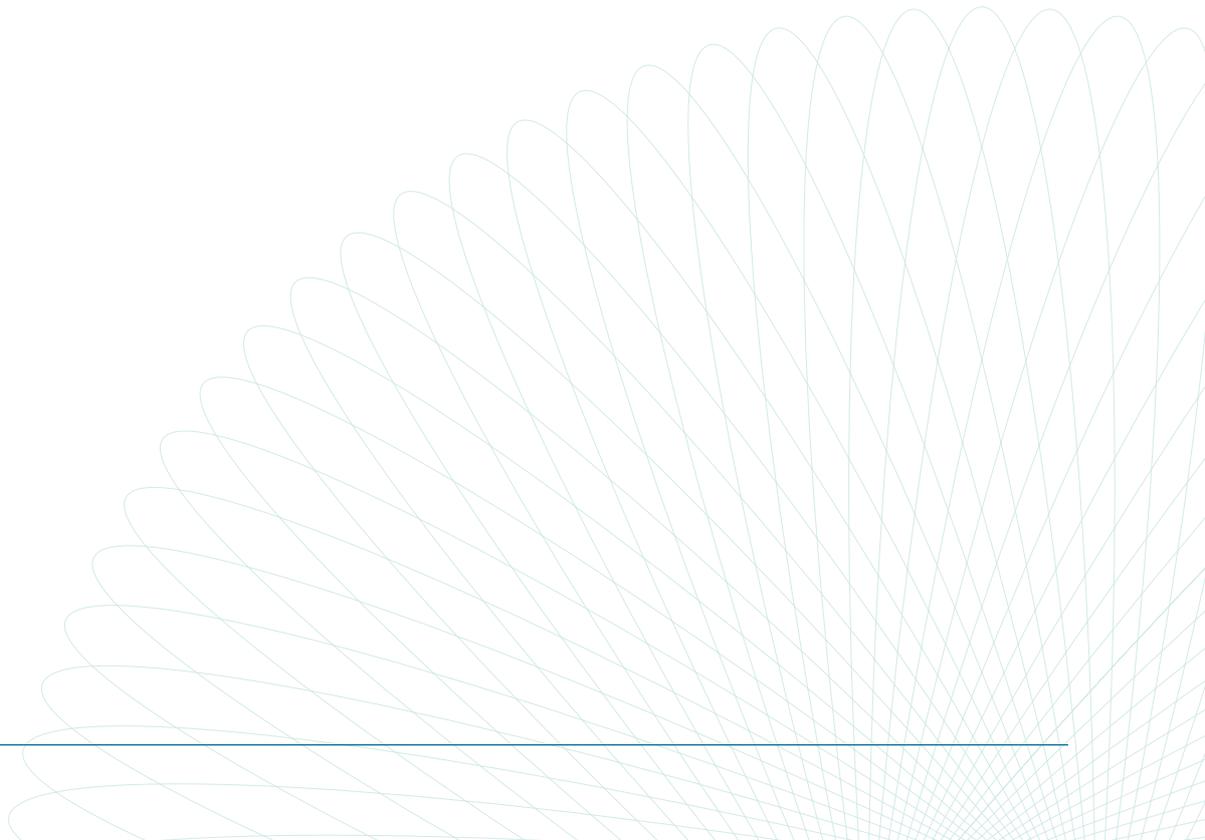


# INTRODUCTION

This is the nineteenth Research Bulletin produced by Middletown Centre for Autism. The Research Bulletin series is aimed to provide accessible summaries of relevant published research. The theme of the current Bulletin is: Autism and Post Primary Education: Preparing for Adulthood and commences with an interview with Dr Julie Lounds Taylor. Dr Taylor is Assistant Professor of Paediatrics and Special Education at Vanderbilt Kennedy Centre in Nashville and she has a particular interest in transitions for young adults. The current Bulletin summarises twelve articles

spanning 2012-2015 and addresses transitions throughout a range of areas: academic, life skills and the promotion of independence across a range of strengths and abilities.

*Please note that the views represented in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of Middletown Centre for Autism. Reviewers have, where possible, used the original language of the article, which may differ from UK and Ireland usage and the usage of a range of terminologies for autism.*





## INTERVIEW WITH DR JULIE LOUNDS TAYLOR

**1. As understanding of autism increases, what positive changes for young adults can you see occurring? Have you noted an increase within societal knowledge?**

Yes, I have noticed a dramatic increase in societal knowledge. Perhaps most important, people are increasingly realising that the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder includes a dizzying array of challenges and abilities. As we say in the autism research community, “When you see one child with autism, you’ve seen one child with autism.” Recognising the great diversity of characteristics and behaviours that young adults with this diagnosis can present with has led to (and is continuing to lead to) a wider range of services and supports that can be mixed, matched, and tailored to best match the needs of each youth with ASD. We still have a long way to go in this respect, but we are certainly moving in the right direction which I think is a very positive change.

**2. We have heard and read a lot about Person Centred Planning, but when is the most effective time to implement such a policy or programme? Is it rhetoric?**

Person Centred Planning is a way for youth with ASD – even those with significant cognitive challenges – to articulate their hopes and dreams. It is an important tool that facilitates youth having their voice heard when planning for the future, and allows parents and providers to focus discussions of services and supports on helping youth attain their own goals. Ideally, Person Centred Planning would begin as early as possible, and there are techniques (such as a “vision board”) that allow students even as young as elementary age to participate in the process.

**3. What advice would you offer to parents of children with autism at about 10 years old, in terms of planning for their child’s future?**

The thing that we always say is to start early. If the goal is for a child with ASD to pursue postsecondary education, for example, then parents will want to start working on making sure that the proper services and supports are in place for children with ASD to reach their maximum potential in the classroom before they begin taking classes that will have implications for acceptance to a postsecondary educational program. As children enter secondary school, parents and educational staff will need to be aware of the courses that students will need to take to help them meet their goals. In terms of preparing for future employment, parents can start thinking about teaching self-help/daily living skills to their children with ASD and giving them household responsibilities. This is something that often gets overlooked. Yet, daily living skills and household responsibilities are an important predictor of whether children with ASD will be employed when they get older. Thus, parents of 10-year olds can start thinking about assigning household responsibilities, working on hygiene and self-care, as well as identifying other age-appropriate ways to encourage independence.

#### 4. **At what age should we start preparing young people for life after post primary school?**

I see all early intervention and education as ultimately preparing youth for life after high school, so I guess I would say as early as possible. But as I mentioned above, encouraging daily living skills and independence, engaging in conversations about the youth's hopes and dreams, identifying services that will help them achieve their hopes and dreams, and thinking about academic requirements for post-secondary education (if that is a goal) early are all ways to prepare for life after post primary school. These can start early and evolve as youth age.

#### 5. **What advice would you offer to home and school environments as part of the transition period?**

Begin thinking about transition early and make sure that youth with ASD and families are active participants throughout the transition process. Furthermore, daily living skills are an important area of concern for the majority of youth with ASD – even those who have average or above average intellectual functioning. Focusing on encouraging independence and daily living skills in addition to academic skills will likely go a long way in supporting youth to have a successful transition. Home and school environments should also be on the lookout for the emergence of mental health problems. Rates of anxiety and depression are high for youth with ASD and these symptoms often worsen during the transition period. Pursuing and receiving proper psychiatric treatment for youth with comorbid mood disorders is important to facilitating transition success.

#### 6. **Is it important that school staff, vocational agencies and parents work together to help students make a smoother transition to adult life?**

It is absolutely critical.

#### 7. **Is vocational support as important for young people with ASD who are mainstream educated as it is for those who are educated in special school settings?**

This is a great question and it reveals a pressing need. Yes – vocational support is often important in helping youth with ASD who are mainstreamed obtain and maintain employment. We see very high rates of job loss and vocational instability among these youth, and we think this is because of the difficulty accessing vocational supports. For many of these youth, a very minimal (and inexpensive!) level of support would likely make the difference between job success or job loss. For example, if there is a conflict in the workplace that stems from ASD symptoms or characteristics (e.g. difficulty switching tasks, misinterpreting social cues from bosses or co-workers), having access to a job counsellor or careers teacher who is knowledgeable about ASD and who could discuss accommodations with employers might keep youth with ASD from being fired. Yet these supports are often unavailable to youth who are mainstream educated.

#### 8. **How important is early work experience and life skills training to successful adult outcomes for young people with autism?**

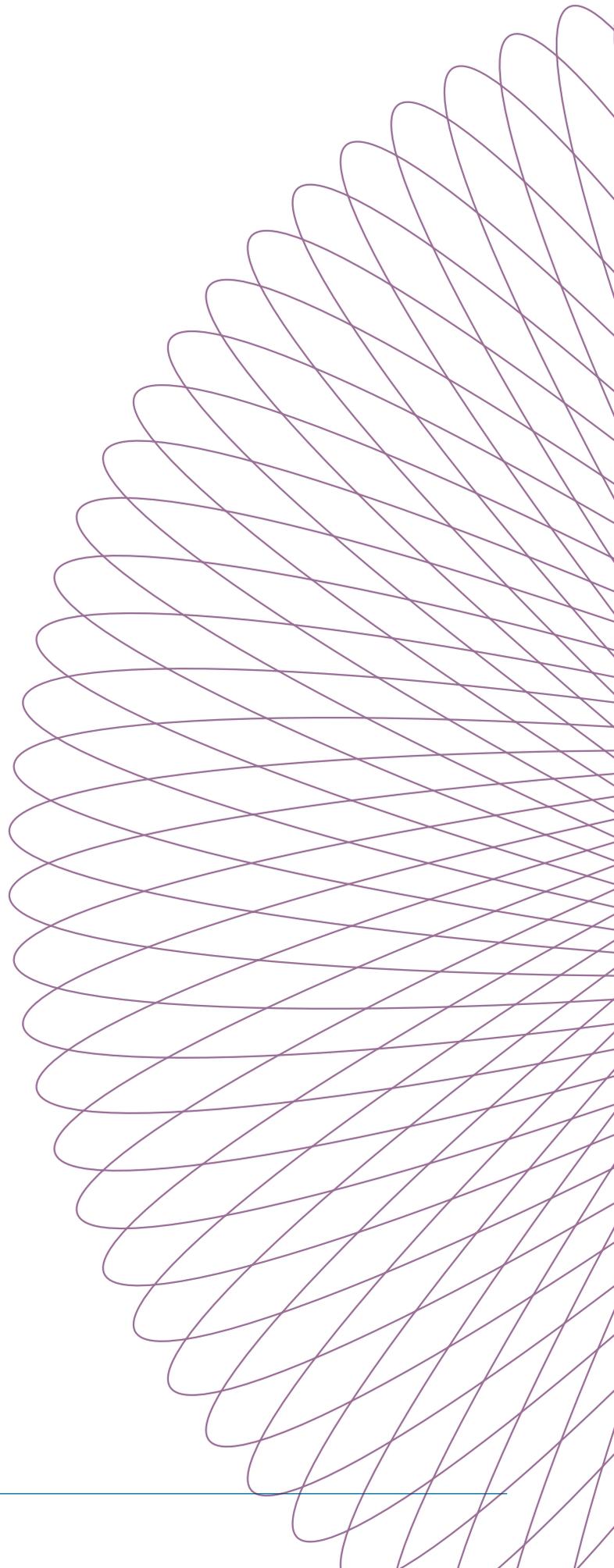
It is critical. As I mentioned previously, even those youth with ASD who have the highest cognitive abilities tend to have deficits in life skills (or daily living skills) that are incredibly impairing when going out into the adult world. Yet, youth who are mainstream educated rarely have access to any sort of life skills training. ALL youth with ASD (and youth without ASD, quite frankly) would benefit from early work experiences and life skills training.

