

TRANSITION –BEST PRACTICES

Summary of Best Practices in Transition for Youth and Young Adults with Autism

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“Society loses out if individuals with autism spectrum disorders are not involved in the world of work or make other kinds of contributions to society”

T. Grandin and K. Duffy (2004, p.vii)

Overview

This document is a summary of a comprehensive review of best practices in transition for youth on the Autism Spectrum (ASD). This is a working document and subsequent versions will include new programs. The complete document (Harrington_08), with links to many resources and references can be found at (Case sensitive password: Scott)

<http://homepage.mac.com/sharring/ASDTransition/FileSharing3.html>

Information was collected through a scientific literature review (e.g., ERIC, Education Abstracts, and PsychINFO) of peer-reviewed publications and supplemented with a review of websites that claim to provide *best practices* for transitioning youth with ASD. “Best practices” is defined as projects that provided outcome data where individuals with autism were competitively employed and/or attending a post secondary educational institution (PSE), however, the quality of the placement was not evaluated in this review.

The following assumptions were made when compiling the research. These include: 1) An inclusive environment is optimal for youth with disabilities; 2) Individuals with disabilities are “employment ready” requiring a *good fit* between ones skills and job demands; and, 3) Self-determination, reflected in consumer choice, leads to positive adult outcomes. Although indicated as assumptions, these are well supported in the research on transition for youth with disabilities. The unique needs of individuals on the autism spectrum and their growing numbers require an expanded/service support network with more options.

Effective Methods

The literature refers to multiple debates and discussions on the importance of “specialized and efficacious treatments and methods.” Federal requirements in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act resulted in substantial funding for programs that are “evidence-based,” requiring certain data are collected, in certain ways, which show improvements. This is particularly true with ASD because of the enigmatic behavioral patterns and inexplicable increases in the prevalence of the disorder.

The Autism Society of America addresses effective methods with the [Treatment Guided Research Initiative](#) or TGRI (2007). This approach, according to the authors, is about “NOW and HOW.” It is based on the premise that “we need to make low-risk treatments as widely available as possible, and that we need to combine providing

treatment with doing science and research to ask ‘*how*’ so that learning from outcomes and successes can become a major portion of our research efforts.”

From a practical and collaborative approach, Wehman (2002) reported to President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education Transition Task Force meeting, and stated “Competitive employment history is one of the most powerful contra-indicators for youth ultimately depending on SSI long-term benefits” (p.194). Therefore, students need to attain competitive employment *before* leaving school. He indicated that this could be best accomplished via partnerships between school personnel and staff from the state-federal vocational rehabilitation program, as well as other community agencies.

Transition Planning

The movement from a system of *entitlement* in federally mandated programs (i.e., IDEA, IEPs, 504s, etc.) to a system of *eligibility* (i.e., Vocational Rehabilitation, Disability Resource Centers, Social Security, Medicaid, Independent and Supported Living Centers, etc.) has caused turmoil in many individuals and families. This tumultuous period of transition can be improved. While entitlement to public education ends at 18, the IDEA requires that transition planning begin at 16, becoming a formal part of the student's IEP. The [Autism Society of America: Life After High School](#) provides those with Internet access an invaluable resource, which discusses Transition Planning, Individualized Transition Plans, and Thinking about Transition. This resource is designed specifically for students with autism, and begins planning in Middle School, an early-intervention philosophy that has become more popular recently.

Alwell and Cobb (2006) published a meta-analysis of 164 studies on transition, evaluating the efficacy of the use of specific transition interventions across educational environments, disability types, ages, and genders. The first intervention that had a significant impact was directly tied to transition planning, that is, identifying several strategies to promote student and parent involvement in the transition process. The more the student and parents are involved, the better the outcome, reflected in increased employment earnings. Person-centered planning, self-determination training, knowledge of available services, student independence and interdependence, job application completion, career choice knowledge, and acquisition of request for breaks were all influential variables that resulted in positive outcomes. Several of the studies evaluated self-determination, in its own right. The authors report that asking for help, respecting the preferences of others, self-advocacy, acquisition of problem solving skills, and maintaining a positive attitude were all related to positive outcomes.

With focusing on quality of life, Gerhardt (2007) wrote a brief article on effective transition planning, and made several recommendations. These include: a) considering all learners to be “employment ready”; b) viewing first jobs a learning experiences; c) promoting creativity in job development; d) providing co-worker training; e) developing active ties with the business community (p. 26).

Transition to Employment

Temple Grandin (2008) reported that during her travels to many autism conferences, she observed many sad faces of people with autism who have successfully completed high school or college, but have been unable to make the transition into the world of work. In her article ([here](#)), she emphasized the importance of a “gradual

transition” from an educational setting into a career. The article describes the slow steps that she took, and how influential people “recognized my talents and tolerated my eccentricities.” Also, she stated a common theme found in good placements, which is “many successful people with autism have turned an old fixation into the basis of a career.” She also mentions that the “freelance route” has enabled people with autism to be successful and exploit their talent area (e.g., perfect pitch, mechanical ability, artistic talent, etc.).

