

An overview of Transition Services for Adolescents and Young Adults with an Autism

Spectrum Disorder

Bradley Bloomfield

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Superheroes social skills training, Rethink Autism internet interventions, parent training, EBP classroom training, functional behavior assessment: An autism spectrum disorder, evidence based (EBP) training track for school psychologists.

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Principal Investigators:

William R. Jenson, PhD

Elaine Clarke, PhD

Aaron J. Fischer, PhD

Grant Director:

Julia Hood, PhD

University of Utah
Department of Educational Psychology
School Psychology Program

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Introduction

The purpose of this monograph is to briefly discuss the characteristics and criteria of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), particularly how it relates to young adults. In addition, the current state of transition programming and the requirements for transition services will be addressed.. Primarily, this monograph will address six programs designed to bridge the gap in transition programming for young adults with an ASD: Campus Based Inclusion Model (CBIM), Project SEARCH, JobTIPS, College Living Experience (CLE), College Internship Program (CIP), and Ramapo for Children: Staff Assistant Experience (SAE). When reviewing the mentioned programming, particular care will focus on the evidence base of components included in each package as well as the successful outcomes of the programming.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that is characterized by differences in how the brain functions. Individuals with ASD may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in different ways than neurotypical peers. Signs of an ASD begin during early childhood and usually last throughout a person's life (Center for Disease Control and Prevention: Autism Report, 2014). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders – Fifth Edition (DSM-5) has two main diagnostic criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder: persistent deficits in social communication and

social interactions, and restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities (American Psychological Association, 2013).

The deficits in social communication and social interactions are manifested by deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, deficits in nonverbal communication behaviors, and deficits in developing, maintaining and understanding relationships. Based on the DSM-5, The criteria regarding restricted and repetitive patterns of interest include the following behaviors: stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech; insistence on sameness, inflexibility adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior; highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus; and hyper- or hyporeactivity to sensory input or unusual interests in sensory aspects of the environment. Additionally, symptoms must cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning (American Psychological Association, 2013).

The prevalence of ASD has steadily increased across the past 20 years. Specifically, the prevalence of ASD has increased by 119.4 percent from 2000 (1 in 150) to 2010 (1 in 68) (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Now, more individuals are identified with an ASD with many of them older than identified before. While in the school system, youth identified on the spectrum can receive various services through the school system that changes as they get older. Receipt of services for individuals with ASD declines dramatically between high school and their early twenties (Roux, et. al, 2015). During high school, many students receive special education services and related services such as speech-language therapy, occupational therapy,

vocational services or career counseling, or mental health where many of these services are not presented after they graduate.

Current Status

According to the National Autism Indicators Report: Transition into Young Adulthood, (2015), as many as 50,000 youth with autism exit high school each year. Although many of those individuals will be able to live independently after graduation, most will need continued services from high school to postsecondary activities. This is increasingly difficult for many families given that the services often received while in the school system terminate upon graduation from high school.

This sudden drop off of services is often referred to “falling off a cliff” due to the rapidly declining number of services for individuals on the autism spectrum after secondary school. Approximately 26% of young adults do not receive any services after secondary school (Roux, et. al, 2015). After special education services end, many do not qualify for adult services and thus do not receive any services. In addition to not qualifying for many services, often services that are available and comprehensive to support the complex needs of this population are very costly. Affordable quality programming is very difficult for many families to find.

Upon leaving high school, there are many options for postsecondary activities for young adults with the majority looking for further education or employment. Although some individuals with an autism spectrum disorder can successfully make this transition, many will not succeed without further supports. Some of the options for individuals with ASD where supports may be available include postsecondary education such as college

or vocational training. Employment opportunities that are available include integrated or supported employment specifically geared towards individuals with special needs. Adult services can continue with options such as social skills groups, support groups, and individual supports. Further, independent living options may include group homes or residential programs, depending on the need of the individual (Roux, et. al, 2015).