**9. Have you noticed from your research an increased need for mental health services for young people with autism who transition from children's to adult services?**

Absolutely. It can be difficult to access mental health providers who are knowledgeable about ASD and can effectively treat comorbid mental health symptoms. Untreated (or improperly managed) comorbid psychiatric symptoms are some of the biggest roadblocks to successfully transitioning into adulthood, and it is critical that youth with ASD have access to better mental health services.

**10. How do you think current research into Autism and Adults will impact on the lives and experiences of young people with autism in the school environment of today?**

We have done a lot of work defining the problem. That is, even 10 years ago we knew little about the significant and varied needs of youth with ASD as they leave the school environment. Now it seems like every study reveals a new area of need. This body of research, although seemingly discouraging, has mobilised activists, autism organisations, and even the federal government in the US to figure out how to better support youth with ASD during the transition to adulthood and beyond. For example, the National Institute of Mental Health in the US has put out two different calls for grant proposals testing specific interventions to improve the transition years for youth with ASD. We will see the fruition of this work in the next 5-10 years, and I am confident that it will result in new and effective supports that will benefit current and future adults with ASD.



# IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES AMONG ADOLESCENTS AND ADULTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

## BACKGROUND

Those on the autism spectrum are more likely to be unemployed this can be due to the impact of the core features of autism on their ability to perform during job interviews and later in the workplace.

## RESEARCH AIMS

This review aimed to highlight the issue of unemployment for young people with autism and further to draw attention to employment supports that should be utilised in order to create equal opportunities for those with autism.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This paper collated literature regarding unemployment in those with autism. This was followed by a discussion on the strategies that may improve successful competitive employment, where a person with a disability is paid at least a minimum wage, and a rate equivalent to their colleagues without a disability.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The paper noted a renewed strategy for improving competitive employment through collaboration between schools and vocational agencies. Strategies to enhance outcomes through natural employment supports were offered under a variety of headings, while the advantages of assistive technology were considered.

### *Collaborating with Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies*

Schools and vocational rehabilitation agencies should work together to ensure the optimal outcomes for young people with autism. It is important to consider factors that may hinder workplace performance, such as challenging behaviour, so that support can be tailored to ensure young people are in the best position to gain employment. In addition, schools and vocational rehabilitation agencies should pay

particular attention to helping to improve social skills in young people with autism, who may not be aware of appropriate social boundaries in the workplace nor may they understand when they are being manipulated by a colleague.

### *Natural Supports*

Natural supports refer to the individualised support that those with autism receive so that they develop the skills necessary for employment. Support is tailored towards the individual's areas of difficulty meaning that some people will be helped to search for jobs whereas others will be helped to develop an understanding of working relationships.

### *Workplace Supports*

After securing employment, the individual with autism may still need support in the workplace and therefore a workplace assessment should take place and a workplace support plan should be constructed. Some individuals may need minimal job coaching whereas others may require more structured support. Support may be long-term or short-term.

### *Existing Supports*

Individuals are also entitled to utilise supports that are already provided by their employer to other members of staff.

### *Co-worker Supports*

Co-workers may be recruited to help an employee with autism to understand the workplace.

### *Assistive Technology (AT) and Employment Supports*

Technology can be used to support individuals with autism in the work environment. Examples include video based supports, covert audio coaching and alternate AT supports. Video based instruction involves the required behaviour being modelled via video and research has found that such training has been beneficial for both communication and functional skills.

Audio coaching involves the employee wearing an ear piece meaning that he or she can hear a member of support staff giving instructions on what to do in a particular situation. This is particularly beneficial as fellow employees are unaware that the individual is receiving support. Alternate AT supports refer to the use of technology such as phones and tablets to provide the individual with prompts. This is less intrusive than the use of prompt cards.

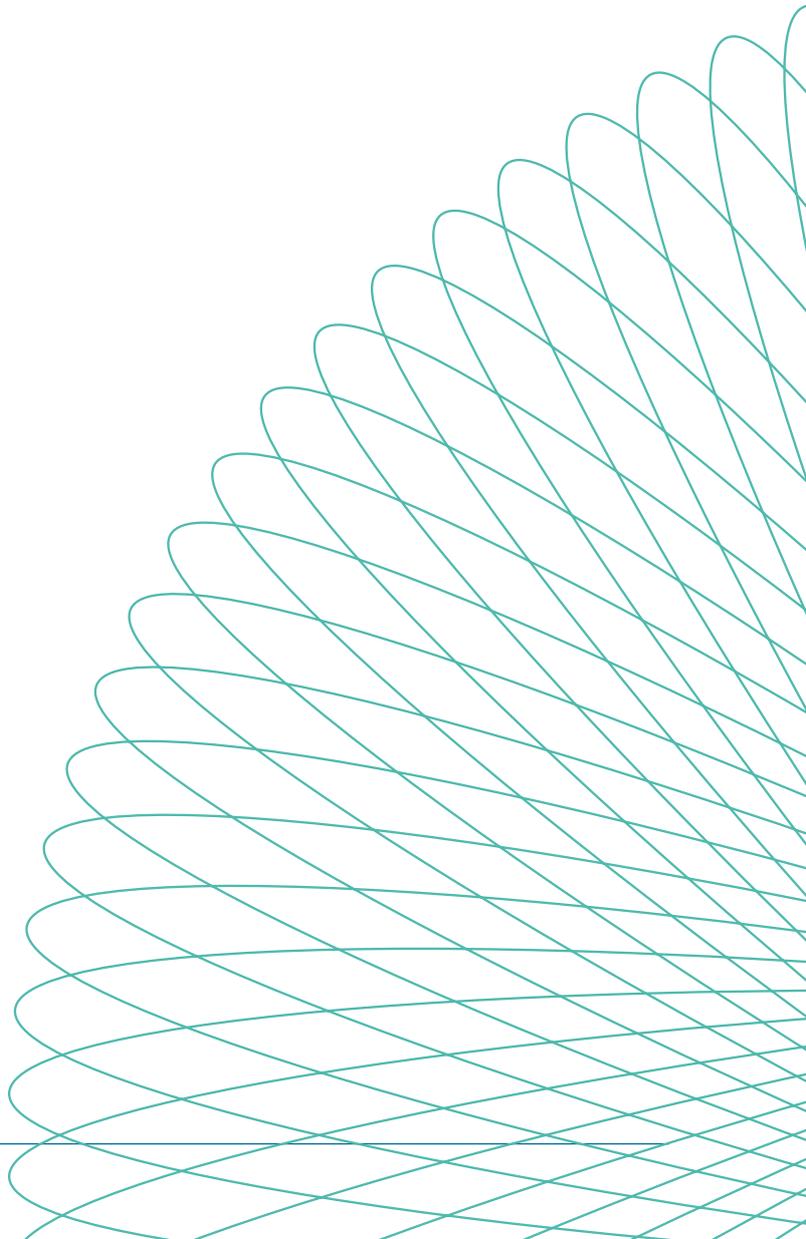
## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the authors)

- Successful employment outcomes for young people with autism can be achieved by collaborative working between education and vocational agencies. In addition, it is essential that support is individualised.
- When preparing the young person for the workplace, one must keep in mind their quality of life. The young person should be encouraged and supported to take part in work that they are interested in and which they possess the required skills to complete.
- It is important that schools make use of the technology available to them to support the needs of young people with autism. They should train the young people to use such devices so that they can take such techniques to the workplace.

## Full Reference

Wilczynski, S. M., Trammell, B. and Clarke, L. S. (2013). Improving Employment Outcomes among Adolescents and Adults on the Autism Spectrum. *Psychology in the Schools*, 50(9), p. 876-887.



# PREPARING TRANSITION-AGE STUDENTS WITH HIGH-FUNCTIONING AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS FOR MEANINGFUL WORK

## BACKGROUND

This research review claims that transition to life after school and into the workforce can be accompanied by both excitement and uncertainty for all students, yet when students also have high-functioning autism spectrum disorders (HFASDs), services must acknowledge what the authors perceive as the critical planning areas, which need to be addressed to provide a framework of intervention, to ensure vocational success and career development for students with HFASDs.

From a series of research articles, it has been found that students with HFASDs appear to have had fewer opportunities than their typically developing peers, to accrue necessary employability skills through relevant work experience, with only 50.2% reportedly having had such an experience and only 14.5% having any part time paid employment experience. Subsequently, the same students were accessed after graduation, and those with HFASDs still seemed to lag behind their peers, in terms of attaining successful full time employment and the relevant health benefits. Howlin (2003) claimed that the opportunities for those within the United Kingdom were equally poor, with upwards of 70% remaining unemployed.

## RESEARCH AIMS

This review examines the key components of relevant transition services to enable students with HFASDs to successfully transition to meaningful functional employment. The research points to four factors, which may have an influence on whether young people have access to the appropriate supports.

1. The divergent diagnostic and eligibility criteria, may be limiting the number who meet the criteria for inclusion to the transition planning process.

2. The presently held and espoused tenet that those with HFASDs, should focus on academic achievement rather than the more practical disciplines of career development and work experiences.
3. The social relatedness of employment, whereby many with HFASDs are excluded from the explicit teaching methods needed to attain such social interaction skills.
4. Re-evaluation of allowing for both post-secondary education pathways and vocational training.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Seven key employability skills have been identified and examined.

### *1. Individualised, strengths-based transition services and supports*

Each student must be seen as an individual with his or her specific strengths, interests and preferences, with emphasis being placed on the particular positive skill set rather than labouring the difficulties experienced by students with HFASDs. The role of the service providers and educators is to identify a suitable career path where strengths are called for by employers.

### *2. Positive career development and early work experiences*

Students with HFASDs need to be offered an array of careers experiences, authentic work experiences, career assessment and planning, job-shadowing, interviewing and résumé writing, to allow the students to see where their talents could be best used, expressed and promoted. Students must be encouraged and facilitated to receive a part time job, whether that be paid or unpaid; it is these amassed skills that may determine future career achievement and development. Cognisance must also be given to the number of potential barriers and such barriers should be identified and addressed as part of a programme development.

### *3. Meaningful collaboration and interagency involvement*

Educators and transition planners must embrace the skills of others, outside the school community, to enhance the opportunities and provide insight that can support the student with HFASDs to realise their potential. They must begin with the identification of formal and informal employment related support services, vocational assessment, career counselling, and transportation, to maximise opportunity and accessibility, once the student has left school.

### *4. Family supports and expectations*

Families must be encouraged to appreciate their role and influence in providing opportunities for their child. Families can support and contribute significantly with their realistic work related expectations and career development. Thus, supporting meaningful collaboration among families, schools, and service agencies should be a central component of effective transition programming.

### *5. Fostering self-determination and independence*

Constructs such as empowerment, self-advocacy and self-efficacy all contribute to greater self-determination and can ultimately enhance students' long-term career success and thus, must be essential components of any successful transition planning programme. Self-determination capacities of each individual student must be assessed on an on-going basis along with identification of skill and support needs and then prioritised as part of the education process within school, as it is perceived as a safe and secure environment for performing and achieving such goals.