Delaware has long been in the forefront of meeting the needs of children and adults in the autism spectrum, with a statewide program for 25 years, and the Special Populations program for adults in operation since 1989 (Autism Society of Delaware). The [Autism Society of Delaware](#) (ASDL) conducted a comprehensive study that evaluated the best practices for serving adults with autism in the United States. The authors operationalize “best practices” as “those services that are appropriate, flexible, highly individualized, and have a good cost-benefit ratio” (p.3).

A common theme in successful transition projects is the ability of the job developer, potential employer, the individual with the disability, and his/her support team to identify the skills, interests, abilities, passions, and supports needed to be successful. The more the alignment between these items and the job responsibilities, the better the fit, and the more likely the placement will be successful. Winter-Messiers et al. (2007) defines Special Interest Areas (SIAs) “those passions that capture the mind, heart, time, and attention of individuals with AS, providing the lens through which they view the world” (p.70). These SIAs occur in over 90% of the children and adults with AS, and may be trains, dinosaurs, videogames, Disney movies, or the more eccentric, vampires, saxophones, goats, spiders, or toilets. Despite the object, a special interest enables them to achieve quite extraordinary levels of performance in a certain area (Asperger, 1944/1991, p. 45). The SIAs can be integrated in school with academics, motivating behaviors, learning about non-preferred classroom topics, and most importantly to this review, create a school-based related to the SIA (Winter-Messiers et al., 2007).

Customized Employment and other Innovative Models

In 2001, the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) funded the [Customized Employment](#) (CE) Initiative. Six different initiatives were funded to document effective CE strategies for individuals with disabilities. Customized Employment, an evolved *Supported Employment*, is “a flexible process designed to personalize the employment relationship between a job candidate and an employer in the way that meets the needs of both” (ODEP, 2008). One of the CE recipients was the Rural Institute at the University of Montana, which has been a leader in the area of transition planning since 1995 ([University of Montana Rural Institute](#)). The applicability of CE to individuals with autism is startling, simply because the eccentricities observed, often viewed as *inappropriate*, can be viewed as strengths. For example, the obsessive classification and ordering via numerals or alphabetically, and need of a quiet environment would be ideal for shelving books in a library. Myles and Smith (2007) wrote an introduction to a special issue of *Focus on Autism and other Developmental Disabilities*, where special interest and individual strengths are presented.

In an innovative approach to evaluating job preference, Ellerd, Morgan, and Salzberg (2006) examined correspondence between video CD-ROM assessment program,

community jobs observed during employment site visits, and photographs of employment sites. The researchers reported data that showed a strong correspondence between the CD-ROM program and preference with community visits (85%), as well as with the photographs (82.5%)

Another innovative project, researchers interviewed the supervisors of 14 “successfully employed” individuals with autism (i.e., employed at least six months), and supplemented the data with worksite observations to examine their supervisory practices and perceptions of employees with autism (Hager & Cooney, 2005). The supervisors evaluated their employees highly, and qualitative analysis found that a set of specific supervisory accommodation strategies were commonly associated with successful supervision. These strategies include maintaining a consistent schedule and job responsibilities, using organizers to structure the job, reducing idle or unstructured time, being direct when communicating with the employee, and providing reminders and assurances (Hager & Cooney, 2005).

Transition to Post-Secondary Education

The recent changes in philosophy about young adults with autism attending colleges and universities are significant. More and more universities are opening their doors to individuals with significant disabilities, but more importantly, these options are being discussed in an open forum. University and community college campuses offer much more than an academic degree; they offer opportunities for individuals to interact and socialize with same age peers, participate in engaging social events, live in residence halls, learn about careers, healthy lifestyles, independent living, and academic life. A well-publicized program, although expensive, is located at the College of Education in the University of Iowa is the [Realizing Educational and Career Hopes](#) (REACH). Other programs across the United States are increasing in popularity, such as the [PACE](#) program at National Louis University (Chicago), the [Venture program](#) at Bellvue Community College (Washington), [Pathways at UCLA](#) (California), the [Threshold program](#) (Massachusetts), the [College of New Jersey](#), Mason [LIFE at George Mason University](#), [Minnesota LIFE](#) College, and several others.

It has been empirically established that there are positive relationships among disability, level of education, and adult employment (Reis, Neu, & McGuire, 1997). The representation of students with disabilities in higher education has risen to about 20% (Wehman, 2002), and the fastest growing population in university settings are individuals with disabilities. Areas that can be improved include supporting students with disabilities to complete their degree, transitioning from PSE to employment, and most importantly, professional development and training for faculty and administrators to ensure a quality PSE experience for students with disabilities.

International Efforts

The Autism Source in the UK produced a document that listed the colleges for students with autism and Asperger syndrome. They indicated that some of the colleges “take students as young as 15 years but all take students over 19 years.” This seven-page list should be used not as a resource, but rather of an example of an agency that actively encourages young adults with ASD to attend PSE.

