Transition to Postsecondary Pathways

FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD):

Translating Research into Practice

PATHWAY TO
College/University

PATHWAY TO
Employment

PATHWAY TO
Community

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SECTION I

Introduction

In 2004, the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) created The Transition to Secondary Service (TSS) for students with Autism to support their transition from elementary to secondary school. TCDSB partnered with Surrey Place Centre, School Support Program to implement and expand this service. TSS includes a number of resources, including brochures, videos, student workbooks, workshops and resource guides. For further information, the reader can contact Autism Programs and Services at the TCDSB.

Each year, an increased number of students with ASD are identified to require the Transition to Secondary Service. As a result of this increase, a next step identified by the TCDSB and Surrey Place Centre was to examine the need to support secondary students with Autism as they transition out of high school. In 2010, the TCDSB and Surrey Place Centre developed a resource entitled "Looking Ahead Together." The resource was created to support secondary students with ASD including their families, schools, and community partners to help them plan year by year toward a successful postsecondary pathway.

In 2012, TCDSB and Surrey Place Centre started to review the literature on transitioning to postsecondary life and possible pathways for students with ASD. The findings are detailed within this document. While this document will support the development of programs and services for postsecondary transitions for individuals with ASD, it is also hoped that this information will be useful to those who support young people with ASD.

The potential for an adult with ASD to be employed, socially included and happy is, in most cases, limited more by the lack of imagination on our part than any individual skill deficit." (Peter Gerhardt, Oct. 2012)

About this Document

This document contains information that was reviewed from a variety of resources published between 1999-2013. However, the majority of the resources were published between 2010 and 2013, indicating an increase in the interest and need for information on this topic.

The purpose of this document is to:

► Review overall effective transition planning practices from across Canada and the United States.
► Investigate the prevalence of students with ASD transitioning to adulthood and the paths they may enter.
► Review the current literature related to postsecondary pathways for students with ASD including college/university, employment and community based services.
► Determine the key findings and their implications for students, families, high schools and the settings to which the students are transitioning.
► Develop general recommendations based on literature reviewed.

Sections 2-4 of this document are divided into pathways:

► **Section 2:** College/University,
► **Section 3:** Employment,
► **Section 4:** Community Based Services.

ICONS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT:

KEY FINDINGS

Important information about the theme reviewed

R>P RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Suggested transition practices based on the literature reviewed

The themes found within each pathway are:

► Prevalence of Autism
► Importance of Transition Planning and Implications for the IEP
► Supporting Individual Needs
► Developing Necessary Skills
► Role of Support Services and People in the Environment
► Practical Experience and Exposure to Real Life Environments
► Educating Others
► Family Support
► Self-Disclosure and Self-Advocacy

Review of Effective Transition Practices

The following key principles were consistently identified as integral effective transition planning practices in policies and documents reviewed from across Canada and the United States. These principles can be applied to all transition plans, and support any postsecondary pathway.

1. START EARLY
- by age 14 at the latest to plan for the future
- identify specific actions and activities to help prepare student for adult life

2. CREATE A TRANSITION TEAM
- each member plays a specific role with set responsibilities, timelines and goals
- students need to play a key role on the transition team and attend meetings, when appropriate
- establish a multi-disciplinary support network including family, friends, school personnel, and other members from the community who can help set goals for the future
- use a collaborative approach to transition planning
- parents are key members of the transition team
- a flexible approach is needed to support student and family as goals and needs change

3. USE A PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH
- ensure individual is an active participant in all decisions and activities, to the best of their ability
- focus on individual's strengths, abilities, interests, and long-term goals for quality of life
- use of tools to identify the preference, experience, skills and supports needed such as: *Connections: A Guide to Transition Planning for Parents of Children with a Developmental Disability, Making Action Plans (MAPS) and Planning Alternative Tomorrow and Hope (PATH)*