### *6. Social and employment-related skill instruction*

Employers have identified the skills they require from prospective employees, including demonstrating personal integrity, honesty in

work, following instructions, showing respect for others, being on time; many such skills young people with HFASDs possess. However, other skills have been recognised such as effective job search and interview skills, transportation-related skills, time management and problem-solving; these skills may need to be explicitly taught. Thus, it is important to connect students to vocational coursework, volunteer activities, internships, and hands-on work experiences within which such skills can be developed over time.

Similarly social skills, expectations and fluctuations can prove difficult and limit career progression to students with HFASDs and although much research has been offered for the efficacy of teaching social skills in a school environment, not much is relevant to the work place. Job coaches may have to take on the role of instructor, skill model and assessor of such social skills, as their relevance is restricted to the particular work environment.

### *7. Establishing job-related supports*

For many young people with HFASDs, difficulties related to keeping and advancing in a job may be more prominent than challenges associated with initially finding that job. Therefore, finding a strong job match and establishing needed on-the-job supports from the very outset take on elevated importance. When the student feels confident in the job, he or she is more likely to increase his or her job satisfaction and performance, thus decreasing reliance on additional supports.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

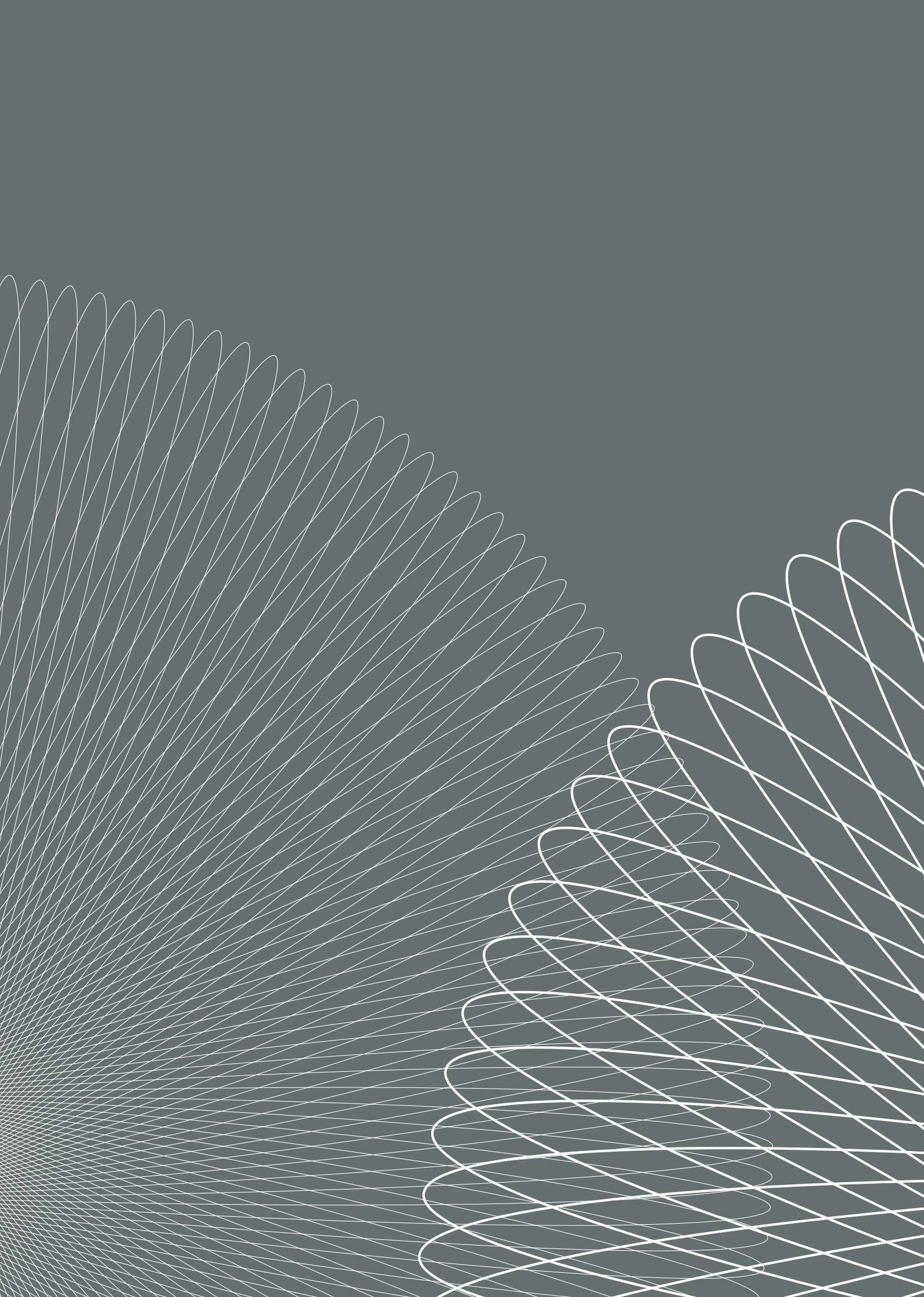
(by the authors)

- A multi-agency approach, school and agency based vocational professionals working together, is imperative if we are to offer an opportunity for success for students with HFASDs. This should include specifically trained teachers, school psychologists, school and vocational counsellors, parents, community agency members, social workers and importantly, the student to whom the transition plan pertains.
- Planning must begin early and be continually evaluated.
- Recognition of the talents and skills of students with HFASDs must be an integral aspect of transition planning, where skills are optimised and difficulties minimised.
- Cognitive ability must not be the only skill assessed during the transition planning; many with obvious cognitive skills may have significant difficulties with the social aspect of employment.
- Real life social skills for the workplace must be taught and learned in a concrete manner.
- Consideration must be given to utilising standardised and non-standardised career assessments.
- Vocational options must also be reviewed periodically.
- Student achievement and development will have an impact on the supports needed, therefore these must be revised and differentiated as needed.
- Vocational practitioners can be providers of consultative and supportive services to employers who recognise the skill set of students with HFASDs and who wish to enhance their workforce with such diverse talents.
- More research into this area and all aspects of transition programmes is required.

### Full Reference

Lee, G. K. and Carter, E. W. (2012). Preparing Transition-Age Students with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders for Meaningful Work. *Psychology in the Schools*, 49(10), p. 988-1000.

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# JOB TIPS: A TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

## RESEARCH AIM

Previous research has indicated that young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are more likely to be unemployed than typically developing youth. The social skills deficit associated with ASD will impact upon interview performance, thereby influencing an individual's ability to secure a job. However, to date there has been little research addressing the success of interventions in improving employment skills for those with ASD. The current study aimed to fill this gap in the literature, by investigating the impact of JobTIPS (an online interview skills programme) on young people with Asperger's Syndrome and High Functioning Autism. JobTIPS allowed the participants to practice answering interview questions through the realm of virtual reality.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Twenty-two participants, all of whom were male, were recruited via response to flyers and mailings. The prerequisites for participation meant that all participants were aged between sixteen and nineteen years, all had a pervasive developmental disorder diagnosis and all were deemed as having "high functioning autism" or "Asperger's Disorder", in accordance with caregiver self-reports. Prior to the commencement of the intervention, all participants were required to complete a consent form and there was an additional parental consent form to be completed for participants who were less than seventeen years old.

Participants were randomly allocated, in equal numbers, to the treatment and control groups, following the first of two simulated "job interviews". One day before the initial interview, all participants received a job description for the "pretend store clerk position".

All interviews were video recorded; they took place in an office and a human resources executive acted as the interviewer. The interviewer was required to

rate participants' responses to all ten questions, which were equally divided between standard questions and interview questions, using the Interview Skills Rating Instrument. This instrument consists of ten items relating to the content of participants' answers and a further twenty items that address issues such as participant body language during responses alongside whether the participant appropriately acknowledges the interviewer. The instrument used a Likert scale ranging from poor to excellent. The Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS) was also administered. This scale quantifies the level of impairment possessed within social and communication realms.

The second interview occurred at least a week after the first interview. In that interlude treatment group participants took part in the JobTIPS intervention. This programme initially comprised of five units entitled "Determining Career Interests", "Finding a Job", "Getting a Job", "Keeping a Job" and "Other Job Topics". Additional subsections added for this intervention were "Interview Overview", "Think Like the Interviewer", "Respond Like a S.T.A.R.", "Rehearsing Response to Questions", "Greetings and Handshakes", "During the Interview" and "The End of the Interview". The units provided treatment group participants with instructions on each topic via several mediums including video recordings, worksheets and social narratives. To ensure participants were utilising the online resources, their usage was tracked. After going through all the website subsections, participants had to fill out and submit a survey with twenty-five multiple choice and true/false questions; this was to ensure that participants had met the required standard to progress to the virtual practice.

During the half an hour virtual practice, the participant was supervised in a research lab that facilitated the recording and streaming of the session. The clinician was in a separate location and acted as the "interviewer" avatar, while the treatment group individual was the "interviewee" avatar.

The avatars communicated with each other through headphones and speakers. Each was able to view the others' movements and body language on their computer screens. This practice involved the clinician advising the participant what was good about their performance and what could be improved upon. The participant was provided with opportunities to practice the advice provided by the clinician. After the practice, the second interview took place.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Analysis of Variance and Chi Square analytic techniques were used to demonstrate that there were no significant differences between the treatment and control groups with regard to demographic characteristics.

There was a significant improvement in the performance of the treatment group with regard to content of interview responses in the second interview in comparison to the first interview. Although not significant, there was a trend suggesting that those in the treatment group delivered their answers more satisfactorily than those in the control group. This implies that the completion of the JobTIPS training improved participants' ability to complete a satisfactory interview.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the authors and reviewer)

- This study shows that online interview training alongside virtual reality practice would be beneficial for young people with ASD, who may otherwise struggle with expressing their true talents at interview stage.
- Interview skills training should focus on questions such as "Tell me a little bit about yourself", as such questions pose a particular difficulty for those with ASD. People with ASD may take such a question literally and give details about their personal life rather than information about themselves that would be interesting to the employer.
- Individuals with ASD should be provided with opportunities to repeatedly practice responses in interview conditions, as this will help improve social cognition and social communication difficulties.
- Finally, as this study focussed on those with high functioning autism and Asperger's Syndrome, such individuals tend to be mainstream educated and therefore may not have the opportunity to work on their social communication skills in school nor may they have the opportunity to take part in "community occupational training". Such elements should be incorporated into the curriculum when preparing any young person with ASD for adulthood.

### Full Reference

Strickland, D. C., Coles, C. D. and Southern, L. B. (2013). JobTIPS: A Transition to Employment Program for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 43, p. 2472-2483.

# DISPARITIES IN TRANSITION PLANNING FOR YOUTH WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

## BACKGROUND

Health Care Transition (HCT) services assist young people with special needs to transition to adult care without gaps in services. HCT services aim to retain health insurance whilst also encouraging independent management of health care needs. The services of HCT are especially critical for the subgroup of service users who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as many young people require medical attention because of comorbid psychiatric and medical conditions such as anxiety, seizures and gastrointestinal problems.