The [National Autistic Society](#) produced a helpful resource that helps youth with autism and their families with transition. Note that the transition services begin for youth at the age of 14 in England and Wales. This document outlines roles and responsibilities for professionals, the child, parents/careers, LEA, Head Teacher (principal), career centers, school staff, social service departments, and other agencies. Another unique service in the UK is the “[Prospects](#)” program, the NAS’s employment service, designed specifically for youth with autism and Asperger syndrome. They assist individuals transitioning to work and continuing PSE. This program provides support in the workplace to people with ASD through the government’s Access to Work structure, and there is no cost to the employer for the following services: orientation to the employee, identification of training needed, job analysis, including guidelines or breakdown of each task within the job; structure, including breakdown of the day and creating time plans; disability awareness training for colleagues; social training awareness and instruction on the unwritten rules of the workplace; development of an effective working relationship between the employee and the line manager (Barnhill, 2007; National Autistic Society).

Transition Resources

The most comprehensive resource for transition issues for youth with disabilities is the [Division for Career Development and Transition](#) (DCDT). Although the resource is not designed specifically for transitioning youth with autism, there is a myriad of resources, publications, and updates that are available for the advocate.

The Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-handicapped Children ([TEACCH](#)) at the University of North Carolina, Department of Psychiatry has been identified as a best practice site (Keel, Mesibov, & Woods, 1997). The program was established in the early 1970’s and has received substantial funding for all ages of youth on the ASD. This program offers an insightful [Strategies for Surviving Middle School with an Included Child with Autism](#), with several specific recommendations. The most valuable resource, which can be used by all parents, is the [Family Reference Guide to Services for Youth and Young Adults with Autism](#). Although it is designed for individuals in North Carolina, the Flow Chart, Step-by-Step Process, Checklists, Helpful Hints, and many other parts are invaluable.

The nation’s visionary in transition for young adults with autism is Delaware. In 2006 the Autism Society for America (ASA) held its conference, where multiple sessions were presented ([click here](#)), one of which was the “[Delaware Model](#).” Follow this link for access to an audio file of the presentation. The ASA has a creative “[Career Center](#)” website that is designed to members of the autism community in seeking employment opportunities, as well as prospective employers/recruiters seeking qualified candidates to fill vacant positions. There are many options at this center, however there are no data to evaluate its effectiveness and frequency of use.

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) at the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) held the 32nd Institute on Rehabilitation Issues (IRI), and published a resource titled, *Rehabilitation of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders* (Dew & Alan, 2007). This comprehensive, 149-page document discusses Transition Planning, Accessing the vocational rehabilitation (VR) system, Supporting Successful Employment, and Challenges/Recommendations. The authors report concern about the ratio of unsuccessful to successful closures for people with autism: In 2005, unsuccessful

closures were about 1 1/2 times greater than successful closures, suggesting systemic and/or programmatic barriers in the VR stem specific to individuals with ASD (p.vii).

Summary and Recommendations

Over a decade ago, Wehman (1995, p. x) reported, “the time has passed for individuals with autism to be sitting in segregated schools, residential facilities, or adult activity centers all day long, performing meaningless tasks... to be relegated to earning a dollar a day in a sheltered workshop or to be confined to a ‘day treatment’ center.” Some states, like Delaware, have prioritized transition services for youth with autism, and the young adults have integrated into the community while offering businesses their skills and talents. Other states, like Nevada, have waited and watched.

This literature review contains peer-reviewed articles and web-based resources that delineate best practices for youth and young adults on the ASD that are transitioning to work or PSE environments. An invaluable resource, the *Best Practices for Serving Adults with Autism* identified best practices across the United States, and made only one working assumption (Autism Society of Delaware). The report stated, “We assume that each individual will spend approximately 40 hours per week engaged in meaningful activity outside the home, with at least 20 hours of this being gainful employment. This is regardless of where an individual may live or what she or she may do across the day” (p. 6).

The Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) published a position statement on preparing personnel in transition (Blalock, Kochhar-Bryant, Test, Kohler, White, Lehmann, Bassett, & Patton, 2003). Despite transition personnel preparation being recognized as a top research priority for the nation, a majority of states were deemed to be out of compliance in meeting the IDEA’s transition requirements (Williams & O’Leary, 2001). The esteemed authors provide a) the broader context for transition personnel preparation; b) what should be taught: core content; c) recommendations for personnel preparation programs; d) implications for educational policy, practice, and future research (Blalock et al., 2003).

A common thread across resources is an emphasis on individual choices and preferences. From the color of paint on one’s walls, to the job choice, to who is a housemate, individual preferences must be honored. Transitions for youth with autism need to be planned and carried out gradually, and it does not work for too many factors to change at once. The [Judevine Center](#) in St. Louis, MO reported that students leaving the school program might have had job placements in the last year of school were required to give them up, as they were not allowed to transition with the job. This is common with school districts around America. Successful transitions to employment or PSE are done gradually, where the individual makes brief, non-stressful visits and has a positive experience. Information should be provided in a schedule format, allowing for repeated access by the individual, such as in written or picture form. Staff should be prepared and educated prior to the visits, and every effort should be made for a good fit between the staff and individual.

