

State of Nevada Autism Task Force
Transition, Employment and Community Inclusion Subcommittee
MINUTES

Friday, June 20, 2008
Teleconference

Members Present: Flo LaRoy, Barbie Lauver, Dr. Tessie Rose, Kathy Treants, Tammy Garrison, Melissa Pegg, Scott Harrington, and Korri Ward.

Members Absent: Joan Shaffer, Jessica Lomboy, Angel Lomboy and Suzanne Thomas.

Guests: Mary Liveratti

Staff: Melanie Stevens

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

The meeting was called to order by Chair LaRoy at 8:05 a.m. Introductions were made by all present for the record.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. Harrington motioned to approve the minutes from the June 11, 2008 meeting of the Transition, Employment and Community Inclusion subcommittee. Ms. Garrison seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING EMPLOYMENT ISSUES:

Chair LaRoy re-distributed the document of findings and recommendations to the Transition subcommittee. As the committee went through the recommendations, they made the following additional suggestions and edits.

- *Employment of Individuals with ASD* – Chair LaRoy asked the committee if it would be appropriate to add to the introduction of this document, a sentence or two about an article she had read concerning young adults who do not go on to college and the significant challenges they are having finding employment. She stated the article shows how this is a problem across the nation for the general population as well and highlights the difficulty individuals with ASD have finding employment. The committee agreed it would be relevant. **Chair LaRoy will find the exact sighting of the source and send the information to Dr. Rose to add to the document.**
- *National Challenges and Recommendations* – The committee discussed the recommendations and expressed concern over the layout of the recommendations. Dr. Rose said it was confusing as to which recommendations were from the VR document and which were from the committee. Mr. Harrington suggested listing

the National recommendations with the Nevada recommendations side by side. Chair LaRoy thought it may be too difficult and time consuming to do things that way. Ms. Lauver suggested stating the National recommendation followed by the Nevada recommendation under each challenge. The committee decided it would be best to list the personal challenges first, and then list the recommendations to meet those challenges. Dr. Rose will put the personal challenges in after the introduction.

- *Employment in Nevada – Data and Programs.* Dr. Rose suggested removing ‘sheltered workshops’ from the final sentence of the introduction to make the paragraph more politically correct. Mr. Harrington pointed out there are two funding sources for job developers; vocational rehabilitation and regional centers. He said the optimum goal should be competitive employment.
- *Nevada Barriers and Recommendations –* The committee recommended removing ‘successful’ from employment outcomes in barrier #1. Chair LaRoy explained barrier #2 saying employers have a preconceived idea of what an individual with ASD will act/perform like. She would like employers to know these individuals can learn and improve as employees with the proper support. Mr. Harrington suggested educating businesses and the community on ASD. The committee agreed to change the recommendations to promote Vocational Rehabilitation and other employment agencies and services. They would like to see more positive stories showing the successes individuals with autism have had in finding employment. For barrier #3 the committee suggested, “Develop a promotional campaign designed to educate businesses on the benefits of employing people with disabilities with a goal of increasing the job bank for individuals with ASD.” In barrier #4 Chair LaRoy expressed concern for young adults who are unable to find employment, yet still need to build on their job skills. She would like for employment agencies to develop a work experience/volunteer network to create opportunities for individuals with ASD leading to job readiness and subsequent employment. For barrier/recommendation #5 Dr. Rose stated the barrier needed to be reworded to match the recommendation. The barrier more likely is there is no incentive for job developers to maintain clients who are difficult to place. Mr. Harrington suggested the recommendation would then be to provide additional incentives for job developers, for placement of difficult to place clients. Dr. Rose rewrote the recommendation to read, “Provide monetary incentives to employment agencies and service providers who find competitive employment for hard to place individuals with ASD.” Recommendation #8 was discussed and changed to, “Vocational Rehabilitation will provide services from and ASD consultant or create an in house position responsible for ASD education or on going ASD education for counselors, staff and potential employers. The committee recommends Vocational Rehabilitation refer to Chapter 5...” The committee opted to delete recommendation #9; however Mr. Harrington suggested combining it with recommendation #4. The committee suggested recommendation #10 be changed to read, “Provide on-site training...”

Dr. Rose will send the changes the committee made to the document to Chair LaRoy. Mr. Harrington will write an introduction for the Community Inclusion document.

Mr. Harrington asked that the 'Re-designation of subcommittee members' item be included on the next agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

SET NEXT MEETING DATE:

The committee agreed to meet again on June 27, 2008, at 11:00 a.m. to approve the Education document and finalize the Community Inclusion document. Dr. Rose will send out the documents and asked that everyone review these documents before the meeting and be prepared to discuss them.

ADJOURNMENT:

With no other business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 10:15 a.m.

EMPLOYMENT

NATIONAL CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EMPLOYMENT IN NEVADA

NEVADA BARRIERS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Submitted by the Nevada Autism Task Force Subcommittee
On
Transition, Employment and Community Inclusion
Part 2 of 3

EMPLOYMENT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH ASD

Brenda Smith Miles, a professor at the University of Kansas, states “even though autism covers a range of intellectual abilities, few young people with autism find meaningful work”. She said only 12 percent who are considered high functioning, while only 6 percent with so-called classic autism are employed. (Newsday, December 3, 2007) It is evident from discussions with parents, experts in the field of autism, and outcome data that many adults with ASD are unemployed or under-employed, including the highest functioning and best-educated individuals.

NATIONAL CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following information is from Chapter 5 of 32nd IRI *Rehabilitation of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, Dew & Alan, 2007.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Systemic challenges are the issues VR counselors may encounter when attempting to adapt the current practices and make these systems work for individuals with ASD.

Systemic Challenge 1

Few job coaches have the specialized skills required to support persons with autism. Job coaches may not have training on how to support persons with ASD, and untrained job coaches can lose their job while the person with ASD is still employed (Smith, 1990). (Note: Person with ASD can also lose their job due to poor job coaching.)