## RESEARCH AIMS

This study aimed to expand knowledge of accessible healthcare transitions for young people with autism and to address the gap in the literature regarding the use of HCT services for young people with ASD. The following issues were also addressed:

1. The prevalence of access to HCT services by young people with autism.
2. Did this prevalence vary between the individual with ASD and those with other disabilities?
3. Was the utilisation of HCT services influenced by individual factors, family factors and/or health system factors?

## RESEARCH METHOD

Cross-sectional data was obtained from the 2005–2006 NS-CSHCN, this is an aspect of the State and Local Area Integrated Telephone Survey. The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's National Centre for Health Statistics carried out this study and they received their funding from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau.

The survey was conducted utilising the sample frame used by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in their National Immunization Survey. The random sample was representative of the characteristics of the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Data was obtained from 192,083 households, who had 364,841 children in total, for the main sample. The prerequisites for the survey meant that only households (44,923) who had children (56,104) with special health care needs were selected. When the sample was further cut down to those aged 12 to 17 this resulted in 18,198 cases and 806 of whom had ASD.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Findings of the study indicated the young people with ASD were likely to have more health problems, greater ability limitations and more developmental issues than young people with other special health care needs. Yet, those with ASD were likely to have received less transition support than those with other needs (21% v 43%). Those with ASD were less likely to have discussed the issue about moving to an adult provider and they were also less likely to take responsibility for their healthcare needs. The only variable where there was no difference between those with ASD and those with other needs was discussing health insurance retention. It was also noted that educational, financial and health factors predicted Health Care Transition.

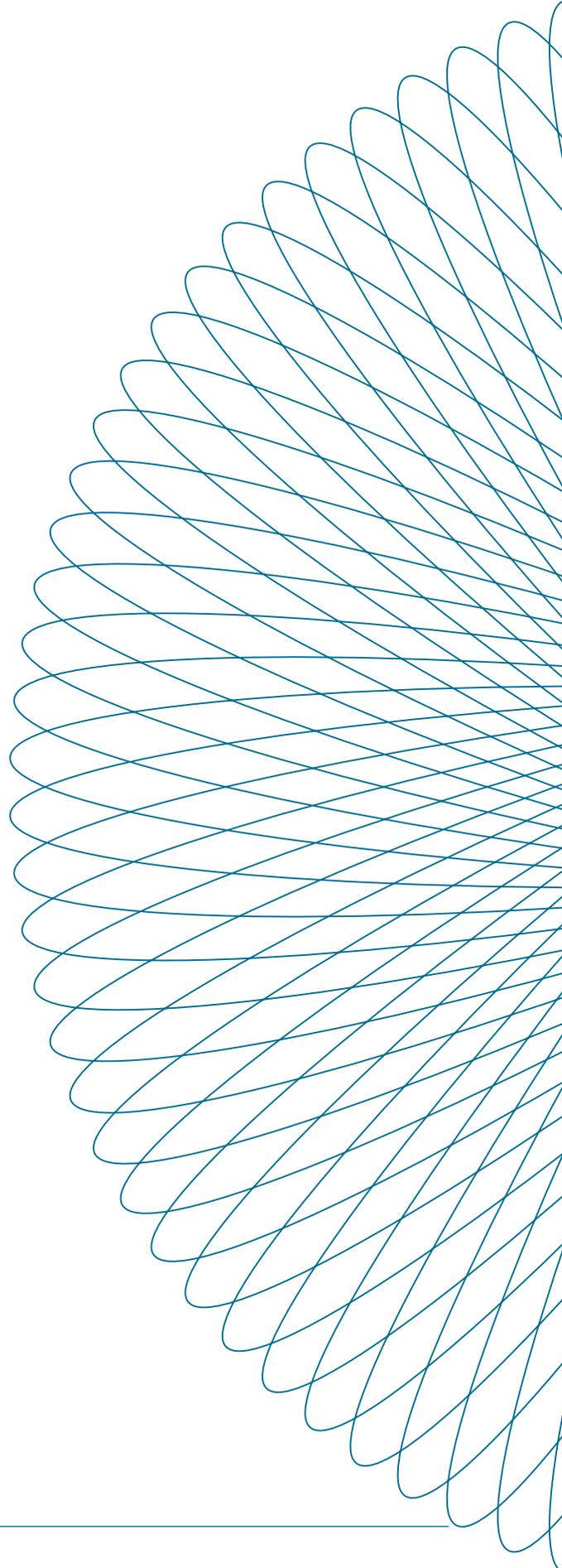
## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the authors)

- It is imperative to consider health care early for a young person with ASD.
- The young person should take an ownership role of their health care needs.
- Transition should be supported through family based supports and also with accessible outside services. Families, service providers and the young people themselves should be fully educated so that transition can be as smooth as possible.
- Young people and their families should have an understanding of what is needed for those with autism to prepare for transition. There should also be a similar understanding gained by those in educational and community settings so that the best quality of life is gained for those with ASD.

### Full Reference

Cheak-Zamora, N. C., Yang, X., Farmer, J. E. and Clark, M. (2013). Disparities in Transition Planning for Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Pediatrics*, 131(3), p. 447-454.



# FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PARTICIPATION IN EMPLOYMENT FOR HIGH SCHOOL LEAVERS WITH AUTISM

## RESEARCH AIM

This study aimed to identify factors associated with participation in employment for high school leavers with autism using a nationally representative data set. In this study the researcher used the data published within the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2).

## RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher carried out a secondary data analysis of the NLTS2. Approximately 830 secondary school students aged 13 through to 16, whose primary disability was autism, were identified in the NLTS2 data set. The outcome variable for this study was participation in employment, data for this variable was collected via parent/youth phone interview and/or mail survey. The variable consisted of responses to questions that asked if a high school leaver had ever had a paid job since leaving high school. The independent variables related to family characteristics, student characteristics and transition planning services contained in the NLTS2 data.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Among the high school leavers with autism in this study 56% had participated in employment since leaving high school, the mean age of high school leavers who participated in employment was 21. This meant 44% had not participated in employment since leaving high school, the mean age of high school leavers who did not participate in employment was also 21. The study showed that of the 56% of individuals who participated in employment, work spanned across 29 different types of jobs. The top five types of jobs were material recording, scheduling, dispatching and distribution (36.3%), information and record clerks (12.9%), building cleaning and pest control workers (8.5%), retail sale workers (5.2%), and workers in other production occupations (5.1%).

A multivariate logistic regression analysis found eight significant variables associated with the participation in employment for high school leavers with autism. These included annual household income, parental education, gender, social skills, whether the child had an intellectual disability, whether the child graduated from high school, whether the child received career counselling during high school, and whether the child's school contacted postsecondary vocational training programmes or potential employers. Results indicated that high school leavers with autism from high income families, female high school leavers with autism, those individuals with good social skills, those with autism but no intellectual disability and finally students who receive career counselling make up the groups most likely to participate in employment. Surprisingly high school leavers whose schools' contacted postsecondary vocational training programmes or potential employers are less likely to participate in employment.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the authors)

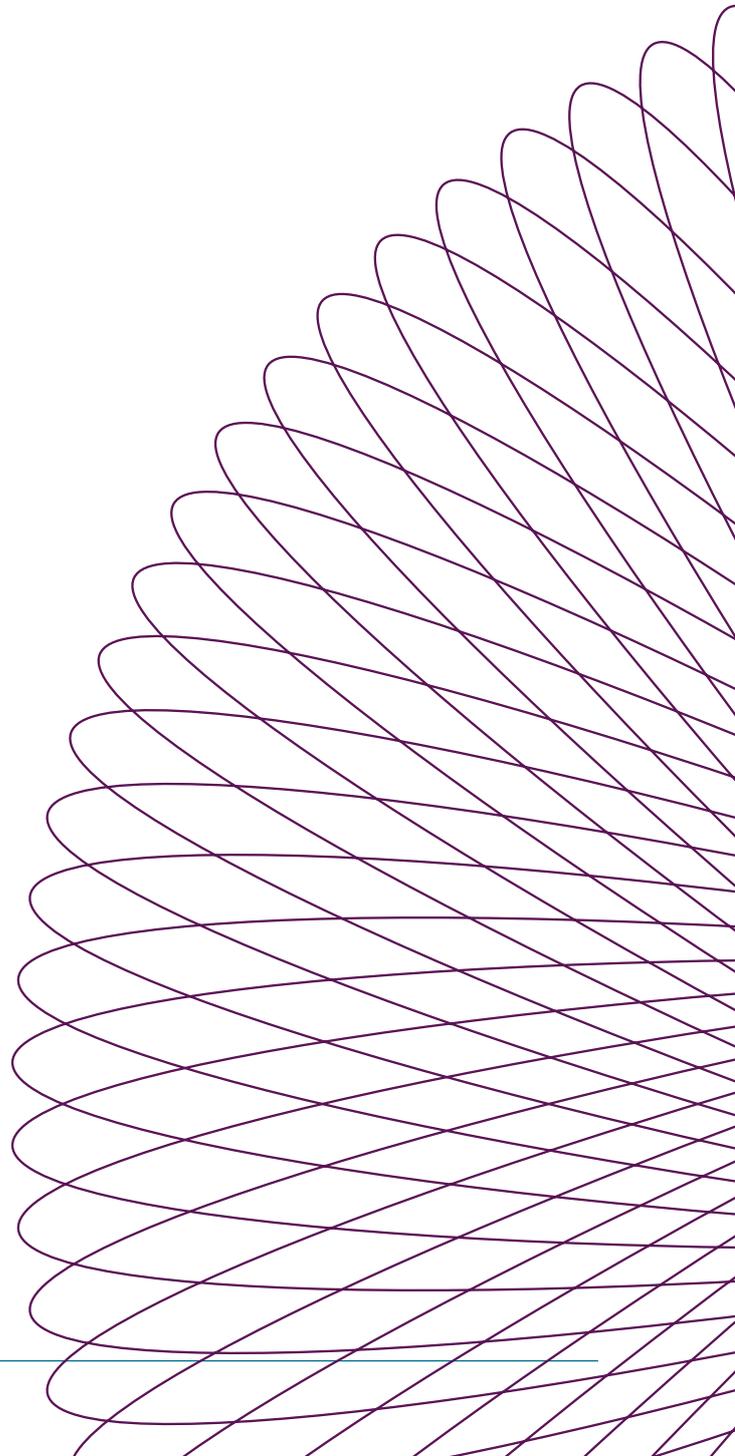
- This study and the study by Eaves and Ho (2008) report a high percentage of participation in employment (56%) compared to previous studies. This may give hope to individuals with autism, their parents and professionals who work with them to seek better employment opportunities for high school leavers with autism.
- The results of this study showed that high school leavers with autism worked in 29 different paid jobs. This indicates that parents and professionals need not be constrained by the stereotyped thinking that suggests individuals with autism can only do certain types of jobs.
- This study highlighted that 44% of high school leavers with autism did not participate in

employment, therefore there is a need to understand the factors significantly associated with participation in employment. This study identified family characteristics, student characteristics and transition planning services as significant factors.

- Educators and other professionals who work with students with autism should provide more resources to students with autism from low income families and whose parents have low educational level.
- Effective social skills interventions, which incorporate skills which students can use at job interviews and within job settings, should be made available to students with autism.
- Students who have autism and an intellectual disability should be included in vocational training programmes and more job placement support should be provided to these students.
- All high school students with autism should be able to avail of career counselling services; other services should also be made available such as career-related work experience and job finding services to support students with autism participating in employment after leaving high school.