An adapted version (for Nevada) of the Delaware Best Practices review of exemplary programs indicates that “Best Practice” requires:

- 1. Integrating activities seamlessly throughout the day and week, across the areas of domestic life, employment, recreation, and social relationships. That is, the person’s life should not be divided into compartments such as “residential services” and “employment services” for which different groups of staff have different responsibilities.**
- 2. Adopting a common philosophy. There must be a clear, shared philosophy that is embraced by all of the stakeholders of the support program. Staff at all levels must not only articulate the philosophy, but “live” it. This enhances consistency in the quality of services delivered.**
- 3. Establishing funding that is diversified and sustainable, using ALL resources within the community (e.g., small business loans, food stamps) thus promoting flexibility and program survival. It is integrated and coordinated without the constraints of an elaborate administrative “system.”**
- 4. Building a local Nevada focus. Our program and providers should be “homegrown,” focused on our local priorities, specific individual’s needs, and directed by a simple organizational structure with minimal administrative hierarchy. Programs must be responsive to local needs and not to distant administrations.**
- 5. Adopting a family-driven, family-directed approach. The individual, with his or her own perspective and preferences is part of a family and must be recognized as such.**
- 6. Adopting procedures for effective and efficient use of all resources including fiscal and human resources across persons served.**
- 7. Incorporating systematic evaluation and accountability. This takes place from the individual all the way to the systems level. It should reflect the local ecology.**

Appendix A: Programs Serving Individuals with ASD

Exceptional Programs Serving Individuals with ASD.

1. [Autism Services Center](#), Huntington, WV
2. [Bittersweet Farms](#), Whitehouse OH
3. [Chimes Delaware](#), Newark, DE
4. [Community Services for Autistic Adults and Children](#) (CSAAC), Montgomery Village, MD
5. [Institute for Applied Behavior Analysis](#) (IABA), Los Angeles, CA
6. [Jay Nolan Center](#), Mission Hills, CA
7. [Judevine Center for Autism](#), St. Louis, MO
8. [Division TEACCH](#) (Supported Employment Program), Chapel Hill, NC

Additional Programs

1. [ARC of Arapahoe & Douglas County](#), Centennial, CO.
2. [Ask Me! Survey Project](#), Annapolis, MD
3. [Bancroft NeuroHealth](#), Haddonfield, NJ
4. [University of South Dakota, Center for Disabilities](#), Sioux Falls, SD
5. [Dept. of Disability & Special Needs, Autism Division](#), Columbia, SC
6. [Devereux](#), Santa Barbara, CA
7. [Eden Family Services](#), Bonita Springs, FL
8. [Grafton](#), Winchester, Berryville, and Richmond, VA
9. [The Homestead](#), Pleasant Hill, IA
10. [JFK Partners](#), Denver, CO
11. [Linwood Center](#), Ellicott City, MD
12. [NJ Center for Outreach and Services to the Autism Community \(COSAC\)](#), Ewing, NJ
13. [Rusty's Morning Ranch](#), Cornville, AZ
14. [The Sean Ashley House](#), Houston, TX
15. [Center on Disability and Community Inclusion](#), University of Vermont, Burlington, VT

The author can be reached at sharring@unr.edu for suggestions and comments.

NEVADA STUDENTS IN TRANSITION

Data on Transition

Clark County School District

There are 308 students aged 14-21 with a primary diagnosis of Autism within the Clark County School District. Fifty (50) of those students are 18 – 21 years old.

Elko County School District

Per the Dec.1 count there are 30 students in the Elko County School District identified with Autism. Nine (9) of the students were between the ages of 14 - 21.

Programs for Teacher Preparation and Licensure

Nevada Code requires special education teacher candidates complete a transition class for eligibility for state licensure (undergraduate and graduate). However, the state does not recommend or provide guidance as to what content is required for the course. In fact, institutions may choose to combine the transition requirement with another requirement in one class. The following illustrates transition course descriptions at UNLV and UNR, the primary teacher preparation programs in Nevada.

UNLV Courses

UNDERGRADUATE - **EDSP 414 Career Education for Students with Disabilities** (Same as EDWF 492A.) Consideration and design of career education programs for students with disabilities. Transition and adult programs discussed. Prerequisite: EDU 203. 3 credits.

GRADUATE - **EDSP 734 Vocational and Career Education for Persons with Disabilities in Transition.** Consideration and design of vocational and career education programs for students with disabilities including those with mental retardation, learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, and others. 3 credits

UNR Courses (information based on UNR website)

UNDERGRADUATE – **EDSP Case Management/Transition in Special Education.** Emphasis on the role of the special education teacher beginning with a student’s referral and identification through their transition into adult living. 3 credits.

GRADUATE – **EDSP 720 Career/Community Life: Persons with Severe Disabilities.** Theoretical and applied study of adaptive, vocational, career, and community life needs of persons with severe disabilities. Includes community services available for transition planning. 3 credits.

School District Transition Programs

Clark County School District

The Clark County School District (CCSD) provides specialized post-secondary transition programs for individuals with disabilities. Currently, CCSD serves **308 students aged 14-21** with a **primary diagnosis of Autism**. Many of these students receive instruction in the general core curriculum while others may receive life skills instruction in the specialized classes. Instructional service delivery is based on the IEP.