Recommendations

VR counselors seeking job coaches should look for these personal attributes:

- Great communication skills
- Intellectual curiosity
- High energy level
- A striving for excellence

- Initiative; being a self-starter
- Respect for the dignity and worth of a person with ASD
- Keen sense of appropriate dress for self and person with ASD, taking into account the culture of the job and community
 - Keen sense of grooming and personal hygiene
 - Creativity

In addition, VR counselors who find job coaches with these attributes should train them for specific skills:

- General knowledge of characteristics of autism
- Understanding of the “theory of mind” (see Glossary)
- Knowledge of positive behavior supports and how to implement them
- Skill to assess the sensory needs of the person with ASD and to modify the work environment to meet these needs
- Skill to conduct a functional assessment of behavior
- Ability to communicate with the person with ASD
- Ability to support the person with ASD to ensure success on the job
- Ability to use information from a functional assessment of behavior to minimize challenging behavior
- Ability to manage challenging behavior with positive behavior supports
- Ability to coordinate information from a task analysis of the job and needs of the person with ASD to provide the best level of support
- Ability to address employee/employer relations

Job coaches and their supervisors must be knowledgeable regarding the range and type of behavior and challenges faced by the person with ASD in the workplace and must be capable of designing supports that enable success on the job (Department of Public Welfare, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2004). Job coaches must be trained and have first-hand knowledge of the job. It is important to teach the job skill in the setting where the person with ASD will be working. This should minimize the need to generalize from cues in the training setting to cues in the work setting (Smith, 1990).

A job coach who knows and understands the person with ASD is essential to successful job placement (Autism Society of Delaware, 2005). Experienced and qualified job coach trainers should mentor less experienced job coaches. A career path in job coaching should be encouraged and compensated at a higher level. Perhaps the Association of Community Rehabilitation Education could develop a certification for job coaches. Collaboration with programs such as the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification to mandate ASD training for certified rehabilitation counselor continuing education hours is recommended. Staff support ratios must be individualized and may vary from time to time, depending on life and job circumstances. Job coach support should be faded gradually and systematically. In some cases, continual job coach support may be necessary for long periods if the person with ASD is to maintain employment.

Systemic Challenge 2

Few VR counselors have professional training or experience working with persons with ASD. The severe shortage of trained professionals who work with adults with ASD is a significant barrier for training VR counselors.

Recommendations

College and university departments who train VR professionals need to provide coursework and practicum experience in ASD. Federal, state, and regional administrators of VR should provide in-service training for all professional staff in their departments to work with persons with ASD.

The Rehabilitation and Continuing Education Program should increase training in ASD. (A model for training is included in Appendix G) The leadership of VR agencies should conduct in- service training and utilize providers in the community who have experience and expertise working with adults with ASD. (Information on existing community providers in the U.S. can be found at the website of the National Association for Residential Providers for Adults with Autism (NARPAA; www.NARPAA.org).

Systemic Challenge 3

VR services are outcome driven and time limited; however, a person with ASD may need lifelong support. Significantly reducing job support may result in job loss for a person with ASD.

Recommendations

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) should collaborate with other federal agencies to secure funding for the long-term support needed when VR services end. At this time there is no mandate for such a funding arrangement. Medicaid's Home and Community Based Waiver Program will fund job coaches, but that support is not mandatory.

The lack of funding for long-term support seriously jeopardizes employment for this vulnerable population. The system needs to provide a seamless continuum of services.

Systemic Challenge 4

Research information on best practices for employment of persons with ASD is very limited. Most of the current research is being conducted with children.

Recommendations

Universities should collaborate with the public and private sector in the autism community for outcome-based applied research on promising practices for successful employment, such as

- The application of technology using video modeling
- Determination of the best job match

- Social skills training for adults
- Job coach training
- Development of natural supports

Systemic Challenge 5

VR counselors' involvement with public schools sometimes does not begin until the person with ASD is about to graduate. Appropriate functional skills for employment may not have been taught.

Recommendations

- A transition plan with the parents/guardian, the individual, the school district, the community disability agency, and the VR counselor should be developed and implemented by age 16 for the person with ASD.
 - At age 16 an application for developmental disability long-term funding should be completed and submitted so VR services can start at age 21, or upon leaving school.

Systemic Challenge 6

There is a severe shortage of agencies that provide specialized services for adults with autism. Only about 25 agencies in the U.S. provide adult autism-specific services, and most of those agencies are members of NARPAA.

Recommendations

A good choice for a vendor would be an agency that has experience delivering services for adults with autism. For contact information on experienced agencies, go to the www.NARPAA.org website. The Autism Society of America website (www.autism-society.org) is another resource. Websites on autism should include information and links regarding employment of persons with ASD. If autism-specific services are not available in your area, attempt to find a community developmental disability agency that would be willing to be trained in autism. Training should be provided by a specialist in adult autism issues and needs. Use the NARPAA Standards, which are located in Appendix F, for evaluating vendor staff qualifications. Given the shortage of knowledgeable vendors, the VR counselor may need to provide case management for the person with ASD.

Systemic Challenge 7

This IRI document will be widely disseminated by VR agencies, conference presentations, and online links. We need to ensure that it will have a positive and timely impact for persons with ASD.

Recommendations

- Measure the impact on employment for persons with ASD.
- Determine a baseline from the RSA-911 report (See Glossary) for persons with ASD.
- Periodically review the RSA-911 report over the next 5 years to

determine the impact.

- Ensure that websites of autism organizations contain links to the IRI document.
- Review this IRI document in 5 years and update it with current information, then disseminate the information.
- Develop a network of resources of VR counselors and autism providers. Provide meaningful opportunities for the groups to work together.

Personal challenges address the behaviors that may present employment issues for persons with ASD.

Personal Challenge 1

Persons with ASD may be nonverbal or not able to answer the VR counselor's questions during the intake process. For example, in some states, the VR counselor is instructed to ask two questions: How do you think we can help you? and How does your disability make it hard for you to work? (Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, 2005).

Recommendations

During the intake process, have a facilitator present who knows the applicant. This person must be someone that the applicant feels comfortable with and someone the applicant wants involved in the intake process. If the applicant is nonverbal or cannot answer a question, rephrase the question or allow the facilitator to answer. Determine if the person with ASD has a legal guardian and include the guardian if possible and/or feasible.