With the incidence of ASD on the rise the growing need for services and supports is also increasing. According to Shattuck and colleagues (2012), 34.9% of individuals with ASD have not participated in any postsecondary employment or school. Prior to graduation, transition services can help make that transition more successful yet youth with an autism spectrum disorder receive transition services half as often as youth with special health care needs (Cheak-Zamora, et al., 2012). Further, Cheak-Zamora and colleagues (2012) noted that the presence of comorbid conditions decreased receipt of transition services. Without receiving services, many young adults on the autism spectrum may have difficulty with having a successful transition from secondary education to postsecondary work or school.

Research as well as resources for postsecondary employment or education are limited. Most research addresses the characteristics of young adults with ASD, and the lack of research on programs and models for this population (e.g., Hendricks, & Wehman, 2009; Wehman, et al., 2014; Westbrook, et al., 2015). Without evidence based guiding programming, and models for services, families and providers can be at a loss for what is best to provide to this population.

Postsecondary education is often thought to be the next step after high school. According to Taylor and Seltzer (2011), 14% of students with ASD interviewed were in

some sort of post-secondary education program. Moreover, separating individuals with and without intellectual disability (ID), nearly 50% of youths with ASD without ID were pursuing a post-secondary educational degree (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). Although this percentage is considerably below the rate of college or university attendance for their peers who do not have ASD (62–69%; Planty, Hussar, Snyder, Provasnik, Kena, Dinkes, ..., & Kemp, 2008), it suggests that the pursuit of a post-secondary degree is a viable option for many youths with ASD who do not have ID. For those individuals pursuing a college education, it is necessary to identify what supports are necessary to help make these individuals successful. Zager and Alpern (2010) identified that Social and vocational communication supports are necessary components of a postsecondary education program.

According to the National Autism Indicators Report: Transition into Young Adulthood (2015), 36% of young adults with an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis in their findings have ever attempted a postsecondary education. The level of supports provided for those students are also of concern; 40% of students who disclosed their diagnosis received some level of support in their education environment.

For postsecondary employment, the outlook is bleak. Under-employment of individuals with ASD is an international problem (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). Individuals with ASD are among those least likely to be employed (Westbrook, et al., 2015; Shattuck, et al., 2012). Employment rates for individuals with ASD, regardless of intellectual ability, reportedly range between 4.1% and 11.8% (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). In a different study, 40% of individuals with ASD have never held a job between high school and their early twenties (Roux, et. al, 2015). Moreover, only 48% of youth with

autism received job placement services (Migliore, et al., 2012). Looking at outcomes of employment, indices of behavioral functioning are also likely related to the employment activities of young adults with ASD. (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). For example, autism symptoms, maladaptive behaviors, functional independence, and comorbid psychiatric disorders are correlated with lower job success. Gerhardt and Lainer (2011) stated that job sampling with sufficient instructional intensity to develop competencies is critical for successful employment.

Although a variety of living arrangements exist, research on living outcomes yield disappointing results (Hendricks, & Wehman, 2009). A survey conducted with out of school youth reported that 80% of those who had an educational label of autism while in high school were still living at home. Only 4% of young adults who had an educational label of autism were living on their own (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). In addition, individuals with ASD live with their parents at some point between high school and their early twenties at a far higher percentage than in the general population of young adults (Roux, A. M., et. al, 2015). There is a tremendous need for additional support for young adults with ASD in order to improve their independent living outcomes

Transition Services

To help facilitate that transition from secondary to postsecondary supports for an individual on the autism spectrum, the child's team can utilize the individualized education plan (IEP) to help coordinate future transition services. Transition services are

a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that according to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004):

- Is designed to be within a results-oriented process.
- Is based on the individual child's needs.
- Includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives.

The results-oriented process focuses on improving academic and functional skills that help facilitate a child's transition from a school program into post-school services. Focusing on the child's individual needs, the coordinated set of activities highlight the child's strengths, preferences, and interests. If appropriate, transition services can also include plans for the acquisition of daily living skills and a functional vocational evaluation (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004). This is determined based on the needs of the specific child in question.