#### Full Reference

Chiang, H-M., Cheung, Y. K., Li, H. and Tsai, L. Y. (2013). Factors Associated with Participation in Employment for High School Leavers with Autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 43, p. 1832-1842.



# PREDICTORS OF EMPLOYMENT AND POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION OF YOUTH WITH AUTISM

## BACKGROUND

The Rehabilitation Services Administration database (RSA911) is an administrative data set developed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration to monitor rehabilitation services and outcomes of State sponsored Vocational Rehabilitation Programmes (VR).

## RESEARCH AIMS

Researchers used the 2008 RSA911 to determine the relationships, if any, between the following:

1. What demographic characteristics and VR services predict successful employment?
2. What demographic characteristics and VR services predict higher hourly earnings and weekly work hours?
3. What demographic characteristics and VR services predict improving the postsecondary education of young adults?

## RESEARCH METHOD

Researchers used logistic and multiple regressions to explore the relationships between predictor variables (gender, ethnicity, benefits received) and outcomes for the 2913 service users on the database.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The greatest contributor to predicting employment was the provision of job placement services. Those students who received job placement support were four times more likely to secure employment. Post-secondary education was also a predictor of securing employment. The strongest predictors of higher earnings were: receiving college services and post-secondary education. College services, post-secondary education and the level of benefits received were also predictors of longer hours of work. Those in receipt of fewer or no benefits were more likely to have longer hours of working.

There were no strong findings for post-primary education, the researcher indicates that this may be due to the characteristics of the sample as 87% of the sample did not progress their post-primary career during or after their engagement with the vocational rehabilitation programme.

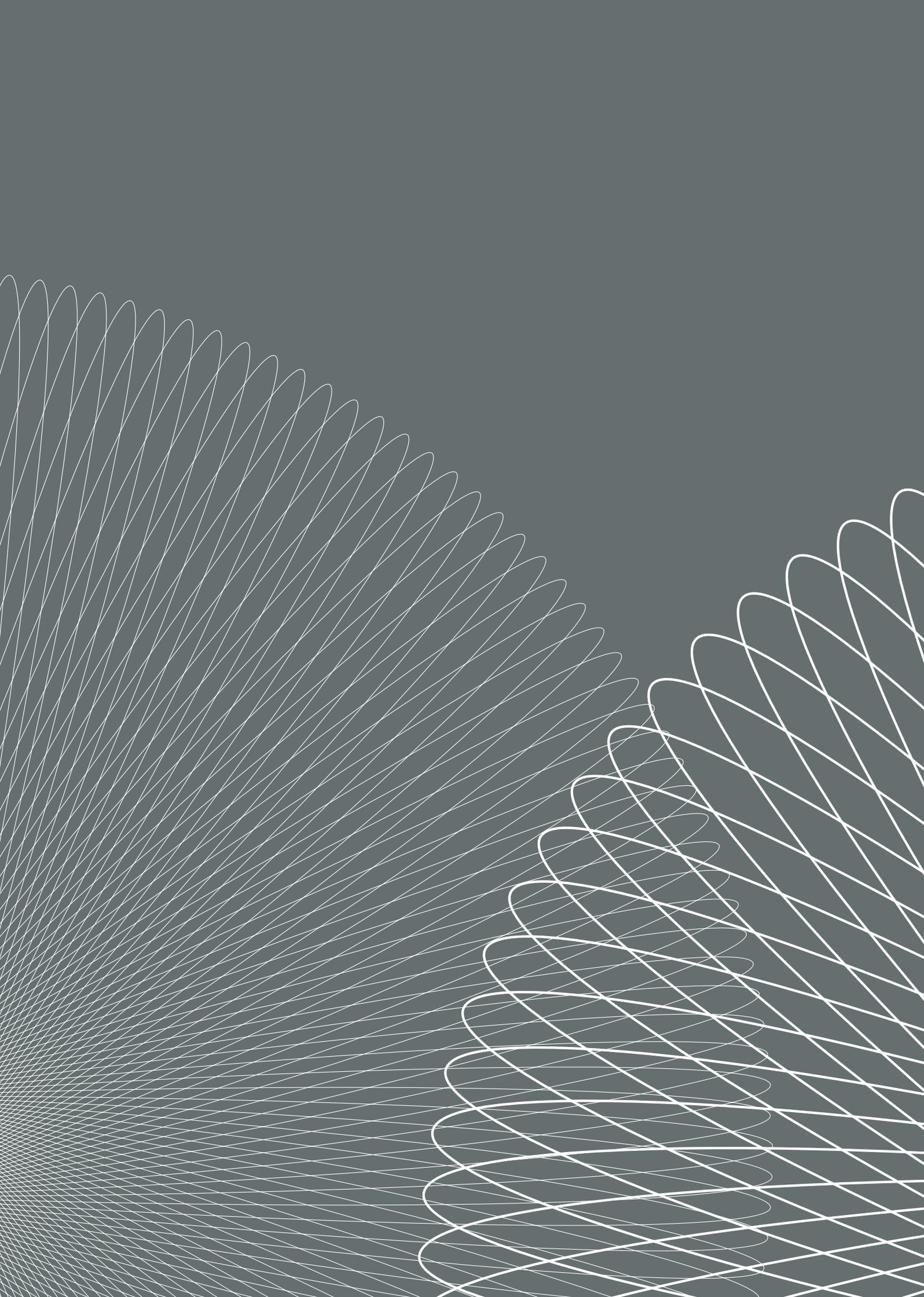
## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the authors and reviewer)

- The research highlights the need for employment focused supports for children and young people with autism. This includes the provision of a series of job placements, support while on the job placement and outreach support from colleges.
- Those who are engaged in post-primary provision for children and young people with autism are advised to consider the nature and variety of job placements as well as providing support and information for students while they are engaged in work experience.
- In addition to this, good communication and relationships with local colleges of further and higher education can be engaged to provide information and discussion options for young people with autism as they consider their post-primary careers.

## Full Reference

Miglore, A., Timmons, J., Butterworth, J. and Lugas, J. (2012). Predictors of Employment and Post-Secondary Education of Youth with Autism. *Rehabilitation Counselling Bulletin*, 55(3), p. 176-184.



# DOES PROVIDING TRANSITION SERVICES EARLY ENABLE STUDENTS WITH ASD TO ACHIEVE BETTER VOCATIONAL OUTCOMES AS ADULTS?

## RESEARCH AIMS

To examine whether better vocational outcomes were attained by young adults with ASD who received early transition services (i.e. by age 14) than by those who received transition services later (i.e. by age 16). Three specific research questions were investigated:

1. Does access to early transition services increase rates of employment for individuals with ASD compared to those in later transition states?
2. Does access to early transition services correlate with a lower cost to assist those individuals in adulthood?
3. Does access to early transition services equate with a higher weekly wage and additional work hours compared to participants from later transition states?

## RESEARCH METHOD

Two matched groups of 453 young adults, from states which mandated transition services be addressed by age 14 and 16 respectively, were examined. The 906 young adults were matched according to seven criteria; gender, age, ethnicity, level of education, severity of disability, primary disability and secondary disabilities. Three variables were considered: early versus later transition stages, employment status, and cost of adult services. Outcomes attained by both groups (e.g., employment rates, income earned, number of hours worked, and cost of services in adulthood) were then compared on an annual basis from 2006 to 2009. Paired-samples t tests were employed to detect significant relationships.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The authors found that the likelihood of employment was substantially increased when access to early transition services was provided. Data from across each of the four years investigated showed that those who participated in early transition services were considerably more likely to be employed than those who participated in transition services at a later age. For example, in 2006, 80.8% of young adults from early transition states were in employment compared to only 58.9% of their peers from the later transition states. A correlation was also found between participation in early transition and higher wages earned. In three of the four years researched the early transition state participants earned at least 12.7% more than the participants in the later transition states. Furthermore, data from this study suggests that not only does early transition considerably reduce the cost of services that young adults with ASD require to acquire and retain employment in their communities, but also increases the chance of gainful employment in adulthood. In three of the four years researched, the cost to taxpayers for services received by employed individuals from the early transition states was at least 30% less than that received by the later transition states. It should be noted that the findings were statistically significant across all three research questions.

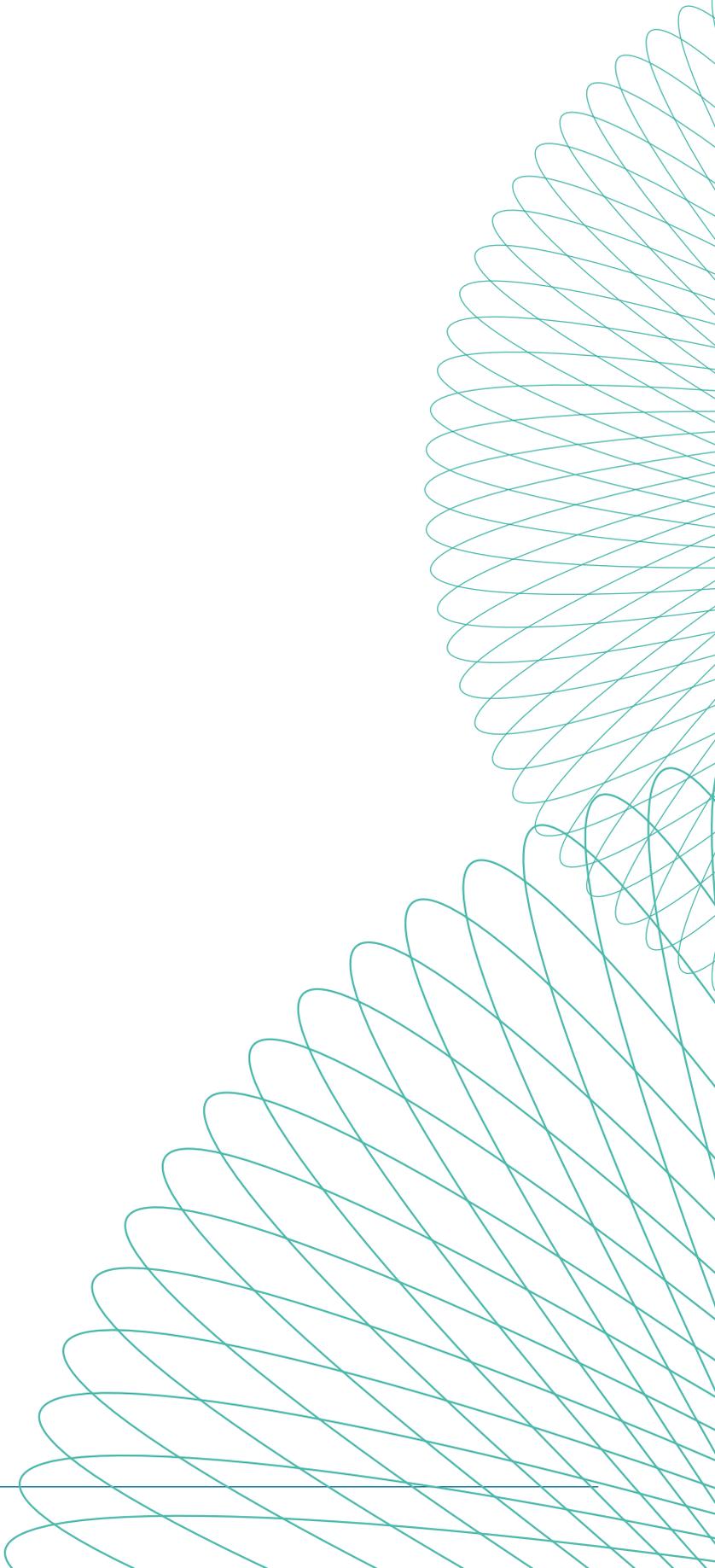
## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the authors)

- Early transition services are essential to actively prepare students with ASD for their adult life, of which employment plays an important part.
- The age at which transition services are required to be included in IEPs should be returned to fourteen years old.
- An earlier transition service for students with ASD will benefit both the individuals themselves and the taxpayer.