Personal Challenge 2

Persons with ASD may have difficulty understanding and engaging in conversation. They

- May be nonverbal or have problems expressing themselves
- May not respond to verbal requests
- May be echolalic
- May have a restricted repertoire of responses
- May be very literal
- May not ask any questions or may ask too many questions
- May not understand nonverbal cues
- May not make direct eye contact
- May need an extension of evaluation time to determine eligibility
- May need trial work with real work experience before closing the case

Recommendations

Consider the social aspects of different job environments when making a job placement. Discuss with coworkers the characteristics and behaviors of people with ASD. Build in natural supports so the person can have someone to go to if there is a problem or a need for clarification.

Communicate information directly and avoid metaphors and idioms, which may be interpreted literally. For example, ask, “How are you today?” rather than “What’s up?” Provide consistency of instruction given by the same person if possible. Do not depend on nonverbal cues—such as telling an individual, “Your job is finished,” standing up to leave, and expecting the person to follow. The person may need a verbal directive such as “It is time to leave the room and go to the second workstation; follow me, please.” For the nonverbal person with ASD, use a communication aid such as a picture cue system or some form of assistive device that aids the person with communication. People with ASD often require extra time to process conversation.

Any time a request is made, wait for a response before repeating the statement. Don’t ask a series of questions. Tell the person, using clear, concise, concrete language, what you want him to do. Model the appropriate behavior. Structure, order, routine, and clear rules and assignments are the key to success for a person with ASD (Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004; Doyle, 2003).

Personal Challenge 3

Persons with ASD may have difficulty with problem-solving and drawing inferences. They

- May not be able to “read between the lines”
- May appear regimented and have one way of performing a task
- May have unpredictable responses to a change in routine or situation
- May deal with a situation in a concrete manner
- May have difficulty transitioning from one situation to another situation

Recommendations

Secure a job that requires limited problem-solving skills. Provide a job task which, once started, can be finished without interruptions. One example is an assembly job that requires the same steps every time it is performed.

When teaching the job, have the person with ASD restate the directions. Break directions down into simple steps, with time limits delineated for completion of a task. Provide a consistent work station or work set-up. Ensure that the employee knows what to do when the task is finished. Provide regular reminders and positive feedback.

Develop a system for transitioning from one task to another. Be sure that during a break or downtime, the person with ASD has a preferred activity to engage in, such as a video game.

Personal Challenge 4

Persons with ASD may be rigid in their thinking and assume that other people think the same as they do. They

- May have problems with authority figures and may not understand hierarchy
 - May be egocentric and have trouble reading other people's behavior in relation to theirs (which is known as theory of mind deficit)
 - May organize their world differently (locate their office by some particular object or item rather than an office number)
 - May have tunnel focus or concentrate on just one thing and be unable to pay attention to other important details (Shattuck, 2001)

Recommendations

State differences of opinion calmly and in a nonconfrontational manner. Avoid suggestive and indirect language (Myles & Simpson, 2003).

Provide training to coworkers and supervisors in how best to solve a problem. Explain the situation in terms of the problem and not the person (Shattuck, 2001). Attempt to emphasize the concrete aspects of the task, not the big picture. Teach the job right the first time by establishing a routine as quickly as possible. For example, use a pictorial chart of the hierarchy of who to go to if there is a problem (Emmett, 2004).

Personal Challenge 5

Persons with ASD tends to learn social skills without learning their meaning or context (Myles & Simpson, 2003). They

- May lack awareness of the unwritten rules of social conduct
- May not understand the concept of making small talk (for example, asking a coworker how his weekend was or how he enjoyed a movie)
- May not appreciate the feelings and thoughts of others
- May not realize that a comment would embarrass or cause offense to another person and that a simple apology could help repair the person's feelings (Attwood, 1998)
- May lack emotion or may not use spontaneous gestures, touch, or facial expressions
- May misunderstand humor and sarcasm
- May appear rude and unfriendly (Seltzer & Kraauss, 2002)

Recommendations

Social skills that are needed on the job must be trained, just as technical skills are trained. Social skills are critical for successful employment. Two methods for teaching appropriate social skills are role playing and video modeling. All of the references listed in this chapter are excellent resources for teaching social skills.

Discuss with coworkers the individual's response to certain situations, such as lack of eye

contact, failure to make small talk, or walking between two people who are talking. Others may perceive these responses as rudeness. However, they should be explained as a common characteristic of autism. Job coaches and other staff must be very consistent in the way they teach the person social behavior necessary for successful employment.

Personal Challenge 6

Persons with ASD may have unusual responses to tactile, olfactory, auditory, and visual stimuli, which may cause difficulty in the work environment. They

- May be distracted or disturbed by different types of sounds, lighting, and smells (Grandin & Duffy, 2004)
- May be negatively impacted by the environmental clutter of a job site

Recommendations

Respect the sensory sensitivities by designing the work area to minimize seriously distracting sights and sounds. For example, allow the individual to wear ear plugs or to listen to his or her choice of music through headphones; use tinted glasses to minimize the effect of fluorescent lighting or other harsh light; have the employee's work station near a window that provides natural light; and if the employee is required to wear a uniform, allow modifications that will make the uniform more comfortable.

A useful technique for self-regulation could include relaxation and deep breathing exercises. Schedule sensory breaks throughout the work day to assist the employee in coping with the busy work environment.

Be sure that the solution to the person's sensitivities is not degrading and does not call undue attention to the problem. Do not sneak up on someone with ASD or startle them. If the person's back is turned, announce yourself. If the person gets too close to you when talking, calmly ask the person to move back a step. A quiet setting out of heavily trafficked areas is usually the best work location for someone with ASD (Grandin & Duffy, 2004). If clutter is a problem, develop a plan (and share it with the person with ASD) to get things organized into neat specific categories. People with ASD are "systemizers," which could be a real asset on a job.