By law, it is required to have a plan for transition services as a part of a child's IEP when deemed appropriate by the IEP team. IDEA (2004) states that by the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16, or earlier if determined necessary, the IEP must include appropriate measurable postsecondary goals, the transition services necessary to achieve these goals, and informing the child of his or her rights before he or she reaches the age of majority. These postsecondary goals need to be based on age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and independent living skills. According to special education teachers, only 58% of youth with autism had a transition plan in place by the federally required age while of those, only 60% of parents participated in this transition planning (Roux, et. al, 2015).

Further, when the intent of an IEP team meeting is to create this transition plan, it is required to invite the child to participate in this meeting. The child should be an active participant in planning their future plans for success. Additionally, any outside agency that will participate in postsecondary services needs to be in attendance. Often, these plans include outside agencies that have a stake in this child's future actively or may be supporting the child through funding opportunities. Thus, they need to be invited to participate.

The purpose of this planning is to support the youth to have the most successful future in the transition to postsecondary life. To help facilitate this in a successful way, it is recommended to start early, work collaboratively, and have high expectations (Rosenblatt, Carbone, & Yu, 2013; Gerhardt & Lainer, 2011). Students are likely to make the most progress towards their transition goals when starting early. Although IDEA states it is required to have a plan starting at the IEP effective at age 16, planning can begin earlier. For example, starting at age 14, the IEP team has several years of high school to help plan coursework and services to meet the needs of the individual to teach skills for future success. Collaboration is critical between the different parties involved with the child's future. This includes the child's family, the school, any outside agencies providing services, and the child him or herself.

Transition Programming

Six program models will be evaluated for adolescents and young adults with an autism spectrum disorder. They are the Campus Based Inclusion Model (CBIM), Project SEARCH, JobTIPS, College Living Experience (CLE), College Internship Program

(CIP), and Ramapo for Children: Staff Assistant Experience (SAE). These programs represent a sample of different models for working with young adults with an autism spectrum disorder. Some of the programming is designed for high school students preparing for the transition to adulthood (i.e., CBIM, summer programs at CLE, CIP, and Ramapo for Children) and some are online training programs (i.e., JobTIPS). Further, there are programs for college and internship support with some including life skills as a component of a residential program (i.e., CLE, CIP, SAE).

Campus Based Inclusion Model (CBIM).

The Campus Based Inclusion Model (CBIM) is a partnership between urban public schools and local colleges with the mission to educate students with autism and intellectual disabilities alongside their peers. In this program, high school students attend all classes on a college campus where they fulfill secondary requirements. The students become active participants in their classes with support. They make friends, and learn among their peers with the aide of a paraprofessional or high school teacher.

, It includes options of vocational preparation experiences such as working at the campus bookstore, cafeteria, library, copying services center, and various university offices. With support, the participants have the opportunity to work on learning skills to be successful in a real-world setting.

A supplementary component of the CBIM includes weekly group and individual social communication skills sessions. Weekly group and individual sessions are provided to students in the CBIM by speech-language pathology majors at the university campus under the supervision of a licensed speech-language pathologist (Zager, & Alpern, 2010).

Under this model, the university students receive supervised experiences while the program participants can learn new skills from peers close to their age.

This model has been implemented in collaboration with Pace University for students age 18-21 with special needs (Zager, Alpern, Meadow, & Salisch, 2006). This gives students the opportunity to fully integrate into the college experience. Working with pre-service teachers, both the educators and the students can benefit and learn from each other. The teachers can apply theory to practice while the students have an aid to help with their education. Pre- and post-testing using the Comprehensive Assessment of Spoken Language (CASL) has shown positive improvements for the majority of participants. The CASL is used, specifically the Pragmatic Judgment subtest, to document language difficulties in this population. This was used to set specific goals for the students (Zager, & Alpern, 2010). Students role-played both the speaker and listener in a reciprocal conversation to practice appropriate responses. At retest, three of the four students showed significant improvement in test scores (Zager, & Alpern, 2010).

Project SEARCH.

Designed at Cincinnati Children's Hospital, Project SEARCH is a 9-month internship model for youth with developmental disabilities in their last year of high school. During these nine months, each participant has three 10-12 week internships totaling 900 hours. Approximately 720 hours are direct internship hours where they learn marketable skills. The remaining 180 hours of the internship experience is earned in classroom time at the business. These internships are embedded in a large community business where the participants gain skills for competitive employment. For example, the

students who have an internship in a doctor's office working on skills such as filing charts in alphabetical order, shredding materials, and scanning medical records (Wehman, et al., 2014).