4. USE FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENTS TO SUPPORT SKILL DEVELOPMENT
- there needs to be annual, measurable, meaningful goals based on transition assessments related to education, employment and independent living where appropriate
- multiple areas of functioning to be assessed include, intellectual, communication, behavioural and academic
- skill development is important in areas such as self-reliance, self–advocacy, social competence, interpersonal relationships and daily living
- to help generalize the skills being learned, it is important to engage in community activities to practice skills in different environments

5. COMMUNICATE AND COLLABORATE
- team members need to have positive, open discussions to address needs and goals
- parent involvement in the transition process is crucial to communicate their child's needs, interests and strengths and is key to support the success of the transition plan

6. ADAPT AND UPDATE

- ► planning should be continuous, evolving and adapt to the student's changing needs/skills
- ► update skill assessment in targeted areas
- ► long term outcomes to be considered in transition planning include: living arrangements, employment, community/leisure and learning outcomes
- ► informing families about adult services

7. FOLLOW-UP

- ► team members must be accountable to follow through with goals and timelines stated in the transition plan
- ► transition plan must include links to the appropriate supports for when the student exits school
- ► hold an exit meeting to allow time for follow-up as necessary

Ministry of Education

To support the increasing number of students transitioning out of secondary school, recent government policies and protocols mandated the need for transition planning and postsecondary resources and services.

Policy Program Memorandum 140 (PPM 140) requires school boards to consider Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) methods in programming for students with ASD. Transition planning for students with ASD is also required through this policy.

Recently, PPM 156 was released. This policy requires school boards to plan for transition, including the transition out of high school for all students with an IEP.

In the spring of 2013, the Ministries of Children and Youth Services, Community and Social Services and Education collaborated to create a transition planning protocol for students with developmental disabilities who are leaving high school.

When planning for postsecondary options, consideration should be made about the high school graduation requirements associated with each pathway. The following requirements are based on Ontario's Ministry of Education guidelines.

OSSD - Ontario Secondary School Diploma, 30 credits at the academic/applied/locally developed level
OSSC - Ontario Secondary School Certificate, 14 credits at the academic/applied/locally developed level
COA - Certificate of Accomplishment, non-credit earning courses

PATHWAY	DESCRIPTION	REQUIREMENTS
College/University	This pathway refers to typical college/university programs any student would apply to.	OSSD
	The student with ASD that takes this pathway is a credit earning student.	
Employment	This pathway refers to a variety of competitive employment options, such as supported employment, customized employment and self-employment.	OSSD OSSC COA
	Students that take this pathway can be credit earning or not, and would have varying abilities.	
Community Based Services	This pathway refers to those who access community based services/programs, such as Developmental Services Ontario (DSO), day programs, and/or leisure/recreational based activities.	COA
	The student with ASD that takes this pathway usually takes non-credit earning courses (k-coded) or a combination of non-credit and credit earning courses not exceeding 14 credits.	

Consult with guidance to map out the student's plan i.e. changing academic levels, staying in school until 21 years of age and other possible ways to achieve the desired pathway.

Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

An important reason for developing this document was the increasing number of young people with ASD approaching adulthood that require planning and support by school boards, community agencies and postsecondary institutions. Research has shown that about 1 in 68 children have been identified with ASD according to estimates from the Centre for Disease Control, 2014.

The estimated number of Ontarians between the ages of 16 and 64 in 2012 was 9 341 200. With the conservative prevalence of 1% of the population, as many as 93 412 Ontarians in this age range are affected by the lifelong challenges of ASD (Stoddart, 2013).