Personal Challenge 7

Persons with ASD may have impaired fine or gross motor skills accompanied by complex body mannerisms. They

- May have compulsions and/or rituals, such as opening a door at a certain angle every time
- May have circumscribed interests and are extremely rigid in their thinking (Seltzer & Krauss, 2002)
- May be clumsy, have problems with pencil grasp, and write illegibly
- May need positive motivation to work—even for the many ASD

employees who are well coordinated, with excellent fine and gross motor skills

Recommendations

Carefully match the job with the individual's interests and skills. Analyze the job and make adaptations using jigs and other prostheses that can help compensate for deficits in fine and gross motor skills. Consult with an occupational therapist who could assist in making accommodations for the individual (Myles & Simpson, 2003).

Build on the compulsions and rituals of the person whenever possible. For example, a person who memorizes the rules of grammar will probably do well in a job requiring coding and classifying books or materials.

Personal Challenge 8

People with ASD typically do not interview well for a job. They

- May not answer the question posed
- May go off on a tangent
- May not maintain eye contact with the interviewer
- May give unrelated answers to questions

Recommendations

Facilitate the interview process with the applicant through role playing. Highlight the applicant's strengths. Have a resume prepared. Practice rote responses and have four or five questions prepared for the interviewer. Assist the person with ASD in planning for and dressing appropriately for the job being sought. If it is a mechanic's job, a suit and tie would not be appropriate (Grandin & Duffy, 2004); however, the person with ASD will not know what is and what is not appropriate dress. In lieu of the traditional job interview, an arrangement could be made for the employer to make available short-term job try-outs, in order to demonstrate the person's abilities and strengths (Hagner, 2005). Three or four different on-the-job try-outs could be helpful in assessing desires and capabilities. A well-trained job coach will make sure that the employer perceives the person with ASD as an asset and helps to ensure that the job will be done as the employer expects.

Personal Challenge 9

Persons with ASD may engage in challenging behaviors:

- Stereotypical behavior such as arm flapping, rocking, or odd verbal noises
- Social peculiarities, social interaction difficulties, and to a lesser degree, aggression and anger (Myles & Simpson, 2003)
- Narrow set of interests

Recommendations

If possible, procure a job with duties that enable the person's challenging behavior to become an asset. For example, an individual who likes to break glass could work in a glass recycling job which requires the employee to toss glass items into a large bin. A person with ASD whose intense interest is putting together a 500-piece jigsaw puzzle would probably be successful in an intricate assembly job.

The employer and coworkers must feel confident that if a behavior problem occurs, the job coach or supporting agency will effectively and efficiently handle the situation with a minimum of worksite disruption. The job coach must systematically identify the problem and then design and implement a solution. Personal networking and the development of ongoing relationships with employers must be maintained. If the person is presently taking medication to assist in controlling anxiety, depression, or any other comorbid condition, make sure assessments are made on a regular basis to ensure that he or she is taking the medications properly.

Personal Challenge 10

Persons with ASD may not respond well to change that may occur on the job. They

- May not generalize skills from one place to another
- May not multitask

Recommendations

When training a new set of job skills, keep the conditions consistent until the employee is responding correctly on a regular basis. Then gradually fade the instructions and prompts as the employee begins to acquire the skill (Scheuermann & Webber, 2002).

Provide support during transition from one task to another. Doing one task at a time is more suitable for the person with ASD (Grandin & Duffy, 2004).

Scheduled job duties need to follow a predictable pattern. Transitions need to be carefully planned and carried out gradually. When change/exceptions must occur, give the employee with ASD as much notice as possible and explain the change. For example, his desk must be moved. If possible, give him choices in some aspect of the move, like which way his desk faces in its new place. Facilitate generalization of skills by briefly retraining the task in the new work environment (Emmett, 2004).

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EMPLOYMENT IN NEVADA

Data and Programs

Rehabilitation Automated Information of Nevada (RAISON) is currently using a four digit disability code to track individuals utilizing vocational rehabilitation services. The first two digits track impairments (none, sensory/communicative, physical, mental) and the second two digits track the primary cause of the impairment (autism is 08 of 37 categories). Data between 1/1/05 and 12/31/07 shows there were 46 individuals with autism served. The actual numbers may be higher since the autism code must be selected as the primary disability. Individuals with ASD could fall under other categories and therefore not be counted under autism. Of the 46 individuals with autism, 9 were employed, 15 with services pending and 22 cases closed. The statewide distribution of individuals includes 8 from northern and rural Nevada and 38 from the southern district.

Vocational rehabilitation pays job developers to identify and help potential clients gain access to meaningful employment. These individuals are the primary method of finding employment for individuals eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. Currently, these individuals are paid around \$2000 dollars for each client who is placed maintains the job for a certain period of time (90 days). The job developer is paid in increments based on the individual's status in finding a job. For example, they get paid around \$100 for intake, and then some of assessment, and then based on the length of success in the position (30, 60, 90). This service may be under utilized for individuals with ASD. A vocational rehabilitation consultant suggested an extra incentive for job developers finding jobs for individuals with more severe ASD.

Other job opportunities may be obtained through privately funded agencies, sheltered work environments, work centers, work crews, enclaves and through independent employment searches,

NEVADA BARRIERS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Barrier:

- Data on individuals with ASD who are seeking employment or are employed is limited to nonexistent. There is no data on how many individuals with ASD apply for vocational rehabilitation services and are deemed ineligible.

Recommendation:

- 1. Collect data on individuals with ASD seeking employment services from vocational rehabilitation, length of job search, time between employments, and locations of successful employment outcomes (eg. sheltered workshops, enclaves, competitive jobs).**

Barrier:

- There is a lack of understanding on the employability of individuals with ASD. Employers and employment services are unaware of the benefits of hiring individuals with ASD. Subsequently, there is lack of employment opportunities in the community, especially in competitive jobs, for individuals with ASD.

Recommendations:

- 2. Vocational Rehabilitation will highlight successful employment outcomes for individuals with ASD and share information with potential employers.**
- 3. Develop a protocol or strategy to aide VR counselors in educating and easing the decision of employers to hire.**
- 4. Develop active ties to the business community to increase opportunities for work experiences leading to job readiness and subsequent employment.**

Barrier:

- Individuals with ASD may spend years in search of employment and/ or have unsuccessful job experiences resulting in long periods of nonproductive downtime. Individuals become discouraged and give up on job searches.