The goal of the program is competitive employment. That is, employment in an integrated setting with work year round. The hope is for 20 or more hours of work each week where the employee is earning minimum wage or greater. In this program, they strongly rely upon applied behavior analysis as a mechanism for systematic instruction

A randomized clinical trial on Project SEARCH resulted in 21 out of 24 (87.5 %) participants in the treatment group acquired employment (Wehman, et al., 2014). In the control group, 1 of 16 (6.25 %) of participants acquired employment as a result of the program. Those in the treatment group achieved employment at a statistically higher rate than participants in the control group. Many of the treatment group participants have achieved employment in competitive jobs that have not traditionally been considered for youth with ASD. Some jobs the treatment group participants obtained include a teacher's aide, doctor's office assistant, or clerical assistant (Wehman, et al., 2014). Additionally, it was observed that the students in the treatment group became increasingly independent at work than those in the control group as measured by the Support Intensity Scale Employment Activities Subscale.

JobTIPS.

JobTIPS is a web-based interviewing skills program and virtual reality practice on responses to employment interview questions for adolescents, according to the program,

with high functioning autism and Asperger's Disorder. This multimedia employment training program has five sections:

- “Determining Career Interests”
- “Finding a Job”
- “Getting a Job”
- “Keeping a Job”
- “Other Job Topics”

This program contains videos and photos of examples and non-examples to help teach the skills for employment interviews. These videos and photos are paired with worksheets, cue cards, summaries, visual schedules, and graphic organizers.

This is best for preparing for interviews. It is a useful method for working with youth with ASD who are at risk for poor performance in job interviews. The program focuses on “content” rather than “delivery” skills with trend showing an increased “content” and “delivery” skills for the intervention package (Strickland, et al., 2013). That is, participants were able to produce more appropriate verbal responses to interview questions following intervention, but the features that accompany those responses (e.g., posture, eye contact approximation, affect of facial expression) did not improve to the same degree.

JobTIPS is an affordable option for many individual families and school or private programs. The package costs \$159 a year for single user license and \$250 / year for the pro program.

College Living Experience (CLE).

The college living experience (CLE) provides comprehensive year round support for students seeking to develop academic, vocational, social and independent living skills. Individualized instruction across these areas is completed in the program center, in student's apartments, in the community, on campus and in the workplace (College Living Experience, 2015a). This helps maximize the opportunities for learning and generalizing skills across settings. The typical population for this program is 18-28 years of age.

This program typically serves young adults who have completed high school or have tried college with limited success. Participants join the program for up to two years. Some of the components included in the program are one-on-one academic tutoring, integrated daily living instruction, social skills development coaching, self-advocacy and self-determination training, and career development preparation (College Living Experience, 2015a).

Specific costs are not released yet cost of the program can be discussed with a program representative. CLE costs do not include tuition to post-secondary university, or residential and living expenses (College Living Experience, 2015d). The admissions coordinators will work with families to help find sources of funding available depending on their child's eligibility.

Included within the program is a comprehensive set of services all in one location. Supports are provided in academic strategies and independent living skills. Further, there is a group of staff that helps support success for the participants across different areas (College Living Experience, 2015d). A specific academic liaison is provided to ensure the participant is registered for appropriate classes and has appropriate services provided. A tutor works 1:1 with students to help in classes. The independent living skills

coordinator helps students manage life-skill activities. There is a case manager who monitors progress and maintains contact with the parents. On staff, there is a psychologist who leads groups and develops intervention plans to facilitate success. The program mentor helps participants practice their learned social skills. A resident advisor lives nearby the students to manage daily life and social life.

Academically, the college living experience works hard to ensure that the programming and services provided to each student is tailored into their specific educational needs. Based on each student's interests and skills, the programming is designed to help them pursue their individual field of study (College Living Experience, 2015b). While enrolled at CLE, students also enroll in a higher education school of their choice located near one of six locations across the United States: Costa Mesa California, Monterey California, Denver Colorado, Austin Texas, Fort Lauderdale Florida, and Washington DC. CLE helps its students pursue a bachelors degree, associates degree, or technical or vocational certificate (College Living Experience, 2015b).

