

Transitioning to Adulthood: Employment Strategies and Life Skills for Teens and Young Adults with ASD

Patricia O'Connor

Sarah Duhaime, MSW, RSW



AutismONTARIO
see the potential *voir le potentiel*



The Redpath Centre

- The Redpath Centre opened in 2008 in Toronto to address the social and emotional needs of children, adolescents and adults with Asperger Syndrome and mental health concerns through best practices, cross-sector collaboration, education and research
- We offer psychological assessments, occupational therapy, speech assessment/therapy, individual, couple, family and group therapy, vocational and educational coaching



Client Profile

- Young adult usually between 18-35 years old
- Often possessing some education (college/university completed or partially completed)
- Social isolation - limited involvement in one's community after leaving school
- Co-morbid mental health issues



Background Patricia O'Connor

- 2010: Retired – Approached by families and individuals with ASD – What's next?
- 2012: In conjunction with **Autism Ontario**, applied for an **Autism Speaks** Grant
- 2013: Wrote and taught the first pilot course
- 2014: Autism Ontario and Integrated Autism Consulting applied for a grant through the **Ministry of Economic Development, Infrastructure and Employment**



Why is this Topic Important ?

- 87% of Ontarians with ASD surveyed reported being unemployed or under-employed
- For the full report:

[Diversity in Ontario's Youth and Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Complex Needs in Unprepared Systems](#)



Challenges for Young Adults with ASD



Image source <http://johnholcroft.com/portfolio6.html>

- Organizational issues at work and school
- Lack of employment experience
- Social-emotional maturation
- Limited social engagement
- Issues with anxiety and depression
- Gaps in community supports



Core Issue One - Disclosure

- If/When and to who? There is no right answer. If you do not disclose, it is still important to share about your “different learning style”
- If you struggle with interviewing, it is important to disclose and request some accommodations prior to this time.
- Consider writing a letter to yourself to start identifying what you may need to do your best job

Bissonnette, B. (2009) *The Employer's Guide to Asperger's Syndrome*



Core Issue Two - Finding the Right Match

- People with ASD often struggle with “theory of mind” (putting yourself in someone else’s shoes)
- Ways to explore career options: Through experiences such as volunteering, co-op, informational interviews, job shadowing



Finding the Right Match

- Formal tools that review skills, personality type, interests and values such as:
 - Career Cruising (free at any local library or school), Myers Briggs, John Holland Codes, HRSDC links, online research, etc.
- What did you daydream about when you were younger?
- Bounce ideas off of someone (ex. a parent, teacher, mentor, etc).
- Onetonline.org



Core Issue Three - Being Social at Work

- It is important to acknowledge that many people are not social at work due to anxiety. Coping strategies are necessary to address this issue.
 - Establish a workplace mentor
 - Use small talk social skills strategies to identify 1-2 “work friends”
 - Script where possible
 - Negotiate the social



Core Issue Four - Where and How to Look for Work

- Career Services at college or university
- ODSP Employment Supports
- Temporary agencies
- Local Employment Resource Centres
- Other strategies include: cold contacting and networking/scheduling informational interviews. Most places do not accept in person resumes today. If you are interested in a company, start by checking out their website.



Transition to Life: Project Description

- The intent of this project is to respond to the increasing needs of young adults in Ontario with Autism Spectrum Disorder transitioning from the secondary school setting into independent living.
- There is currently a significant gap in services and supports for this population.



Program Outcomes

- Increased independence
- Increased social opportunities
- Increased confidence
- Increased employment skills



Transition to Life

- **12 week**, three hours per week, certificate course focusing on skills necessary for transition to independent living
- Weekly **individual coaching**
- Relevant and **practical mandatory assignments**
- **Community based activities** to reinforce weekly goals



Transition to Life

- Weekly structured social opportunities
- Involve individuals with ASD in the writing/teaching process and as program mentors
- Volunteer, supported or work placement
- Access research/evaluation information