### Full Reference

Cimera, R. E., Burgess, S. and Wiley, A. (2013). Does Providing Transition Services Early Enable Students with ASD to Achieve Better Vocational Outcomes as Adults? *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 38(2), p. 88-93.



# COMPARING THE EFFECTS OF COMMERCIALY AVAILABLE AND CUSTOM-MADE VIDEO PROMPTING FOR TEACHING COOKING SKILLS TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

## BACKGROUND

The authors wanted to ascertain if video prompting (VP) using commercially available programmes would be as effective as custom-made programmes when teaching cooking skills to students with autism. In VP a user watches a video step, performs the step, returns to the video, views and performs the next step, and so on until the task is completed.

## RESEARCH AIMS

The aims of the study were:

1. To compare the efficacy of commercially available video prompting programmes with custom-made video prompting programmes to teach four young people with autism three cooking tasks.
2. To ascertain if overall performance differs among young people with autism when using a commercially available video prompting programme compared to a custom-made video prompting programme.
3. To identify specific variables that may contribute to superior video-prompting instructions.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Three researchers were directly involved in the study; one acted as instructor and two collected data at each of the sessions. Four high school students with autism participated in the study. They were male, were educated in separate classes designed to meet the needs of students with moderate intellect, and were aged between 15.5 years and 19 years at the end of the study. The students were interviewed to determine their interest in participating in the study and were selected based on their ability to imitate gross and fine motor skills shown through a video model, could attend to a task for 10 minutes, and needed to develop independent living skills such

as cooking. The study was taken place in the home living room of the students' high school.

Due to the limited number of commercially available programmes for teaching daily living skills, the authors selected to evaluate the "Look and Cook" programme (Attainment, Inc.) due to its longevity on the market and its prominent use in Special Education. From this programme, the authors selected three tasks for the study, one of which was used as the control task. The tasks involved the students collecting utensils, pots, bowls, and ingredients from the refrigerator, cabinets and drawers in the kitchen and cooking three snack meals; making pancakes, making instant mashed potatoes, and the control task making instant oatmeal. Visual support strategies such as colour coded measuring cups and spoons were used as determined by the commercially available video prompt.

A laptop computer was placed on the kitchen counter and the students watched the programmes as they engaged in the tasks. They followed VP format whereby one video step was played followed by the student completing the step before the instructor advanced the programme to the next step. The authors created the custom-made video prompts in the students' school home living room using materials and appliances within that setting.

The study used an adapted alternating treatments design to compare the effects of the custom-made and commercially available VP. Counterbalancing the VP interventions between sessions was used to minimise the possibility of sequencing effects and was achieved by using the commercial VP on one day and the custom-made VP on the subsequent day. All students began the study at the same time, but each received instruction and progressed between conditions independently of each other. The dependent variable was the percentage of steps completed correctly during

each task. The study was conducted over four discrete stages: Baseline, Comparison, Final Treatment, and Best Treatment.

Baseline assessments were carried out to ascertain each individual student's ability to complete the cooking tasks. Only the instructor provided task direction during this stage and the sessions continued for a minimum of three sessions per task or until student performance had plateaued.

During Comparison stage sessions the instructor initially provided task direction but then introduced VP. These sessions continued for a minimum of six sessions and until there was no further improvement in student performance. The control task was intermittently presented with only verbal direction during this stage.

During Final Treatment stage sessions, only the custom-made VP was used and only the control task recipe was evaluated. This stage lasted for six sessions. Following these sessions the authors evaluated the data and identified two criteria: the recipe each student did not master during the Comparison stage sessions and what VP resource was most effective for each individual student. These two criteria informed Best Treatment stage sessions.

During the Best Treatment stage sessions of the study, the authors were able to determine the effects of using commercially available VP or custom-made VP for teaching cooking skills to students with autism.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Initially all four students demonstrated low skill performance during sessions but this changed abruptly when both custom-made and commercially available VPs were introduced. Student performance was superior for the custom-made videos; 83.3% of all student errors occurred when using the commercially available videos. The authors found that the four teachers favoured using commercially available VP due to the time it takes to create custom-made VP.

In concluding the research findings the reviewer reverted to the aims of the research paper and feels it is fair to surmise that student performance does differ when students with autism use custom-made VP programmes compared with commercially made VP programmes to complete cooking tasks. This does not mean that practitioners should overlook, dismiss or avoid commercially available VP, indeed the study informs that practitioners favour using commercially available VP for a range of practical reasons and that all students in this study made significant progress using commercially available VP, but that students made fewer mistakes and progressed quicker using custom-made VP. The study identifies the need for wider development of "apps" specifically for persons with autism but that it is imperative that producers and consumers of these products attend to the quality of components and attention to detail within such as presenting abstract concepts concretely for users with autism.

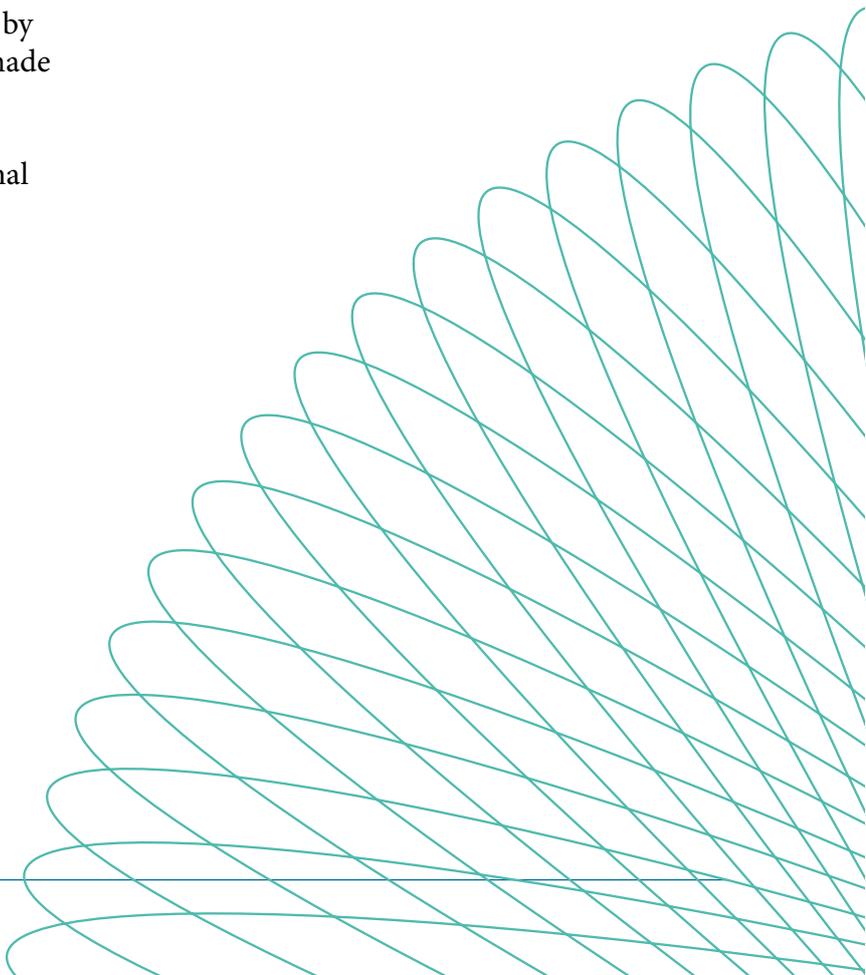
## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

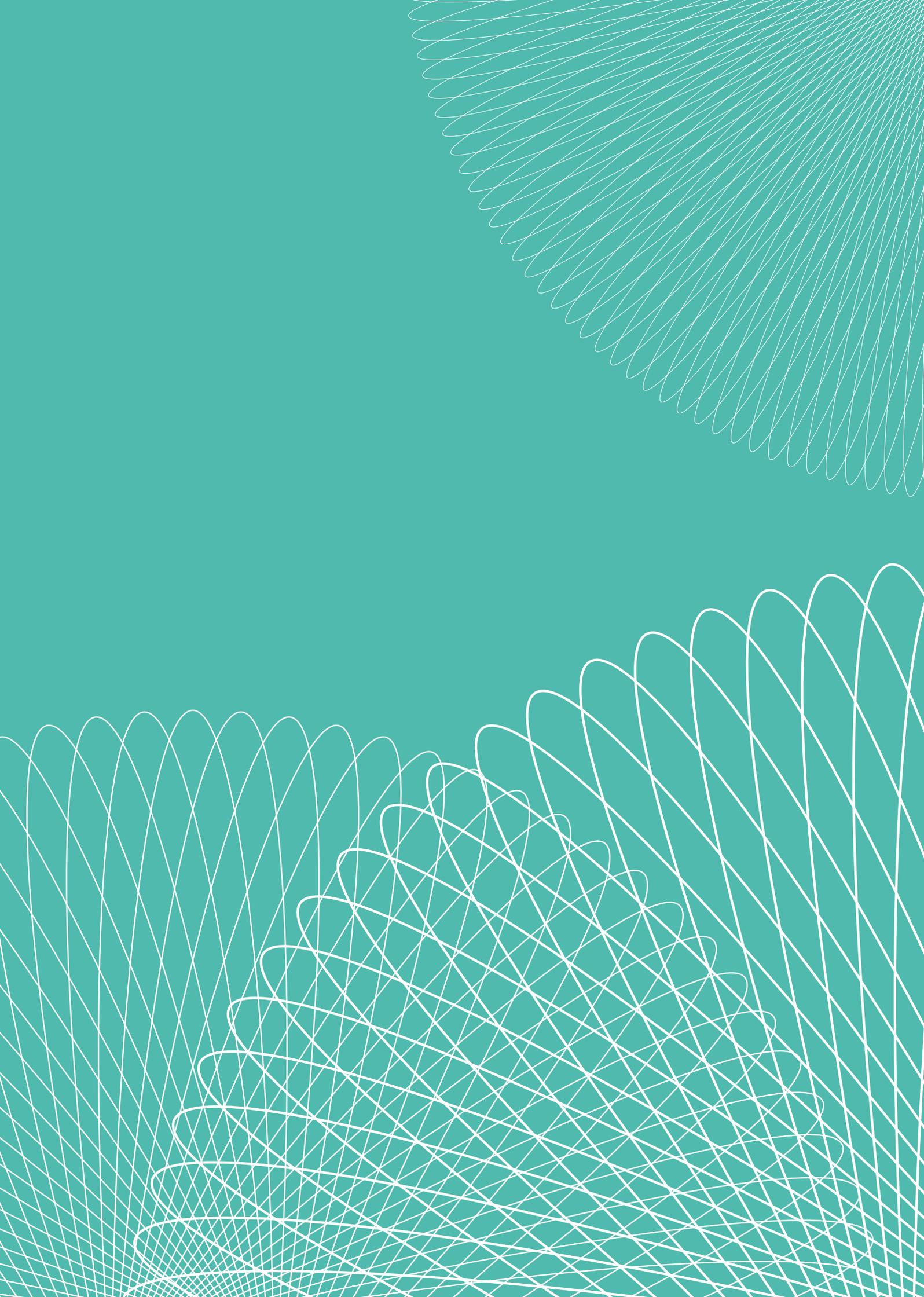
(by the authors and reviewer)

- Students with autism have difficulty generalising skills; the authors of this study found that a change to material or equipment presentation did slow the speed of progress however, once the student was familiar with the new style of presentation, progress resumed.
- Understanding abstract concepts and processes, such as the passing of time, are difficult for students with autism. The custom-made VP was able to incorporate abstract concepts and the authors attributed this to student success.
- One of the four teachers who contributed to the study identified the cost of this niche market resource as a barrier to using it. However, all four practitioners were in favour of using commercially available VP due to the length of time it takes to create custom-made VP. The overall success and progress made by students with autism when using custom-made VP should act as further positive evidence based research and inspire practitioners to make their own VP when teaching functional skills to students with autism.