Individuals with an autism spectrum disorder often have deficits in independent living skills. Thus, this area is a focus of the programming for CLE. To facilitate the acquisition of these skills, participants live in an apartment with a roommate near campus with a resident advisor on call as necessary. Apartment living helps give opportunities to practice skills of daily living that do not occur when living in a college dorm setting (College Living Experience, 2015c).

College Internship Program (CIP).

The College Internship Program (CIP) is a transition program that is designed to prepare young adults with Autism, ADHD, and learning differences for success. According to the organization, their mission is to “inspire independence and expand the foundation on which young adults with Asperger’s, ADHD and other Learning Differences can build happy and productive lives” (College Internship Program, 2015d). The admissions criteria for interested program participants would be a young adult age 18 to 26 with a documented diagnosis of Asperger’s syndrome, High-Functioning Autism, PDD-NOS, ADHD, NLD, Dyslexia or other Learning Differences. Further, they have low average to high intelligence with the potential to live and attend a college or career program independently. With emotional, behavioral and psychological stability, interested participants need to have a high level of motivation to meet the goals of the program.

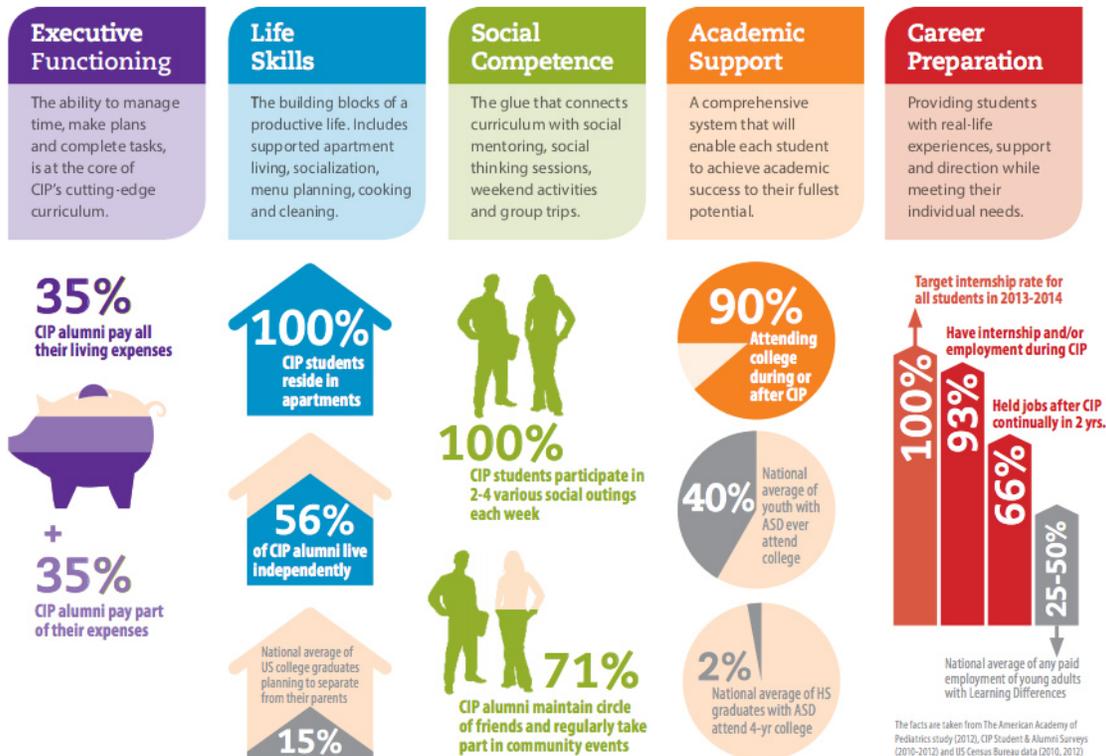
The program focuses on real-life skills in areas of social thinking, executive functioning, sensory processing and wellness (College Internship Program, 2015d). To meet these goals, there are two tracks, or areas of focus: the college/certification track or the career skills training and employment program. Students receive individualized supports in social skills, academics, internship and career skills, and life skills. When enrolled in the program, students are assessed by program staff to determine the level of support necessary.