Fifty (50) students with primary diagnosis of Autism are 18 – 21. Eight of these students participate in one of the following post-secondary programs specifically designed for students with Autism. In summary, CCSD provides services to 16% of students who are old enough to participate in the programs. While this number appears low, it is important to understand that the post-secondary programs are only capable of serving 14% of the total populations of the students with disabilities ages 18-21. In summary, students with Autism ages 18-21 account for 5% of the participating

population in CCSD post-secondary programs which is commensurate with the 5% district-wide incidence of individuals identified with Autism.

PACE - Program Approach Career Development

This is a unique program for post-high school students aims to place students with disabilities into **competitive work environments**. It provides functional and occupational skills training in building maintenance and culinary arts. Students are linked to various community agencies to promote transition to adult living. The program focuses on the following skills: a) employability skills, b) career exploration, c) job shadowing, d) employment related academics, e) job seeking skills, f) travel training, g) functional academics, h) consumer skills, and i) self-determination.

POST - Postsecondary Opportunities for Students in Transition

The POST is designed for seniors who **will graduate with a Option 2 Diploma**. The program emphasizes vocational skills training (e.g., employability skills, career exploration, job shadowing, interpersonal skills, independent skills) and community/life skills training (e.g., community based instruction, travel training, independent living, cooking, career/work experience, leisure and recreation, functional academics). While in the program, students participate in school-based enterprises.

YES -Your Educational Success

YES is designed to help 11th and 12th grade students with disabilities **transition from school to post-secondary educational settings**. The program focuses on self-advocacy, the college experience, and study habits. This program is a partnership between CCSD and College of Southern Nevada (CSN). Participants have the opportunity to attend classes at CSN and earn college credit.

JDP - Job Discovery Program

Students experience a wide variety of work activities. Skill development focuses on a) work-appropriate socialization, b) interpersonal skills, c) task completion, d) self-monitoring, and e) specific work skills. In a 12 month period, students have the opportunity to work in 5 different work sites for 9 weeks per site. This program runs through a **joint partnership with Opportunity Village**. It was formed to provide an intensive vocational training in a natural work environment for students who **require enclave or supported employment options** for successful post-school employment.

Transition Specialists

Transition specialists are hired by CCSD to aid teachers and parents in facilitating the transition from school to post-school services, specifically vocation rehabilitation. The lack of expansion commensurate with district growth and budget cuts has reduced the number of transition specialists to 4-5.

In 2000-2001 SY, there were 7 transition specialists and 2 SPTAs serving the schools. Then in 2001-2002 SY, CCSD went to the regional model where one TS was assigned to each of the 5 regions, and one TS and ones SPTA was assigned to Helen J Stewart Special school and the 7th TS floated for the postsecondary programs while the last SPTA left the position and was not replaced. Today, there is one TS in each region - although one of the positions was unfilled for the majority of this school year, 1 TS at Helen J Stewart, one part-time TS at Variety school who is also a Work Experience coordinator and one SPTA in ONE of the regions.

Some regions of the district lack available services for transition. In some cases, it is unclear who has the responsibility for administering transition assessment, developing the transition IEP develop, implementing the IEP, and providing individualized transition services. Many secondary teachers mistakenly believe that these are the responsibility of the transition specialist and thus fail to provide their students with early preparation for transition to post-school living.

Elko County School District

At this time there are no Autism specific programs, but information regarding the 9 transition students can be collected. An overall description of autism services is available upon request.

Community Agencies Providing Education & Transition Services

Nevada Parents Encouraging Parents (PEP)

Nevada PEP is a federally funded, statewide Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center for Families of Children with Disabilities. The transition coordinator is located at the central office in Las Vegas. The Transition Department focuses on individuals with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 26 who are transitioning into adult life and their families. Key topics are self-advocacy, self-determination, preparing for the world of work and/or post secondary education, and being able to access and make informed choices about work, school, recreation, living skills and community agencies. Three workshops are offered.

Helping Our Youth Reach For Tomorrow

This workshop reviews the special education rules of IDEA and Nevada's NAC relating to the transition process. Making the transition from the structure of high school to the challenges and responsibilities of adulthood can be a daunting task for many students with disabilities. This workshop gives parents and students information on transition, by using the guide "Where Am I Going? How Will I Get There?" Reviewing the rules and regulations, participants will learn to develop a transition plan that can involve other agencies. Both students and parents will find this training helpful as students move towards college, employment, and living independently.

You Can Do It!

The "You Can Do It!" presentation will help families and high school students with disabilities prepare for a successful transition into college. Participants will receive their very own "You Can Do It" guide which provides strategies and ideas that will help parents and students develop a plan to attend college.

Solving the Employment Puzzle

Parents and youth will be introduced to practical job development strategies and awareness of a wide range of resources that can help youth with disabilities prepare for work, find a job, and stay employed.