## Full Reference

Mechling, L. C., Ayres, K. M., Foster, A. L. and Bryant, K. J. (2013). Comparing the Effects of Commercially Available and Custom-Made Video Prompting for Teaching Cooking Skills to High School Students with Autism. *Remedial and Special Education*, 34(6), p. 371-383.





# 'I WANT TO STAY OVER': A PHENOMENOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF A SHORT BREAK/EXTENDED STAY PILOT PROJECT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

## RESEARCH AIMS

The principal aim of this research is to evaluate the opinions of the young people, their parents/carers and the educational and care professionals involved with them, in order to understand the possible effect of short break/extended stay projects for this cohort. It sought to evaluate:

1. How provision was perceived by each stakeholder (pupils, parents, educational and care staff).
2. The possible limitations and benefits of the provision in its current form.
3. The effect of residential provision both for the young people and their families.

## RESEARCH METHOD

A phenomenographic approach was used to analyse the data gathered in this research study. Phenomenography is a methodology which is designed to detect differences in perceptions and to make those variations in concepts visible. Data was gathered from four sets of semi-structured interviews carried out with the sixteen young people themselves (aged 11-18 years), fourteen parents/carers, and the nine education and seven care staff who worked with them. Data collected from the children/young people comprised group discussions, one-to-one conversations, and copies of picture diaries. Picture diaries are an acknowledged tool designed to encourage verbal and emotional expression and social interaction for children and young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Data from the adults was collected through focus groups which took place pre- and post-project.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Prior to the project parents/carers readily accepted a need for the family to have a "break" from the demands of caring whilst, at the same time, acknowledging that their child also needed a "break" from them. They also hoped that the project would facilitate self-care skill development and opportunities for socialisation. Educational staff hoped that the project would influence in-class behaviour and communication skills as the residential staff could provide a consistency of approach that was not always feasible in the home environment. Additionally, they hoped that improved socialisation and independence would result from participation in the project. The care staff mirrored the hope for increased independence and self-care skill development but also highlighted the importance of early preparation for transition to adulthood. All mentioned the importance of social inclusion in the community.

The study found that from the perspectives of the young people involved the project resulted in a number of positive outcomes. The participants' responses described increased friendship opportunities outside of the classroom and improved socialisation. They also noted that the project facilitated a sense of achievement from improved life skills and an increased self-competency which improved self-esteem. Furthermore, despite an initial reluctance to participate in activities in the wider community, this was soon overcome and a definite increase in community inclusion was experienced. Within each adult group the post-project responses related expressly to their own perspective whilst incorporating the objectives espoused by the care staff.

The research study also found that for the children/young people concerned, important progress was made towards personal and educational goals, and in several instances the

improvement made was regarded as significant by the parent/carer and care staff. From the perspective of the educational staff improved behaviour was an unexpected, though appreciated, result of the pilot. Parents also reported being able to attend fully to the needs of their other children, something they had been unable to do previously. In addition the research with care staff illustrated how early planning for a child's transition to independence was paramount to the staff's ethos in conceptualising, planning and evaluating their practice.

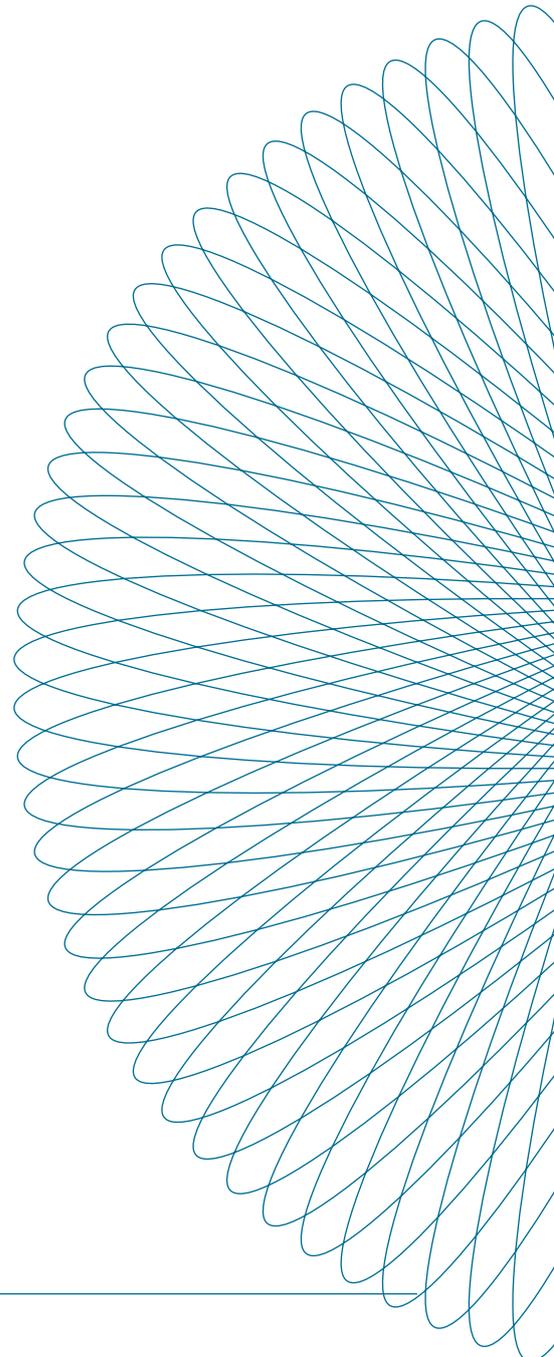
## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the authors)

- To fully support the human rights and needs of many children with ASD we need to support the wider human rights and needs of their families, realistically prepare them for a life beyond home and school, and strive to improve their unique life experiences.
- The demands of caring for a child with ASD often results in siblings receiving less care, attention and support; the needs and well-being of the carer and their family are essential to consider.
- Previous studies submit that children with ASD frequently have considerable unmet needs in mainstream provision; education of, and social inclusion for, children and young adults with ASD can be enhanced by the specialist qualities of the special school setting.
- A greater analysis of the elements that hinder or enhance the "lifeworld" of individuals with ASD is needed.

## Full Reference

Hallett, F. and Armstrong, D. (2012). 'I Want to Stay Over': A Phenomenographic Analysis of a Short Break/Extended Stay Pilot Project for Children and Young People with Autism. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 41, p. 66-72.



# OUTCOMES OF A FAMILY-CENTERED TRANSITION PROCESS FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

## BACKGROUND

Individuals with autism struggle with various transitions throughout their lives. Perhaps the most difficult transition period is when leaving full time education to possibly pursue a route towards further education, employment or independent living. When the process of transition is not fully supported, especially for a person with a disability, this can cause added stress to the process. In addition to this families need support to understand how best to put in place a transition programme which is beneficial to the needs and end goal of the individual. Individuals with autism who were provided with essential transition support were found to have achieved employment tailored to their skills and knowledge.

## RESEARCH AIMS

Staff and parents of students with a disability tend to have lower expectations for the individual. This can then overshadow the skills needed to be taught in order for the individual to contribute to society during adulthood. Individuals with autism may find themselves unemployed or attend sheltered workshops; those who do retain employment may find themselves with a job which is below their level of skills and education. Many families also struggle to identify what organisations and funding programmes they can access in order to fully support their young adult during the transition process.

The research goal was to investigate a programme which supports the needs of the individual whilst educating families on the community resources available and how to design and implement a transition plan.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The authors focused on three main areas of a comprehensive family-centred intervention:

1. The impact this would have on families' expectations for adult life.
2. The effect on the levels of self-determination among transition aged students with autism.
3. How this would affect career decision making ability for transition aged students.

The randomised control trial design meant that a group of students and their families received the intervention in Year 1 and an additional group received the intervention in Year 2, this group thereby acted as a delayed-exposure group. Schools were contacted to request any interest in participation for the project as this would also be incorporated into the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). Families were recruited with at least one parent and young person equating to 49 students and 49 parents over a two month period. The first and second authors served as coordinators in addition to four full time planning facilitators. The authors focused on three main areas:

1. Group training sessions for families were put in place over three Saturdays, four weeks apart with two modules per day. This followed a curriculum method which consisted of six modules to support families with the knowledge of person centred planning. Families then completed a quiz in order to establish what knowledge and skills were retained.
2. Following from this was the person centred planning. During this process the student and family member were assisted in developing a transition plan which was individualised. The family member and student then recruited further family participants and community members who would assist in the transition programme.

The completed plan entailed:

- History,
- Who you are today,
- Strengths and accomplishments,
- Supportive people and resources,
- What works and what doesn't work,
- Vision for the future,
- Fears, concerns and barriers,
- Goals,
- Next steps and follow up.

The planning session was also tailored to the needs of those in the group to ensure an end result. This end goal resulted in appropriate and person centred transition goals.

3. Finally a follow up assistance stage was implemented for a four to six month period after the introduction of the transition programme. During this time assistance was provided to support students with progress in relation to career options.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Data was collected at the beginning of the research and again twelve months later prior to the beginning of the Year 2 group commencement. Three standardised tools were used to measure each of the different components of the study; the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2. The Arc Self-determination Scale and the Vocational Decision-Making Interview-Revised. In order to measure changes between the pre and post survey measurements, paired t tests were run separately for group 1 and group 2.

Results indicated that all three areas showed an increase in student and parent expectations for the future, self-determination and vocational decision making ability for the Year 1 group however this was not apparent in the Year 2 group.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the authors and reviewer)

- From this study it is apparent that family-centred transition planning significantly aids the transition of students from school to adulthood, therefore, it should be widely employed. Additionally, such transition planning is relatively easy to implement.
- If such a programme is to be successful coordinators should be fully equipped to support families who may struggle academically themselves in order to put in place a transition programme which is specific to the student's needs.
- In addition, within this study participants, students and families were given a stipend for their time which may not be available by other organisations.

## Full Reference

Hagner, D., Kurtz, A., Cloutier, H., Arakelian, C., Brucker, D. L. and May, J. (2012). Outcomes of a Family-Centered Transition Process for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 27(1), p. 42–50.