Recommendation:

- 5. Hire additional vocational rehabilitation staff to adequately meet the need of individuals with ASD seeking services, including intake, assessment, follow-through, job searches and job support from the agency.**

Barrier:

- Individuals are often directed to specific employment niches with out regard to abilities and interests thereby decreasing the likelihood of successful outcomes.

Recommendation:

- 6. Provide a variety of opportunities for individuals with ASD to obtain work experience in the areas of abilities and interests and use those opportunities to**

assess job potential. Utilize job-carving strategies to find job niches matching employee and employer needs.

Barrier:

- There is a lack of training for all employment related professionals and support staff on the needs and supports required by individuals with ASD. As a result, many individuals with ASD either lack opportunities for employment or have unsuccessful employment experiences leading to job loss.

Recommendation:

- 7. Educate all employment service agencies, including Vocational Rehabilitation, on the Personal Challenges #1 through #9 experienced by individuals with ASD as presented in Chapter 5 of 32nd IRI *Rehabilitation of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders*.**
- 8. Vocational Rehabilitation will hire an ASD consultant or create an in-house position responsible for ASD education to train counselors, staff and potential employers, as well as build a database of trained and willing employers to pull from. Information will focus on the Systemic Challenges #1 through #7 as presented in Chapter 5 of 32nd IRI *Rehabilitation of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders*.**
- 9. Provide additional funding to help job developers seek employment for individuals with ASD and fund extended hours for support staff to find and maintain meaningful employment for people with more significant ASD.**
- 10. Provide co-worker training to increase job success and establish natural supports on the job.**

COMMUNITY INCLUSION

INCLUSIVE RECREATION

***COMMUNITY INCLUSION
BARRIERS AND RECOMMENDATIONS***

PUBLIC COMMENTARY

Submitted by the Nevada Autism Task Force Subcommittee
On
Transition, Employment and Community Inclusion
Part 3 of 3

INCLUSION RECREATION

BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE RECREATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR YOUTHS WITH DISABILITIES

Barbie Lauver

Parent of child with high functioning autism

Founder, Asperger's Syndrome/High Functioning Autism Support Group

“Participation in inclusive contexts, where people with and without disabilities participate alongside each other, is generally associated with beneficial outcomes for youth with and without disabilities” (Edwards & Smith, 1989; Sable, 1992; Schleien, Ray, Soderman-Olson & McMahon, 1987, as cited in Wilhite, 1999). Unfortunately, naturally occurring interactions between youths with and without disabilities is usually limited at school (passing each other in the hallway or in the cafeteria, or perhaps working on a special project together) and in extra-curricular school activities (where most programs are segregated). This lack of reciprocal interactions can influence the degree of acceptance of youths with disabilities by youths without disabilities, and also discourage youths with disabilities to participate in certain activities for fear of burdening others or being embarrassed. A general consensus among all youths was that acceptance in various environments was important and that they just wanted to fit in. However, research that examined the importance of sport and leisure participation in the lives of youths with and without disabilities revealed that while all youths agreed that participation was beneficial, youths with disabilities placed less emphasis on the importance of participating in these activities than their peers without disabilities. This attitude is believed to be based on their unfavorable past experiences in integrated social activities (Wilhite, Mushett, Goldenberg, & Trader, 1997, as cited in Wilhite, 1999).

“Leisure appears to be a significant context in which young people develop self-perceptions” (Haggard & Williams, 1992; Kelly, 1983; Larson, 1994; Silbereisen & Todt,

1994, as cited in Wilhite, 1999). In order to determine how inclusion influences self-perceptions, Wilhite's team conducted a study to gain insights as to why inclusion works for some youths but not for others, and what the best methods are to support successful inclusive leisure experiences. The participants were middle and high school students with and without disabilities. Most of the youths with disabilities felt that competitive activities were not conducive for achieving acceptance because it could be embarrassing and demeaning. However, inclusive community recreational programs, where attention is focused on the participants' strengths versus weaknesses, where no one is rejected based on ability, and where positive social interactions is encouraged was found to be important for both youths with and without disabilities. In this regard, "leisure was considered to be an opportunity for bridging some social and physical barriers, as well as emphasizing or creating others" (Wilhite, 1999).

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE RECREATIONAL PROGRAMS

If inclusive recreational programs are to be successful, they must be conducive to the actual participation in the program rather than to winning or losing. Because self-perceptions are created through social interactions with others, recreation environments that provide opportunities for mutually beneficial interactions and relationships enhance communication and influence positive self-perceptions. Positive inclusive recreational experiences help to counter negative stereotypes, promote mutual acceptance, develop friendships, and, thereby, contribute positively to self-development.

On one hand, youths with disabilities can increase their social skills and develop friendships with other youths in the programs. Also, every positive situation they experience gives them the courage and willingness to attempt new experiences. The self-confidence that they develop carries on into other areas of their lives. On the other hand, youths without disabilities positively integrating with youths with disabilities can cause the youths without disabilities to become more sensitive to individual differences. This awareness and attitude of acceptance will carry on into other areas of their lives, too. They will begin to view people with disabilities as people first and disability second, instead of the other way around.

I believe that inclusive recreation programs can benefit everyone. Most youths with disabilities have experienced limited success in interacting with typical peers due to misunderstanding or intolerance of their differences. However, involvement in a well-planned inclusive recreational program where the staff is trained, behavioral support plans are in place, adaptive equipment is available – all enabling a more equal setting – can become a win-win situation for both youths with and without disabilities. It is my hope that someday socially inclusive programs will become the norm rather than the exception.

ADOLESCENT CURRENT ISSUE PAPER

In the past, young adults with developmental disabilities and significant support needs were provided with recreational, leisure and social activities that were almost exclusively segregated and operated by disability organizations. With the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, which prohibits programs and services from discriminating against persons with disabilities, research on the benefits of inclusive recreational programs has resulted in a tremendous growth of inclusive recreational programs and opportunities. As I explored information for this project on the internet, I came across almost half-a-dozen community inclusion models from various cities across the United States. Each city provided an overview and positive effects of their particular inclusion programs. I was very encouraged by the fact that inclusive recreational programs are becoming featured in more communities. “Research has provided clear evidence of the multitude of benefits of inclusive recreation and leisure. Parents have spoken about these benefits in very real terms” (Modell, 1998). “Interviews conducted with individuals with disabilities revealed that in the area of recreation and leisure

satisfaction, those who participated more regularly and had greater access to recreation and leisure activities were significantly more satisfied with their lives than their peers” (Harper & Heal, 1993, as cited from Modell, 1998).