Easter Seals – McComb Transition Connect Program

This program serves high school students with special needs to determine their path for the future whether it is full or part time work, volunteer work or post-secondary education. Five transition coordinators partner with the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and visit all Las Vegas high schools. A team approach is used to determine the best option for the student. Once students have decided to pursue employment, coordinators under the guidance of VR counselors can provide services

which include, career exploration, resume preparation, interview skills, job searching, bus training, help obtaining work cards and proper work attire. Internet research is also available. Currently, **five youths with ASD are being served by this program.**

Vocational Rehabilitation

Partners for Autonomy in Life Skills

Employment Services

Currently PALS is working on Employment with one individual with ASD. He is 23 years old and has been without a job for over a year. We began getting him ready for employment with a focus on community inclusion and volunteer work geared towards structuring an appropriate daily routine for him. Currently he volunteers independently for two hours per week and with a shadow for one added hour. Additionally, he participates in shadowed community outings for two hours per week. Also, he has participated in two job interviews arranged through his Job Developer. The last of the two interviews was recent and seems to be promising for job placement. Once he has an official job placement, we will participate as a Job Coach for him. Initially, we will serve as a full time shadow, assisting in developing a routine in the workplace and understanding the workplace culture. Over time, we will shadow less each week (pending on his progress) until he is fully independent. Lastly, we will frequently check on his progress to see if he has any needs, concerns, or questions in order to help him to continue to work independently.

On a side note, PALS is currently attempting work as a Job Developer for another individual who is not diagnosed with ASD. However, the information that we have gathered during this process may benefit your report, since it involves individuals with disabilities in general. First, the VR Counselor has had very little experience, since she has maintained the job for less a year and has given us very little assistance. Second, VR has not played any other role in helping to alleviate the process of finding an employer (no lists or employer, etc.). Third, after calling dozens of employers, the same response was given, "Fill out an application." Even when talking to managers or owners and explaining our position, their response was the same. One manager even responded by saying, "We do not hire people with disabilities," and then corrected her statement by saying, "I mean, no one has ever worked here with a disability." So, in general, it seems there is a lack of understanding of what it means to hire an individual with a disability. Lastly, at businesses, such as YMCA and various thrift shops there seems to be a restriction for them to only hire individuals from Opportunity Village or other organizations that they have a contract with.

Transition Services

PALS works on Transition throughout varying stages in life; kindergarten to elementary school, elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school, high school to college or adult life, home school to public school, from old schools to new schools, into workplaces, etc. In regards to transitions from high school to college or adult life, we currently work with four young adults. Two of these young adults (17 yr old Female, 19 yr old male) attend our weekly social skills group that has a mix of individuals with ASD from 14-19 years old. The other two young adults work in a 1:1 setting (one individual was mentioned above 23 yr old male, and the other is an 18 yr old male).

In the group setting we discuss transition in a lecture and practice type model with the focus of our group on social/life skills necessary for independence in adulthood. We discuss conversation skills (greetings, active listening, self advocacy, etc.), recreational skills (game/play skills, active participation, team work, good sportsmanship), and problem solving (using SOCCS: Situation, Options, Consequence, Choice, Strategy).

In our 1:1 settings, there is flexibility in the approach that we may take. Our focus depends on the needs and goals of the individual (according to family, individual and our own assessment). For instance, one individual focus may be on transitioning the individual from an inconsistent routine to a consistently routine schedule. Another focus may be on developing an understanding and preparation for changes that will occur during a transition from high school to college.

Community Inclusion Services

PALS presents Community Inclusion in the same way that we present Transition. We work with a group as well as 1:1 supports. The group setting is presented in the same way; however, the 1:1 support focus is different and geared more towards Community Inclusion.

Community Inclusion goals for 1:1 support are focused on enriching experiences within the community and learning to utilize resources within the community. For instance, the focus can be with utilizing banking services, making purchases appropriately, or developing a budget.

Summary

Overall, in dealing with Employment, Transition, and Community Inclusion, we do so with a holistic approach in mind, which includes individual, family, and professional input.

Population of Young Adults Served and Services Provided

Male:

18 yrs old (1:1 Support)

19 yrs old (Group)

23 yrs old (1:1 Support, possible Job Coaching)

Female:

17 yrs old (Group)

Useful Materials

- Life Skills for Vocational Success- <http://www.workshopsinc.com/manual/>
 - I use this site for their detailed lesson plans on a variety of social and life skills. This site cannot only be used for vocational success, but social/life skills success overall.
- The following is a book we use for teaching social skills, problem solving, feelings, etc.- The Hidden Curriculum: Practical Solutions for Understanding Unstated Rules in Social Situations by: Brenda Smith Myles, Melissa L. Trautman, Ronda L. Schelvan
- The following is another book that I like to use for teaching money management and basic banking- Buying with Sense by: Carol L. King
- Article from In Business Las Vegas describing the success of a young adult with ASD- <http://www.inbusinesslasvegas.com/2006/11/10/healthcare.html>
- This site provides various tools for life after high school. It has tools for learning to manage money, find information about a career, career interest inventory, and other options beyond high school- <http://www.myfuture.com/>