> *The last 20 years have witnessed a wave of youth and adults seeking a diagnosis of ASD. Many (but not all) of these individuals are subsequently diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome. This accompanying demand for services for this group is now an ever-present challenge both in Canada and abroad. It is likely that this wave of 'higher-functioning' youth and adults will become even larger as more children are diagnosed earlier."*
> *(Stoddart, 2013)*

► According to the 2013 report, Diversity in Ontario's Youth and Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Complex Needs in Unprepared Systems, when the DSM IV (1994) first included the diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome (AS), it was believed that those on the "milder" end of the Autism Spectrum would not present with deficits in life skills, except for those that were socially-based. This was based on an assumption that in this group who were cognitively competent, application of knowledge and skills would follow. However, many individuals with ASD do not generalize skills from one setting to another, may not attend to relevant environmental cues, can experience behavioural inflexibility, and may have problems translating skills into action (Stoddart, 2013).

► In a study reviewing post high school service use among young adults with ASD, it was found that young adults with higher functional cognitive skills were associated with increased odds of no service and reduced odds of case management or medical services (Shattuck, 2011).

► Additionally, a US study of young adults with ASD who had exited the school system found a significant relationship between Intellectual Disability (ID) status and post high school activities. It was found that within 5 years post high school those without an ID were more likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education and be competitively employed and less likely to be accessing day services. Supported employment percentages were similar for those with and without ID. However, more surprisingly, those without an ID were 3 times more likely to have no day activities compared to those with an ID (Lounds Taylor, 2012).

The findings support the need for specialized services, even for those without an ID and the importance of transition planning for this group. Furthermore, these findings provide insight for those that work with students with ASD.

Resources Reviewed

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Pathway to College/University

In this section, pathway to college/university refers to diploma/ degree programs to which a student would apply. At the time of the literature search, the student with ASD that was often referred to as having High Functioning Autism (HFA) or Asperger Syndrome (AS). These students are credit earning students and would obtain their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). It is expected that in the coming years, colleges and universities will enroll more students with ASD.

> *With carefully planned transition, appropriate accommodations and support, ASD students can be successful academically and socially in college."* *(VanBergeijk, 2008)*

THEMES:
- ► Prevalence of Students with ASD Entering College/University
- ► Importance of Transition Planning and Implications for the IEP
- ► Supporting Individual Needs: Choosing Best Setting, Accommodations in College/University
- ► Developing Necessary Skills: Social, Time Management, Independence, Study skills, Organization
- ► Role of Support Services and People in the Environment: Disability/Accessibility Services
- ► Practical Experience and Exposure to College/University Environments
- ► Educating Others: Faculty, College/University Staff
- ► Family Support
- ► Self-Disclosure and Self-Advocacy

Note: In the literature reviewed for this pathway, college vocational programs were not included. College vocational programs differ from diploma/degree programs in college/ university. College vocational programs help bridge the gap for students who have graduated from high school with workplace credits or an Ontario Secondary School Certificate (OSSC). They offer extensive assessment through the use of several vocational assessments and tools. Students entering vocational type programs could be following employment or community pathways.

Transition to College/University

- ► The exact prevalence of those with ASD entering college/university varies depending on several factors, including the study being examined, how sources are reporting their statistics, whether students have disclosed that they have ASD, whether students are requesting accommodations and if the source is Canadian, American or International.
- ► In the past few years, colleges/universities have noticed an increase in the number of students with ASD who are accessing college/university. This is in part due to the surge

of children diagnosed with ASD in the 90's, early diagnosis and intervention (VanBergeijk, 2008).

▶ In Ontario, between 2009-2011, it was estimated that about 1400 students with ASD graduated with a diploma from secondary schools, an estimated 1100 were seeking to enter college or university and 400 students identified as having ASD were already in Ontario's colleges and universities (Alcorn MacKay, 2010).

▶ There is potential for a large number of students with ASD to be in a postsecondary setting at one time because of the "cumulative effect". Since many students with ASD have a reduced course load as an accommodation, this can result in students staying additional semesters (Alcorn Mackay, 2010).

▶ In a recent study in Ontario, of 480 adults with ASD it indicated that 4.8% of respondents had taken some postsecondary education courses and 28.5% had completed a degree. The highest academic level earned in postsecondary education was a diploma/certificate for 12.1%, a Bachelor's degree for 11.9%, a Master's degree for 3.1% and an MD/PHD/LLB for 1.9% (Stoddart, 2013).