I direct a support group for parents of children and adolescents on the autistic spectrum. Two of the biggest concerns expressed by these parents are their children’s lack of friends and the social skills necessary to get along in life. What better a place to develop friendships and learn social skills than in inclusive recreational programs.

Unfortunately, some youths with disabilities are hesitant to participate in such programs due to the threat of possible rejection or failure. Therefore, what are the necessary qualities that an inclusive recreation program must possess in order for youths with disabilities to feel welcomed and accommodated? What barriers must be overcome to attain successful integration? In order for inclusion to be successful, both physical and social integration should be considered. Also, the philosophy and attitude that integration is possible for all children is crucial in order to provide the necessary supports for positive inclusive recreational experiences. A team consisting of agencies, professionals, parents and youths must work together to determine how best to encourage participation and interaction and what supports are needed to make this possible. What types of direct or indirect supports should be provided to increase the young adult’s participation in activities and their interactions with others? Supports that provide social interactions and friendships (support people modeling appropriate behavior, support people providing a connecting link between youths and then backing off when necessary) along with individualization and flexibility (constant adaptation of the types and levels of supports needed) are key elements in developing positive experiences for all youths (Walker, P, Shoultz, B. (n.d.). What considerations must be addressed in order to make the recreation a positive experience for the youth? Most agencies look toward the parents for these answers. “Typically, parents have the most influence on whether or not their children will participate in inclusive recreation and leisure” (Modell, 1998). As a parent of a child with high functioning autism, I totally agree with this statement.

When my son was six years old, he joined a t-ball team. Before the first practice and game, I contacted all of the parents on my son’s team and told them that he had high functioning autism. I also provided them with information regarding his social deficits and different behaviors. From the first practice through the last game, the other parents were very supportive in encouraging my son’s peers without disabilities to model the desired behaviors, and occasionally adapted the levels of support for my son to successfully handle the many rules of the game. Because of the attitudes, acceptance, and flexibility portrayed by both the parents and his peers, my son had a very positive experience playing t-ball that season. If I had not provided the other parents with any information on autism and how it affected my son’s behavior, the experience could have turned out quite differently.

In 1997, Scott J. Modell, Ph.D., Professor, Sacramento State, conducted a study to investigate inclusive recreational patterns of children with disabilities through the eyes of their parents. The study revealed five categories of responses that emerged as a result of

the survey. Category one: learning from diversity, developed from the parents wanting their children to participate in a heterogeneous atmosphere – the real world. Society, itself, is inclusive and children should interact with all children regardless of race, religion or disability. Category two: learning from each other, resulted from the feeling that inclusive experiences were important for learning and awareness to take place. Category three: communication, expressed the beliefs that a main benefit of inclusion was that children with and without disabilities were given the opportunity to communicate with each other. Category four: developing socially, focused on the importance of disabled children to develop socially appropriate behavior, friendships and social skills. It was felt that in order for children to develop acceptable behaviors, they must be exposed to it. Lastly, category five: barriers to participation, mostly identified the frustrations experienced with both programmatic (safety, lack of programs) and attitudinal barriers (acceptance and ignorance) (Modell, 1998).

“Inclusive recreation and leisure can provide innumerable opportunities for youths with and without disabilities to interact and increase their overall quality of life” (Modell, 1998). Although, ongoing and informal opportunities of interaction between youths with and without disabilities is crucial for the development of positive attitudes, integration alone does not guarantee successful experiences if a child has a social skills deficit. While typical children learn these basic skills simply by exposure to social situations, children on the autism spectrum need to be taught skills explicitly by trained personnel and then provided reinforcement through a more structured environment.

As I reflect on the attributes necessary for youths with disabilities to become successful adults in the workforce and in life (eg., making choices, taking turns, following directions, performing as a team, conversing appropriately), I believe these skills can be learned by integrating them with non-disabled youths within a positive environment such as an inclusive recreational program, but only if the appropriate training and supports are in place to make the experiences successful.

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INCLUSIVE RECREATION IN NEVADA

Data and Programs

Southern Nevada - City and County Adaptive Parks and Recreation Services

Henderson Parks and Recreation – The Henderson Parks and Recreation Leisure Services provides programming for **10 participants with Autism a month** in their specialized programs for individuals who are 14 and older. The majority of their **services for individuals with Autism for children under the age of 14**. Currently, they have **50 children with Autism who participate in general recreation programs**. Their core programs are R.E.C. and B.L.A.S.T. programs. They are Mon – Fri, approx. 4 hrs/day in the afternoons. These are year round programs. They are for individuals with disabilities who are 14 years and older, any ability level. (Approximately 90 participants registered for these programs). They also offer weekly programs (meet 1x/wk) in the evening and on weekends for individuals with disabilities as well as one day special events. Most of these are for teens and adults. These also change each brochure season. (As few as 4 participants and up to 10 on occasion).

Sheri Cordray, Director of Adaptive Services, noted several barriers to providing additional community-based programs. First, it is difficult to find an ample pool of qualified applicants to choose from (experience with disabilities, recreation, leadership, etc.). Second, the working budget and now current cuts make it difficult to fund additional staff (part time and full time), supplies, facility space, vehicles, etc. for specialized programs. Third, they previous barriers make it difficult to keep up with the demand for services. Fourth, it is difficult to identify what types of recreation opportunities individuals with disabilities would like to do. They would prefer to provide services based on what people want rather than what they think people want. Finally, they struggle with getting others to “buy in” to the need for more programming. For example,

they must compete for dollars and space with other who do not view the need for these services as important.