# 'TRANSITIONS ARE SCARY FOR OUR KIDS, AND THEY'RE SCARY FOR US': FAMILY MEMBER AND YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD WITH AUTISM

## BACKGROUND

To date there is a dearth of research concerning the transition to adulthood from the perspectives of young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their caregivers. In addition to the obstacles faced by all transitioning adolescents, those with ASD face added challenges in acquiring the skills necessary for self-advocacy and independent living, in adjusting to new responsibilities and different environments, and in utilising the assistance or services needed to successfully transition.

## RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this research study is to explore the social, educational, and vocational needs and experiences of adolescents with autism spectrum disorders from their own perspectives and that of their caregivers.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Themed analytic strategies, developed from Grounded Theory techniques, were utilised to present the participants' experiences and thoughts. Two semi-structured focus groups were carried out both with the young people with ASD (n=13) and their caregivers (n=19).

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The lack of service availability was an area of concern and anxiety for both the young people and their caregivers. Caregivers in particular were concerned with the absence of educational, social and vocational assistance services and the demand of then fulfilling those roles themselves. Equally they felt that they were ill-equipped to talk to their young person about relationships and sex, or who to ask for help in this area. All caregivers concurred on the importance of socialisation programmes, with many expressing a desire for a buddy/mentor system, but felt there was a lack of programmes available for adolescents.

While high school was recounted as an experience both challenging and positive, the transition to college was deemed to be more difficult and held increased concerns for caregivers. Similarly concerns were expressed regarding employment; all caregivers wished for their young person to work but cited a lack of fulfilling jobs and motivation issues as barriers to successful employment. Of concern to caregivers also was their belief that their son or daughter was neither confident nor ready to become an adult. This concern was echoed by the young people themselves who expressed a lack of confidence around their future and significant concerns regarding becoming an adult. Many felt overwhelmed by the prospect of the future, resulting in them focusing solely on the present. In expressing these concerns most young people felt more comfortable speaking with external support than with their caregivers. Similar to their caregivers the young people also placed importance on social relationships, and expressed a desire for more opportunities in which to build them. Equally the transition to college was a cause of worry for the participating young people, even for those confident in their ability to succeed. Likewise the young people felt transitioning to work presented a challenge for them; satisfying jobs were difficult to come by and many employers had the misconception that people with ASD could not work. In contrast to previous research this study found that young people with ASD may be inhibited from taking a more active role in their futures through fear, the comfort of the familiar and a lack of motivation. Whilst in the main both caregivers and young people expressed similar opinions, the study found that there were misconceptions from both parties around what the other was feeling and thinking and that the young people's motivation and wish to attain independence was underestimated by caregivers.

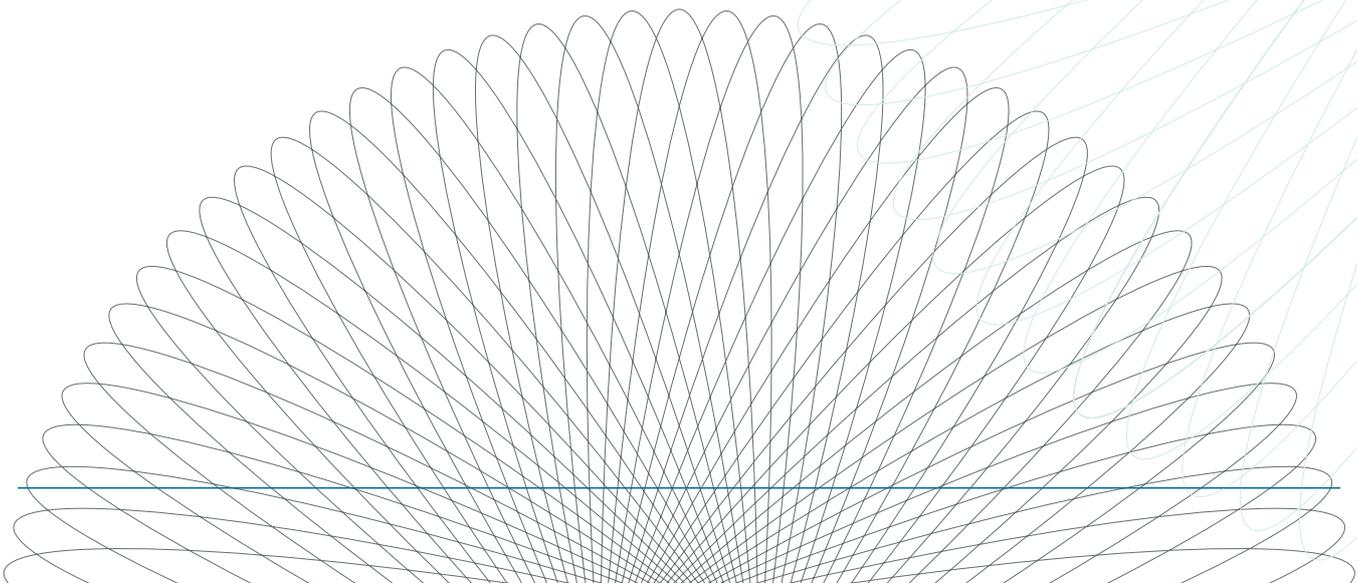
## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the authors)

- Data from the current research indicates that for young people with ASD and their caregivers, there are considerable needs that are not currently being met.
- Consideration of the perspectives of young people and their caregivers must be central when educating providers and developing programmes for transition planning services.
- In order to decrease stigma and increase opportunities for young people and adults with ASD an increased awareness of autism in the general public is needed.
- Specific services such as respite care, college and vocational support, youth peer mentorship, and care and service coordination must be improved and expanded.
- Development of ASD specific post-secondary education and vocation planning, in consultation with both young people and caregivers, is needed.
- More qualitative research with young people with ASD is required. One area that requires further research is the communication patterns between young people with ASD and their caregivers

## Full Reference

Cheak-Zamora, N. C., Teti, M. and First, J. (2015). 'Transitions are Scary for Our Kids, and they're Scary for Us': Family Member and Youth Perspectives on the Challenges of Transitioning to Adulthood with Autism. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 28, p. 548-560.



## CONNECTING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS TO COMMUNITY LIFE

### RESEARCH AIMS

An increasing number of research studies corroborate that the supports and experiences that students with disabilities receive in the course of adolescence can, to a huge extent, shape the outcomes and opportunities for those students in their early years after secondary school. However, students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are much less likely than the majority of their peers in special education to access significant opportunities for peer relationships, post-secondary education, employment, or community engagement in that same time period. The aim of the current research is to review what is currently known regarding effective methods for connecting young adults and young people with ASD to life outside the classroom. Furthermore, it seeks to highlight encouraging and recommended practices for connecting students of transition age to further education and community activities, and to emphasise the importance of developing social connections as a crucial component in helping young people to succeed in their communities.

### RESEARCH METHOD

The authors reviewed literature on research-centred methodologies addressing connecting adolescents with ASD to life outside of the classroom.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The authors assert that the following practices are of benefit to adolescents with ASD to equip them for life after secondary school:

- Address barriers to post-secondary education by connecting students with experiences both in and out of the school arena that will make certain they possess the skills, desires, academic achievements and supports needed to make college a feasible choice.
  - Foster career-related ambitions in young people with ASD and then scaffold the goals required to fulfil those ambitions.
  - Use the individual's own interests and strengths to guide their programme of study.
  - Ensure that adequate transition time is given to prepare students for any post-secondary possibilities.
  - Encourage students to visit colleges, participate in open-days, and explore campus experiences.
  - Connect students to extracurricular activities that will help them gain a more rounded experience and thus prepare them more adequately for college and community life.
  - Research options for dual enrolment or college-based programs.
  - At the school stage, design and teach programs that will equip students with the practical skills necessary to negotiate and succeed in college life.
  - Encourage students with ASD to explore and engage with activities and areas outside of their preferred interests.
  - Help students build and maintain relationships that will connect them to their communities and sustain their community involvement.
  - Engage and support students in participating in pertinent activities (i.e. volunteer experiences, career development activities, civic opportunities) and in the decision-making process around this engagement.
  - Assessment, planning and instruction ought to be centred on ascertaining the individual skills and supports necessary to sustain meaningful participation in these extracurricular activities.
  - Development of supportive relationships and of friendships is extremely important for students with ASD and their families.
  - During the secondary school phase emphasis must be placed on building social and communication skills that can create and improve positive interactions with peers, community members, co-workers and others.
-

- Equally, those who interact with students with ASD must also be equipped with the confidence, opportunities and skills for these interactions to be positive, productive and sustainable.
- Finally, environments conducive to actively encouraging the practice and reinforcement of social skills must be created and facilitated by educators and other professionals.
- The expectations of educators, families and other community stakeholders can have a considerable impact on the life outcomes for young people and young adults with ASD. In order to best ensure that every individual with ASD is aware that they have an important place in society, families, schools and communities must work together to convey this message.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the authors)

- School psychologists can aid young people and their families to access resources and avail of opportunities in the community that may be beneficial in addressing individual strengths, limitations and challenges.
- It is imperative for students to have a say in their individual transition planning yet many students with ASD may lack the skills needed to actively engage in the planning process. Building the student's self-determination abilities will enable them to take a greater role in self-advocating for community opportunities and the supports they need in order to affect such opportunities.
- Understanding and navigating the often complex system surrounding employment, college and community supports and services presents difficulties for many families and indeed, educators of adolescents with disabilities. School psychologists can play an important role in providing families and educators with the necessary information required to access opportunities for adolescents to engage in community life.

## Full Reference

Carter, E. W., Harvey, M. N., Lounds Taylor, J. and Gotham, K. (2013). Connecting Youth and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders to Community Life. *Psychology in the Schools*, 50(9), p. 888-898.

## CONCLUSION

The Bulletin addresses the important issue of transitions from primary to post primary education and onwards into adult life. This is a difficult time for children and their parents. The following issues are identified as important:

- Collaboration between schools and employment / employment support agencies and this should be commenced early in the child's transition.
- Any support provided should be tailored to the child's individual strengths and needs.
- The use of assistive technology can help e.g. video modelling, online and virtual learning. These can be useful in preparing a child for interviews and can be used from early on in the transition to prepare the child.
- Employment and post-16 opportunities add to a child's basic quality of life and should be viewed as an important component of social and emotional supports for a child.
- Use all available resources in local communities e.g. voluntary work.
- Some skills need to be taught explicitly and repeated e.g. certain social skills, or employment specific skills e.g. time keeping, health and safety issues.
- Support should also be provided to keep a job. It is not enough to support into employment - this then needs to be maintained.
- Employment, training and supports should be regularly reviewed.
- Always consider the viewpoint of the child.

Assessment is also critical and a useful addition to the above; targeted assessment will determine the child's strengths and needs. The TEACCH Transition Assessment Profile is a useful assessment to use and will identify current and emerging strengths and needs.

Comprehensive assessment along with meaningful engagement with support services and consistent support while in the workplace should all be considered as necessary for a child in transition.

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## YOUR OPINION

The Centre trusts that you have found this Research Bulletin informative. It would be appreciated if you would take a few minutes to provide the Centre with feedback in relation to this bulletin by clicking on the survey link below.

**Survey for Post Primary Education Preparing for Adulthood**





CENTRE FOR AUTISM  
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The Centre's Research and Information Service welcomes any correspondence including suggestions for future Bulletins to: [research@middletownautism.com](mailto:research@middletownautism.com)

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