> *Up to 50% of individuals with ASDs do not have an intellectual disability (ID), yet their needs for support are as great as those with ASD and ID".*
> *(Forgotten Report, 2008)*

Key Findings and Implications for Transition Services: College/University

Prevalence

KEY FINDINGS	**RESEARCH TO PRACTICE**
Literature indicates that the number of students with ASD entering college/university is increasing. However, there are still barriers which prevent them from entering and/or graduating from college/university. Many do not seek or gain entry into college/university or they drop out prematurely due to social isolation, difficulty with changing routines and new schedules, problems with living independently and lack of monitoring and guidance.	Colleges/universities may consider structuring or expanding their accessibility/disability services to support the needs of the influx of students with ASD for e.g. regularly scheduled meetings, quiet areas throughout the campus, staff devoted to the ASD population, ASD specific programs or supports.

To prepare students for entry and successful graduation from college/university, high schools may need to focus on the social challenges ASD can have on postsecondary life, self- advocacy, organizational and time management skills. |

Importance of Transition Planning and Implications for the IEP

Transition planning is an important factor in the prediction of future success for students entering college/university. Transition plans need to be tailored to meet the needs of the specific student and school setting.

Well developed IEPs and transition plans may serve as a blueprint for individualization of services at the university level. | It is important to identify appropriate transition goals that are student specific. Key topics to include in a plan can be: career exploration, academic goal setting and preparation, assessing and identifying learning styles, self-advocacy skills, reasonable accommodations, academic supports, interagency collaboration, technology and time management skills. |

Importance of Transition Planning and Implications for the IEP (cont'd)

KEY FINDINGS

Having students participate in transition planning promotes their successful transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

The transition "process" is just as important as the plan. Literature indicates that transition plans should include specific action steps and identify the persons/agencies responsible for completing the action steps.

Plans should be reviewed and monitored regularly. Students should be active participants in transition planning.

Supporting Individual Needs

Choosing Best Setting Accommodations in College/University

The most important aspect of the transition to higher education is the fit of student to institution (VanBergeijk, 2008).

Many accommodations are available in college/university. Accommodations can be defined as adjustments to the learning environment while maintaining the academic requirements of the course. They are meant to remove barriers without providing academic advantage or disadvantage to students.

The process of accommodation is very individualized. The specific types of accommodations that a student can access at a postsecondary institution will vary depending on the student's needs, institution, the program and professor.

Determining which academic accommodations are appropriate is a shared responsibility among students, accessibility services, and the professor. Although professors are not "disability experts," they are the expert in the course they teach; they may suggest a more appropriate, accommodation that best suits the course and maintains academic requirements. Most students will have access to additional time, use of a separate space, and the use of a computer.

For those living in residence, there is often insufficient support to promote adjustment in the residence environment.

Investigate all possible options for postsecondary education early on in high school. Ensure all pre-requisite courses/criteria are met. Begin researching options and visiting campuses early to ensure the student's ability to make an informed choice.

The fit of student to institution should be examined in terms of; type of setting (college, vocational, technical, university etc.), population, size of campus, campus layout, size of typical classes, receptiveness of the institution to students with a variety of disabilities, proximity of the campus to home, availability of high interest program/courses, available supports from accessibility/disability services.

Investigate possible modified admissions deadline. Modified admissions candidates must meet minimum requirements (OSSD etc.) however, grade requirements are given consideration.

If the program allows, consider taking a reduced course load, especially in the first year as part of an effective time management strategy.

Discuss and clearly list college/university deadlines. For e.g. deadlines for choosing classes and dropping classes.

Before September, look for locations throughout the campus that are quiet and comfortable, find class locations and have an idea about seating locations that seem comfortable.

Some programs offer some online course work. This may be a good fit for students with ASD who can work independently.

Consider what supports would be necessary if student was living on residence.