City of Las Vegas - The City of Las Vegas Adaptive Programs provides inclusive and segregated leisure and recreation programming for an average of **30-40 youth and adults with Autism each month**. There have been requests for more segregated programming for children with Autism from a local non-profit Autism agency. However, the city noted that they have difficulty in finding space and adequate staff to run specialized activities (e.g., gymnastics) for children with Autism, similar to experiences faced by the City of Henderson. The city does not keep data on primary diagnosis or secondary diagnosis nor do they count repeat participants. They are more concerned with needs, desires, and abilities of participants.

Recreation for Adults with ASD

Goodfriends:Las Vegas Young Adult HF Autism/LD Meetup Group

Purpose-To provide friendship, support, and fun to high-functioning young adults ages 18-32 in the Las Vegas/Henderson area who have Asperger's Syndrome (or are on the Autism Spectrum), ADD, or other learning disabilities. We will have a get-together once monthly to talk, share, and plan a fun activity; and then a meet up to have fun at a pre-planned location. If you could use friends who understand you and more fun, please contact us. The majority of regular meetings and meet-ups will be held on Saturdays. Potential members must be HIGH FUNCTIONING AND EITHER BE WORKING IN THE COMMUNITY OR ATTENDING SCHOOL. (All meet-ups will be smoke and alcohol-free, and members must be emotionally stable.)

COMMUNITY INCLUSION

BARRIERS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Barriers to Community Inclusion

- ASD is not well understood by the general public. There are misconceptions resulting from media coverage and other sources.
- Links to community agencies, services and support groups are not found in any centralized location. Professionals and families receive information and supports in a hit and miss approach.
- Recreation programs for adults are more commonly segregated and there are few if any supports available to facilitate the use of existing community programs.

- There are inadequate services and supports for individuals with ASD thus hindering their participation in inclusive community environments.
- Lack of resources to support and guide individuals with ASD living in the community independently or semi-independently, especially individuals who do not qualify for regional center services.
- Adults with ASD are limited in their choices of housing needs, therefore they are frequently found living with their family or in a group home. There are no individualized living situations (e.g. apartments) offering on-site / on-call support staff. If living independently, there are inadequate supports to ensure success.
- Adults with ASD are often not given the dignity of choice and be supported by those who know them best.
- Adults are floundering in their communities due to the lack of supports. There is no vehicle to assist adults with ASD who are in crisis.
- Mental health services for individuals with ASD are inadequate and offered by service providers who do not understand the disability and may misinterpret behavior.

Community Inclusion Recommendations:

1. Initiate a state campaign to increase awareness of ASD and to educate the general public by using a strength-based portrayal of individuals with ASD. Use public service announcements to share “best practice” information about ASD and direct inquiries about ASD to reliable sources.
2. Utilize a centralized web-based information site to link all ASD supports and services. Provide access to hard copies of that information at libraries and public agencies.
3. Provide single point of entry for families and individuals with ASD to access resources in Nevada. Link all services and supports available through a central clearinghouse.
4. Develop a system to provide information, services and supports for adults with ASD so that they may live, work and recreate within their community.
5. Support individuals with ASD through knowledgeable staff and include those who know them best in the decision-making. Develop guidelines for serving individuals with ASD and ensure competency of staff providing support.

6. Adults with ASD should be free to choose their living situations, receive financial information/supports, legal representation, appropriate medical and dental services, mental health services, access to inclusive recreation, vocational training, and employment in their communities.
7. Adults with ASD should experience an acceptable quality of life and live free of isolation and harm. A support network for adults should be available.
8. Individuals with ASD should receive training and supports to utilize public transportation. Public transportation employees need to understand ASD and needs for support to avert crises in the community.
9. Encourage inclusion of students with Autism in school based programming to encourage the development of natural supports, friendships, and appropriate social skills leading to full participation in their community as they transition into adulthood.
10. Create an NEVADA AUTISM HELP & SUPPORT LINE so families and individuals with ASD can receive appropriate and timely support in a crisis.
11. Create an interactive on-line support site where parents and individuals with Autism can ask questions and receive answers.
12. Parents of individuals with ASD need access to information and services on life-planning prior to the time they can no longer care for their children or adult children.
13. Children and adults should receive self-directed funding through a community-based waiver

PUBLIC COMMENTARY

***Comments and concerns shared by parents upon request from the
Transition, Employment, and Community Inclusion Subcommittee.***

(See table on the following pages.)

PARENT 1	PARENT 2	PARENT 3	PARENT 4	PARENT 5
CSN	My son, ___ who will be 20 in May 2008, has been attending CSN (Charleston campus) part time. He is interested in the law. His idol is Judge Judy. He usually takes 2 classes per semester. He wants to take a course over the summer. I think he may ultimately transfer to UNLV.	Graduated UNLV	-	-
Appointed.	For the most part, my son has been receiving supports at CSN. Joe Garcia from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) has been great with ____, helping him deal with his instructors, and they with him. ____ gets extra time on tests, and has a note taker.	He was registered with the student assistance office, but needed no extra support.	-	-
Frustrated due to the understanding of time.	He's still attending CSN.	No	-	-
Drop several classes to focusing status and ask.	He has successfully completed his coursework, especially the English classes, which are extremely difficult for him. I have helped him when he has asked for help. At present, he is taking a public speaking class, which is particularly difficult for him. CSN has tutoring for students (all students), but in the subjects where ____ needs it most, it doesn't work (i.e., English – it's not a black and white subject and each instructor has their own spin on the topic).	Yes	-	-
Admission criteria (he missed meeting the Millennium criteria) having Asperger's and as voc rehab and not understanding time as well.	His support at CSN, our support, and the fact that he is going part time.	He was focused on a major that interested him. He had financial support to attend.	-	-
Need a vocational assessment and counseling on going one hour for college degree	I have many concerns about ____ transitioning into the community such as supporting himself, taking care of himself.	We had a large concern he would be able to find employment with his disability.	-	-
Time limited	? I think that for someone like ____, who is extremely intelligent, but needs some support, if there were programs to make him independent, it would be a lot cheaper than if were on the dole.	No, he was successful in college and securing employment in his field of study	-	-
Job transition job and	Desert Regional Center has accepted ____, but has no funding to help with In Home Services. ____ needs help in learning to shave; how to cook and clean, and finances.	N/A	-	-
	____ has had services from Voc Rehab. He has had an assessment through Goodwill; did a community assessment with an attorney; has used a job developer; and a job coach. Funding is a real issue. It almost seems like a lot of the agencies are redundant.	Have you experienced any problems with any services? We use national services, like the Washington Center in Washing DC to obtain a summer internship for him. There was nothing locally.	-	-
Lack of social skills	There's a new group, called GoodFriends, which has young adults just like ____. The group is for young adults 18-32. They usually meet once a month or every other month to plan activities, and then meet another time to	No	-	-