Programs are located for both the full year and summer programs in Massachusetts, Florida, Indiana, California and New York. The tuition cost for the program is based on the individual student’s needs. The core level starts at \$59,500 per

year not including housing. The plus level starts at \$68,000 per year not including housing either.

According to the program, alumni overall show positive results when successfully completing the program as designed. As a result of this program, 70% of alumni pay all or part of their living expenses with 56% of alumni living independently (College Internship Program, 2015b; See Figure 1). Further, according to program alumni, 71% maintain a circle of friends and regularly take part in community events. Academically, the program is showing great success with 90% of participants attending college during or after the program compared to 40% of individuals with ASD (See Figure 1).

Figure 1.



College/Certification Track. Through this track, young adults can attend a local college, university or vocational program with CIP's support and direction. Through this comprehensive system of support, participants will be able to achieve academic success when often have not prior. For example, young adults in this track have individual tutoring sessions scheduled throughout the week (College Internship Program, 2015a). The program staff members work closely with the university faculty members to find classes and professors that will help lead to success.

Career Skills Training & Employment Program. Through this track, participants can take part in C-STEP, CIP's career development track offering hand-on, small group classes and more extensive internship and job positions (College Internship Program, 2015c). The internship and job experiences are designed to be real-life situations with support and direction to facilitate success.

CIP has summer programs where students can experience independence and try a college life experience. This short, two-week program helps provide young individuals with some skills necessary for a successful transition to college and beyond. There is a high school program for individuals entering 10th through 12th grade as well as recent high school graduates. For older individuals, there is a "beyond high school" program for high school graduates through age 26.

Participants in the Summer@CIP program spend two weeks on a college campus learning skills and gaining experience in fun and exciting activities. Participants experience independent living and use the CIP curriculum focusing on social skills, executive functioning and organization (College Internship Program, 2015e). The

summer program has a cost of \$4500 including \$300 that will be returned to the participant in cash to practice budgeting and handling money.

Ramapo for Children: Staff Assistant Experience (SAE).

The Staff Assistant Experience (SAE) through the organization Ramapo for Children is a residential transition-to-independence program designed for young adults age 18-25. Specifically, they target individuals who seek increased self-sufficiency. The participants, called staff assistants, are interested in exploring college coursework, employment opportunities, and independent living. Through the SAE, the diverse set of participants have had a history of learning challenges, Asperger's/high-functioning autism, Nonverbal learning disability (NVLD), pervasive developmental disorder (PDD), or Attention-deficit, hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The program stay is from six months to two years while most participate from nine months to a year.

Ramapo for Children believes that the young people who would be most successful in this program would benefit from a structured program, which offers coaching on life skills. Further, individuals need support and supervision to develop a social network and manage free time (Staff Assistant Experience, 2015). Through this program, the participants learn independence skills such as healthy eating habits, physical fitness, organization, time management, meal planning and preparation, budgeting, laundry, hygiene/grooming, housekeeping.

The SAE program is a residential program hosted on Ramapo's Rhinebeck, New York campus. Staff Assistants are immersed in Ramapo's thriving Rhinebeck campus community. On this campus, there is a year-round retreat program serving over 8,000

people annually, and a cohort of residential staff with whom they interact frequently (Ramapo for Children, 2015). Further, there is a summer camp serving youth with social, emotional, and learning challenges serving over 500 youth annually with an additional staff members.

Each day on this residential campus, there are Ramapo staff members on duty from 7am to 10pm with staff on call each night. Many staff that work with the staff assistants live on the campus as well. Each staff assistant has a roommate who is a neurotypical peer who serves as a mentor. Although there are no clinical staff members on residence, staff assistants are referred to clinicians in the community for medical and mental health needs.