Criteria for Involvement

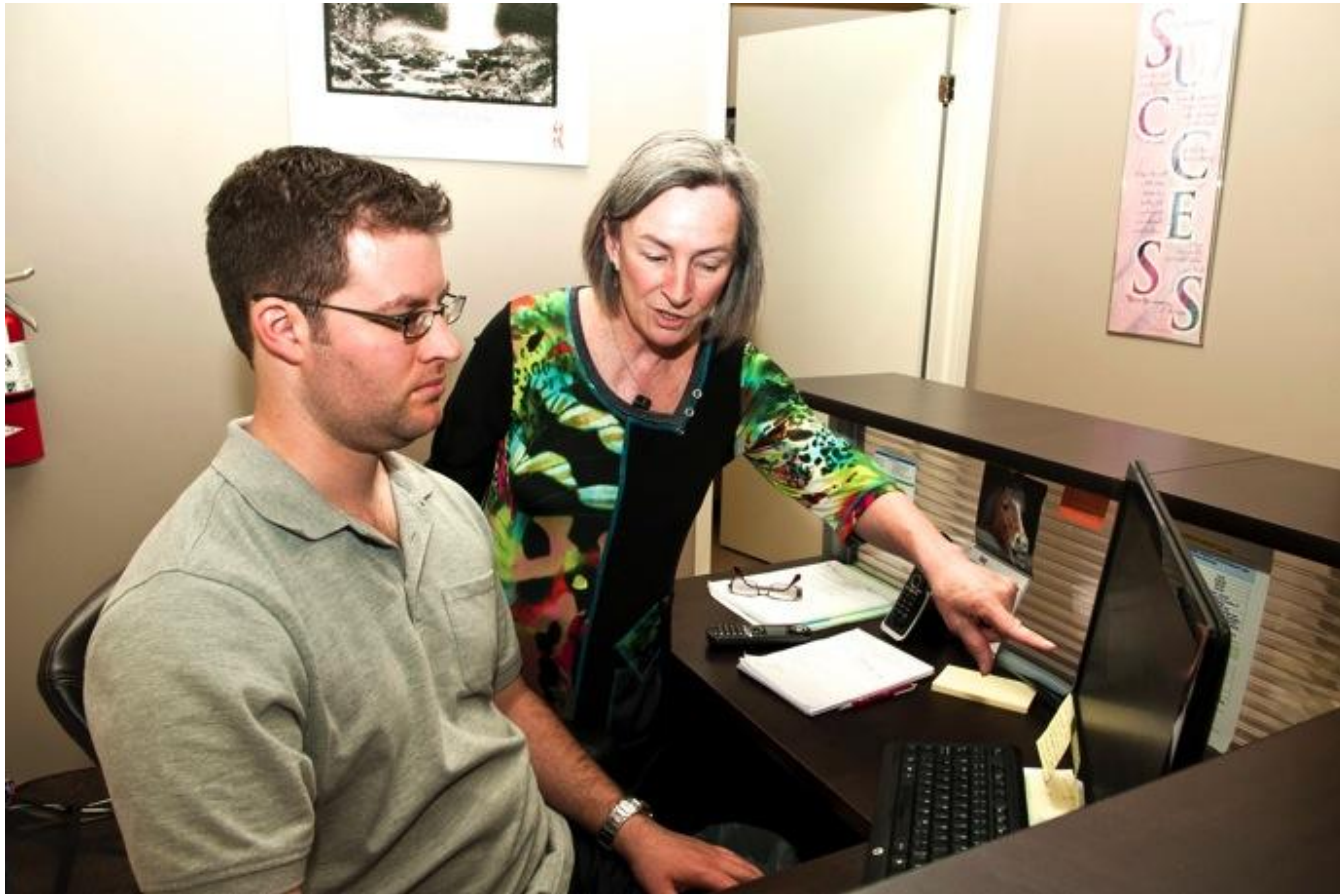
- Documented diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder (Asperger's Syndrome)
- Ages 18-28
- High level of motivation to meet program goals
- Parent commitment and involvement
- Mandatory attendance and weekly assignment completion
- Ability to attend the course and employment placement independently











Individual Progress

- 25 year old – Past 5 years as a “shut-in”
- Nocturnal schedule
- Intelligent, anxious, depressed, afraid to leave the house
- No social involvement
- Today: Out of the basement and into the light!
- Attends social events at the Centre weekly and has a full time job ...



Group Progress



Present and Future Activities



- Centre opening in the summer of 2014
- Funding to support the expansion and roll out of **Transition to Life** in other areas of the province
- Implementation of the **Transition to Work and Transition to Post-Secondary** programs





Thank You

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www.integratedautismconsulting.com



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