PARENT 1	PARENT 2	PARENT 3	PARENT 4	PARENT 5
	do an activity. So far, they have gone bowling, movies, Springs Preserve, GameWorks, pot luck dinner, and will be doing a community service activity at a nursing home.			
	My son is not involved in any recreational activities.	No	-	-
Individual needs well as ongoing	I have many concerns about _____ transitioning into the work world, such as an employer who understands him, as well as him adapting to the "real world".	Yes, he interviewed numerous times, but he couldn't compete with his peers. Even when he disclosed his condition it didn't help.	-	-
	Structure has worked well for _____, as well as someone who understands _____'s idiosyncrasies.	Washington Center in Washing DC has a program for disabled students to obtain internships with federal agencies.	-	-
off several times to skills. His last job he had someone s autism, etc. His job back.	_____ is working as a front-end clerk (bagger) at Smith's. He is looking for another job that is more structured, especially the hours.	Yes he is working.	He worked at Albertson's for 1 1/2 years and did a great job. His qualifications are great.	-
e was just getting by l became disinterest al peer level.	We are working on it.	So far yes.	-	-
o quit and try a e.	_____ has not been able to find a part time job at a law firm. He had a job at a law firm, but was fired because _____ decided to do things his way, instead of the way the employer wanted.	Yes, he is fully employed in his field of study with a salary that will allow him to live independently.	-	-
nal Rehab has been a e impression. The counselor has a was hard to make e individual (child) to a waiting list of en we had to go pe presentation - no n contact of support. ad our meeting with a n, the counselor was ruly understanding the nd there was multi paperwork! They do ore assessments, ts, college support to go part time instead most of all: financial d and scholarships are with Autism. I was h the Voc Rehab	Voc Rehab has been most generous with their services, although it can be a fight at times	My one call to them was negative. They had no programs to support high end Aspergers.	My son is now 20 years old and has High Functioning Autism. He has been cooperating with Voc. Rehab for 2 years. He has attended scheduled meetings and filled out all paper work, got his health card, and driver's license. In two years he has not even gotten a job interview through Voc. Rehab. VR has been difficult to work with and when we call them we're told people are out sick and it takes time and we need to be patient. Last fall, our assigned case worker wanted to remove our case because he claimed there was no response, or that we were difficult to get a hold of, which is something we've never been accused of. After a strained discussion with our caseworker, he decided to keep our case, although my son has still never received job interviews or direction. After a few more months of nothing, I have recently requested to be dropped off the VR caseload. I really don't understand why it is so difficult for my son to get an interview. An idea I have to improve these services is to get qualified, honest, ambitious people, trained in autism and other areas of special needs to work with employers and others. It seems there should also be more accountability with VR or other agency staff. Our VR caseworker contacted us rarely, but claimed to have left messages on my cell phone and home phone. I have talked with companies that were willing to work with my son	X hasn't actually had a lot of experience with Voc Rehab. He had a counselor BN out in NLV during and post high school. Because of them, he was unable to connect with two summer jobs through Nevada Business Services, eventually lost the Voc Rehab--I remember her saying they had no funding for X--because we got him a job for a year at the Deseret Industries which is a donation-based organization of our church.

PARENT 1	PARENT 2	PARENT 3	PARENT 4	PARENT 5
			<p>in the program and still waiting for VR to contact them for further information. Each time we call VR we are told it takes time.... I am not sure what the placement agencies names were that contracted with VR, but we were transferred from one to another and still got the same inconsistencies. To me "The proof is in the pudding" saying is applicable in this case. Appropriate training and accountability is critical to truly assist my son and others to gain meaningful employment.</p>	
<p>college would be more</p>	<p>_____ has been receiving services of a job coach, but did not get along with her; we are in the process of changing job coaches.</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>-</p>	<p>He's had two summer jobs through Nevada Business Services. The first before his Junior year, was as a custodian assistant at Beatty Elementary. I believe he made \$5 hr. The next summer, Nevada Business Services arranged for X to assist in a copy room at the school. He worked with a very nice man there, and that went well. After that, I believe they assisted in getting him a job at Target which went very badly--He was meeting the public and directing people to things--He was semi-fired. He had a job for a year at the Deseret Industries which is a donation-based organization of our church. It went very very well. That was only for one year--and he became affiliated with Goodwill Industries. He worked first at a plant on Maryland Pwy. and that didn't go very well. So he moved out to the West Sahara location for about a year and that went okay. After that, we assisted him in getting a job cleaning planes--that was barely okay but he did it. X became fixated on a girl. It was about then that DRC arranged for him to become affiliated with Progressive Choices, a sub of DRC, who did job coaching and got X started at UNLV washing dishes. He did that for about a year and a half through them--and UNLV offered him a full-time position washing pots and pans--he did that for about 2 years with Progressive Choices doing just follow along for minimum hours. I really liked the employee who was a Progressive Choices employee and job coach. However, he was very displeased with Progressive Choices when UNLV had to cut his hours back and we began looking for something else. The guy, J, with Progressive was actually rather ugly.</p> <p>We assisted X in getting an application with the school district for custodian and then he went on probably two interviews unsuccessfully until one head custodian decided to give him a chance. Sounds like a fairy tale, huh? During this last eight months, DRC continued to provide funding for job coaching for X through Transition Services--his job coach is K, and she</p>

PARENT 1	PARENT 2	PARENT 3	PARENT 4	PARENT 5
				<p>has been wonderful. I'm very pleased with them. Without her help, I do not know if X could have made progress. Because X made too much as customer he lost his Medicaid--However, D has kept him on for minimum in-lieu of SLA and job coaching.</p>