Some highlighted components of the SAE program include nightly recreational activities, health and fitness activities, job support, college support, and an outdoor component. Each night, there is a sponsored recreational activity for the staff assistants so that they can practice the social skills they have been learning with the other peers on camp. According to the director of the staff assistant experience, they find health and fitness education to be a critical component of the program. With increased health, they notice a great impact on mood. Thus, Ramapo has a fitness trainer on staff for the staff assistants. The staff assistants receive nutrition lessons, cooking lessons, and individual fitness training.

Situated on a 250 acre campus, the organization tries to take advantage of the space available to offer an enhanced program utilizing the space to expand a gardening program as well as use the space for outdoor activities. There are several gardens available on campus where staff assistants and program staff can help grow different

foods for the residents to cook and eat as a part of the healthy living program. There are hiking trails and outdoor spaces to be used for activities.

This program is different from others as each staff assistant works alongside other staff on campus. They each have a job coach and work on different teams around the campus (i.e., retreat, maintenance, kitchen, or cleaning). At the end of each work period, the job coach and the staff assistant each take time individually to reflect on their job performance. After the reflection, they come together and discuss the behaviors exhibited by the staff assistant to start or do more of, stop or do less of, or continue. This performance feedback is also written and documented daily.

Goal setting is critical to helping achieve success. Each staff assistant creates goals within their work, home, and social environment at Ramapo for Children for which they can work towards. Further, these goals are specific, observable, measurable, and achievable. For example, within the work setting, staff assistants are working toward their goals and have frequent progress monitoring through these daily meetings with their job coach. Paired with goal setting, reinforcement for goal attainment is included in the form of a \$50 weekly stipend.

Goal setting is one part of the many components of the staff assistant experience yet very important. According to Carr and colleagues (2014), setting one's own goals as a component of an intervention may help individuals be more successful. Although there were limited studies for individuals on the autism spectrum, the interventions reviewed did show some success with helping those individuals achieve independent functioning.

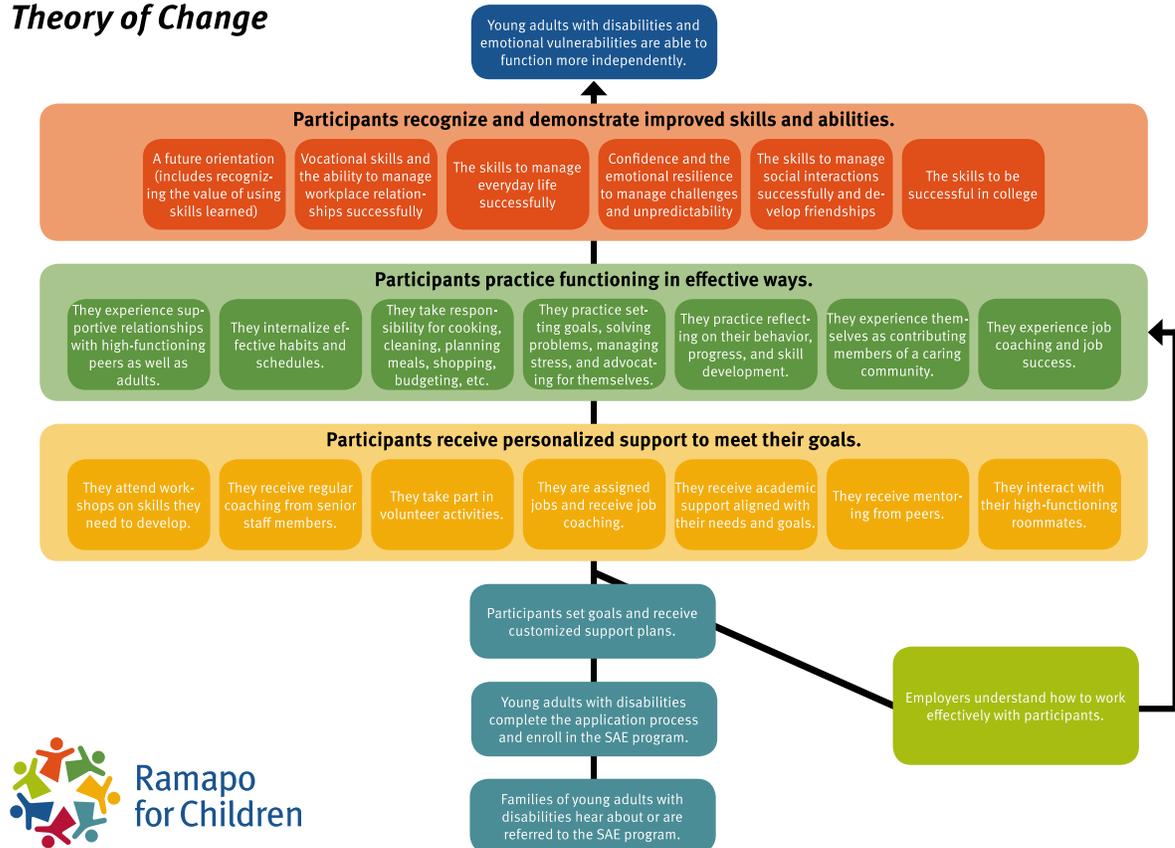
In addition to goal setting, repetition of the skill across settings and acknowledgement of improved skills and abilities are key components of the SAE theory