TRANSITION BARRIERS

Barriers in Data Collection

There is a significant problem in capturing the information on the number of students in the transition process served by school districts. Although school districts are required to collect data on students under the primary category of autism, the numbers do not reflect the actual number of students with ASD. Autism may be marked as a secondary disability or not at all. Students with Asperger's may not even be identified or misidentified. Many students with ASD may have one of the other disability categories checked on their IEP. Other disability categories being used, include, developmental delay (up to age 6), learning disability, speech and language, emotional or multiple. Students with Asperger's may be in regular education with accommodations. Therefore, the numbers students with ASD are far greater than reported. One would not think this would be an issue except that many students with ASD still experience significant social issues across all ability levels. Misreading of social situations, along with a lack of appropriate or generalized social skills and often result in inappropriate behaviors that could be reduced or avoided through appropriate teaching and support. This lack of social intuition will often undermine success, especially once students leave the

supportive school environment and move into the community. Even students still in school may experience challenges if their social skill deficits are not addressed satisfactorily. Many high functioning students also have challenges in their problem So it is important that students with ASD are identified and subsequently receive an education that will meet their needs and be successful to the best of their abilities.

Recommendations for Data Collection:

- 1. Nevada will develop a comprehensive statewide system to accurately identify the number of individuals with autism. The state will establish and maintain a statewide registry of individuals with ASD. Participation should include parents, guardians, and individuals with ASD as they are the primary stakeholders in developing future appropriate statewide services and obtaining funding. Information will be kept confidential and its use be determined by the Nevada Autism Task Force.**
- 2. Nevada school districts will report numbers of individuals with ASD in each disability category.**
- 3. Nevada Department of Education will track and collect information on post graduation outcomes to determine if educational services are adequately preparing students for the world of work and life in the community.**
- 4. Designate an independent organization (e.g, ACON) to provide leadership in coordinating autism services statewide, This organization will help establish a web-based, central information site for ASD services. This organization will provide an independent annual review of statewide progress on Nevada Autism Task Force recommendations.**

Barriers in School-Based Settings

Focus on transition currently is mandated to begin at the age of 14 years old. At this age a student would be moving from middle to high school or would already be in high school. However, beginning the examination of transition at this age may not allow for enough time to prepare students for college, the work force, etc. If the transition process is examined at an earlier age (10 years old), then there may be more time to help build the skills necessary for successful transition.

There is a lack of support for participating in extracurricular activities (clubs, sports, etc.), as well as, a lack of transportation to and from such activities. Participation in these activities and organizations may help to build necessary life/social skills (such as

following directions, good sportsmanship, working as a team, etc.) which may aid in the transition to high school, college or work.

CCSD Transition Programs

- The topic of transition and specialized post-secondary transition programs, are not often talked about in IEP meetings unless the student is graduating. Due to this late start, students often encounter waiting list to participate in the CCSD programs.
- Knowledge of when to apply for CCSD programs is not always afforded the student/family
- The intent and outcomes of the programs are often not fully communicated.
- There is a lack of follow through with VR or DRC once a student ages out
- The programs are not individualized at all. A comment was made about a “group IEP” for incoming students in the PACE, POST, and JDP programs!
- How can a student capable of competitive employment be able to transfer the skills learned in the PACE program when they are disinterested in building maintenance or culinary arts? Where will these same students learn social skills & other soft skills?

Recommendations for School-Based Transition:

- 5. Futures planning for each student beginning at age 14 (although earlier is preferred). The purpose is to identify desired post-school outcomes and develop an action plan to help the students work toward those goals. Futures planning encourages person-centered planning and helps facilitate movement toward a common vision for the future.**
- 6. Clarify roles and responsibilities of teachers and transition specialists in the transition planning. Provide both professional development opportunities for teachers and training for parents to clarify their roles in the transition process.**
- 7. Teacher preparation institutions should collaborate to identify desired outcomes of transition courses in the state. A greater focus in preparing teachers in the process is vital.**
- 8. Consider a university training program (person preparation) to prepare transition specialists across the state. Currently, few specialists are available to bridge the gap between school and community-based services.**

- 9. Consider funding additional transition specialists to assist school personnel in connecting students with community agencies.**
- 10. Increase the capacity of the current transition and post-school programs to provide services to more students in need.**
- 11. Create a transition planning document that is given to parents/individuals with ASD to empower them and clarify their roles in the process. The purpose is similar to what we discussed about the questions parents should think about before coming to the Transition IEP.**
- 12. Consider restructuring the transition IEP to put post-school outcomes first. Assessment data should not guide the Transition IEP (currently 1st in the document). Instead, the students' post-secondary goals (as identified by IDEA; e.g., go to college, work, move in with friends) should guide educators and parents in identifying potential areas of need and which assessments will be used to assess those areas of need. The transition action plan should be developed from that data and then supplemented with a few key goals and objectives. Everyone should be responsible for items in the action plan, including parents, students, and teachers.**
- 13. Establish a protocol for providing social skills and life skills training for students with ASD without regard to educational placement. Provide opportunities during school, in after-school programs, and as summer programs. Students should learn and practice skills in the most integrated settings possible. The goal is to prepare students to live, work and recreate in their community.**
- 14. Students with ASD will have multiple work experiences commensurate with their abilities prior to exiting school. Work opportunities will explore interests, determine strengths and identify areas of need and support. Students will have opportunities during school, after school and/or school vacations. Work experiences will be available to students in general education pursuing a standard diploma.**
- 15. Require teacher/staff (including principals) education and training on the needs and supports for students with ASD. Provide access to autism specialists as mentors, classroom consultants and teacher support group leaders.**

