

## **Supports for Individuals with ASD & Their Caregivers**

Grace AbouAssaly (Therapeutic Recreation), Kristi Brinck (Self-Advocate), Danelys Narvaez, B.A. (Clinical Psychology), & Alyssa Thompson, B.A. (Speech-Language Pathology)

### **Research Mentor and other collaborators:**

Matthew O'Brien, PhD, BCBA-D

### **Introduction:**

Young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often face significant challenges after high school, yet few qualitative studies explore their experiences or evaluate the effectiveness of existing support systems. Many young adults with ASD experience a period of disconnection from both education and employment after high school, highlighting critical gaps in transition planning and systemic barriers to meaningful participation (Shattuck et al, 2012). These challenges reflect a lack of tailored supports that promote autonomy and sustained engagement in the life of adults with ASD. Many families of individuals with ASD report unmet needs, particularly in social skills, life skills, and employment support, underscoring the "service cliff" experienced during the transition to adulthood (Ishler et al., 2022). This gap highlights the urgent need for more targeted, transition-focused research and services.

### **Objectives:**

Our purposes for this research stemmed from personal experiences and our future careers in healthcare. We wanted to obtain knowledge regarding supports that adults with autism and their caregivers found helpful within the community and state. This information would allow us to (1) become effectively supportive by providing specific recommendations in reports and feedback to caregivers; (2) advocate for supports for self and other people and be aware of supports that work best for self-advocates; and (3) understand the circumstance in which a given support is most beneficial compared to others.

### **Method:**

We began our research by conducting a literature review, looking at similar studies and their findings. Through this, research questions and objectives were established. An IRB was completed and submitted for review. Once approved, the team began recruitment of participants through a Qualtrics survey that was dispersed to pre-approved agencies and organizations. After filtering participants with our inclusion-exclusion criteria, applicable participants were sent an email with Zoom links to attend a focus group meeting. Participants were not able to identify themselves through verbal or Zoom chat options, therefore consent was not given, and the study had to be discontinued.

### **Results/Conclusion:**

Due to unforeseen recruitment problems, the study was discontinued during the focus group phase. Therefore, there were no results yielded from the study. In conclusion, future studies should be wary of their recruitment processes so that unintended participants do not get a hold of intake surveys. If done again in the future, the research team should stick to emails through

validated organizations' email lists. Additionally, the team should view the IP addresses of participant sign-ups on Qualtrics to ensure individuals are not registering multiple times. There is still a large gap in research for this age group and population. Individuals with an ASD diagnosis between 18-25 are not represented in a large amount of research that reveals the effectiveness of supports provided.

Research has highlighted some effective transition supports, one of these being supports that facilitate employment success for young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Literature suggests that there are two main types of vocational support that can help young adults with ASD successfully transition to and maintain employment (Nicholas et al.,2015). The first is supported employment, a service model that helps individuals with ASD get and keep paid jobs in typical work settings through personalized job matching, training, and ongoing support (Nicholas et al.,2015). The second is the use of **media and technology-based tools**, such as training videos or apps, to teach job skills in a visual and practical way (Nicholas et al.,2015). Caregivers and autistic individuals may view these resources and supports positively, especially when they lead to stable jobs, higher wages, and greater social inclusion. Having more supports like these could be beneficial and effective in improving employment outcomes and overall quality of life for individuals with ASD.

#### **Kristi Brinck's Experiences:**

Being diagnosed with autism later in life can be incredibly challenging. By the time many of us receive a diagnosis, we're often past the age where most support services are available—especially after 21, when a lot of programs just stop. It can feel like we've missed the window for help that others received earlier. On top of that, so much of the research and support out there is focused on children, which leaves adults like me feeling overlooked and unsure of where to turn. It's isolating, and it really highlights the need for more awareness and resources for autistic people at every stage of life.

#### **References:**

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