of change (see Figure 2). With support, staff assistants can experience success and learn effective habits for responsibility and practice self-reflection

Further, parent training and support phone calls occur on a monthly basis for families of participants. With many participants coming from all across the country, it is necessary to use alternative forms of communication other than in person trainings and support. Vismara and colleagues (2013) have found positive results for parent training provided through telehealth to families of children with autism. This additional component of remote parent training is designed as a part of a comprehensive package of supported interventions.

Figure 2.

Staff Assistant Experience Theory of Change



Ramapo for Children has many relationships with local businesses in the community. In partnership with these community businesses, the staff assistants can have opportunities to work with these businesses and hopefully maintain these jobs after the staff assistant program. Ramapo and the SAE staff continue to work with the staff assistants to help find jobs where they will be successful once they leave the program.

Some participants in the SAE have tried college or are interested in college. To help structure for success, staff assistants start with one or two classes at a local community college. After a semester where they show success and responsibility, staff

assistants may continue to enroll in more classes with the goal of becoming a full time student.

For some individuals who have a difficult time with the transition from the staff assistant experience to independent living, there is an option for the SAE post program. This program is designed to help staff assistants after they get a job in the community. For an additional year, the young adults may continue to live on campus while beginning their transition to independent living. This is a more structured transition from the residential program to independent living after the program.

During the post program, the participants maintain their living on campus while working off campus at a local job in the community. Staff assistants work on maintaining the job while working on securing independent living. Staff members assist program participants in searching for an apartment and gaining the necessary skills to make independence, in work or college, successful.

The current make-up of the staff assistant experience is 17 staff assistants: 14 as a part of SAE and 3 as a part of the post program. The program tuition is approximately \$5,000 per month yet many of the staff assistants are on scholarship. Additionally, a few of the participants are paid from their home school districts. Staff assistants come from all across the country. Further, the participants enter from various activities prior to the staff assistant experience; some staff assistants come directly from high school while others come after trying college first.

Conclusion

As services and evidence-based practice for individuals with an autism spectrum

disorder continue to expand, the same level of service needs to expand across the lifespan and spectrum. For school-aged children and adolescents, services are plenty yet once they leave the school system many families are scrambling to support their children, now young adults, on the spectrum. This is described as “falling off the cliff” where 28% of young adults who were not employed and also not attending higher education had no services (Roux, et. al, 2015). Some individuals can successfully transition to employment or postsecondary education independently yet many individuals on the autism spectrum need additional support and are not receiving it.

In closing, there are several private programs that try to meet this gap in services. That is, these programs help provide support to meet the needs of these young adults on the autism spectrum and help teach them some skills to successfully transition to independence. Six programs have been discussed: the Campus Based Inclusion Model (CBIM), Project SEARCH, JobTIPS, College Living Experience (CLE), College Internship Program (CIP), and Ramapo for Children: Staff Assistant Experience (SAE). Through the successful completion of one of these programs, adolescents and young adults on the autism spectrum will learn skills to transition effectively transition to independence in postsecondary education, on the job, or independently living.

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