Barriers to Post Secondary Education Programs

- A lack of preparation at the middle and high school level to develop the skills needed to navigate the college environment, including self-advocacy, organizational tools, and social skills.
- Self-help and independent living skills may be an issue for students living away from home for the first time.
- Students may not seek assistance with coursework when challenges are first recognized.
- Poorly developed social skills or lacking support to correct social errors.
- Students not hooked up with disability resource centers
- Resource center personnel do not understand the needs of students with ASD and how to support them.
- Academic and social supports are inadequate or not available.

Post Secondary Education Recommendations:

An increase in the number of students with ASD and early intervention services has correspondingly resulted in an increased interest in attending colleges and universities. Postsecondary education and training are recognized assets in obtaining employment and establishing a career track. Students with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) are often encouraged to attend post secondary schools due to their high academic achievement.

- 16. The student's IEP team should assist the student and family in exploring and developing accommodations needed. Pre-requisite skills needed for college should be goals in the IEP.**
- 17. Contact colleges who have successful programs to address these issues, such as an Autism Transition Specialist. Create programs that utilize student mentors to assist in developing routines, socializing, and adapting to college life.**
- 18. High school guidance and VR counselors can assist students in navigating the admission process and linking students with the college disability resource center.**

19. **VR services can help by developing an Individual plan for employment and review financial needs.**
20. **Students need to develop self-advocacy skills and understand when to inform the instructor/professor the needed accommodations for their courses. Students will need to decide when or if they want to disclose their disability.** The New England Asperger's Association suggests that "early disclosure to appropriate college personnel improves the chances for success, and minimizes the chances of misunderstandings or unfortunate incidents... We highly recommend that you give college information about yourself and about AS after you are admitted and before the first semester" (Jekel & Loo, 2003)

Resources:

Ask and Tell: Self-Advocacy and Disclosure for People on the Autism Spectrum by Ruth Elaine Joyner Hane, Kassiane Sibley, Stephen M. Shore, Roger Meyer, Phil Schwarz, and Liane Holliday Willey.

The 411 on Disability Disclosure: a Workbook for Youth with Disabilities by the Office of Disability Employment Policy and the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, can be purchased or downloaded at <http://www.transcen.org/>.

Sample of useful college supports listed in the 32nd Institute on Rehabilitation Issues (IRI), and published a resource titled, *Rehabilitation of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders* (Dew & Alan, 2007).

- Access to assistive technology, especially in relation to learning needs and or planning, organization, and scheduling
- A reduced course load, at least for the first semester
- A single dorm room
- A social mentor
- An assigned point person to serve as liaison with the student
- Support for executive functioning needs, such as regular check-ins or helping with prioritizing
- Counseling, especially related to social issues that can be quite baffling since there are many new situations, including dating, drinking, and parties

Social situations can be especially challenging for students with ASD so finding a special interest or support group can be helpful. Website information and online supports specific to AS may be a resource to some students. The following information is listed in *Rehabilitation of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders* (Dew & Alan, 2007).

Books and Articles Especially for College Students with ASD with Advice from Peers

One useful website is that of University Students with Autism and AS (<http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~cns/>). Another university offers an e-booklet of advice for students with Asperger's called *Towards Success in Tertiary Study with Asperger's Syndrome and Other Autistic Spectrum Disorders*, available at <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/ellp/publications/towards.html>.

An article called "The Hindered Path" was originally written by Laura Tiffany for the student newspaper at Memorial University. It describes the postsecondary experience for individuals on the autism spectrum. It can be found at <http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~cns/article.html>.

Lars Perner, Ph.D., wrote "Preparing to Be Nerdy Where Nerdy Can Be Cool: College Planning for the High Functioning Student with Autism" found at <http://www.professorsadvice.com/>. This same website has a reprint of an article from the 2003 issue of *Autism-Asperger's Digest* on selecting a college for a person on the autistic spectrum (see <http://www.larsperner.com/autism/colleges.htm>). It includes specific details about services offered and contact persons for specific colleges.

In 2004, *Succeeding in College with Asperger Syndrome: A Student Guide* made its debut. John Harpur, Maria Lawlor, and Michael Fitzgerald state that their primary purpose for the book is to "assist those with AS cope with the challenges life brings" and add that the book is also helpful for parents, counselors in student services, and therapists. Another current recommendation for students on the spectrum thinking about college is *Aquamarine Blue 5: Personal Stories of College Students with Autism* edited by Dawn Prince-Hughes (Swallow Press, 2002).