Developing Necessary Skills
Time Management, Study Skills, Independence, Organization, Social Skills

KEY FINDINGS	**RESEARCH TO PRACTICE**

The literature repeatedly indicated that higher order decision making skills are needed in college/university.

The sole focus on academics in high school can be a disadvantage to students. It is usually not the academic component that causes these students difficulty. It is often the social and executive functioning skills that can lead to failure of classes. These are the skills that require explicit instruction.

In a survey, adolescents and parents indicated that the social dimensions of the child's life were more problematic than academics (Camarena, 2009).

In several of the articles reviewed, it was believed that there was insufficient monitoring of social-emotional needs in the college/university environment and in residence.

Focus on developing skills where attention to higher order decision making is necessary such as;
- planning time with limited supervision
- prioritizing tasks
- building working memory through the use of agendas, calendars and/or to do lists
- organizing materials and/or assignments through graphic organizers, colour coding, filing systems and checklists
- using schedules, timers, and visual reminders to ease anxiety
- social skills: communicating with a host of new people in new settings in a short span of time
- learning new strategies for studying and achieving them while away from home in a novel environment

High school teachers can;
- increase expectations, decrease support as appropriate
- assign projects with long due dates (so students can master how to break down tasks and manage time)
- set up "check in" appointments (similar to disability/accessibility services in college/university)
- model appropriate organizational skills with an agenda, checklist, visual reminder for work to be submitted
- review course outline and discuss deadlines and the prioritization of course assignments and tests

Role of Support Services
Accessibility/Disability Services in College/University

It is important that the right type of supports in the right increments are provided. While support is often necessary, it is important to note how much is actually necessary. Having too much support in high school may actually lead to an inability to cope independently if there is an established dependence on others to problem solve and make decisions.

Contact disability/accessibility services at the college/university to arrange an appointment. If possible, schedule it in the summer before the campus becomes busy and chaotic. Ensure all necessary documents reach the accessibility/disability services office in time.

Gradually reduce support in high school so that students can become accustomed to being as independent as possible. Reduced support in high school offers opportunities where students can identify the need for help and then determine how to receive help (asking questions in class or visiting disability/accessibility office). This will benefit the student in the long run.

Role of Support Services (cont'd)
Accessibility/Disability Services in College/University

KEY FINDINGS

While there is much less support in college/university, postsecondary institutions do have accessibility/disability offices to provide services specifically for students who have self-identified as having a disability and who have submitted supporting documentation. Services can include: assisting students with navigating the school, promoting self-advocacy, developing more effective learning and coping strategies, disability-related counselling, determining and arranging appropriate academic accommodations.

Most postsecondary institutions do not employ specialists that are trained in meeting the needs of students with ASD. Also, there is limited, if any, access to community-based agency supports to assist with college/university related work.

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

High schools can help students by ensuring that students know how to use support services in their high school such as the library, guidance services, administration, resource. Subsequent discussions about the various supports in college/university such as registrar's office, professors, accessibility/disability services, may help them to understand and utilize the various supports effectively and confidently.

In college/university, support services can expand to include, social skills groups, psycho-educational groups, directive counselling, vocational training and life coaching.

Practical Experience and Exposure to College/University Environments

Opportunities to visit the setting prior to beginning college/university is key.

Some programs exist where students can take college level courses on campus while still in high school.

With carefully planned transition activities, accommodations and supports, students with ASD can be successful academically and socially in college/university.

Students need to be exposed to the expectations, environment and structure of college/university as much as possible.

Tour the college/university to learn about the physical environment as much as needed.

Time should be set aside to review college/university website, policy/procedures, maps, courses offered, surrounding area and discussing the college/university disability/accessibility services offered.

To help students understand the postsecondary environment, where possible, students can take a summer school course on campus or investigate if the college/university offers a transition program.

Educating Others
Faculty, Campus Staff, College/University Staff, Accessibility/Disability Services Staff

One of the barriers to success is the limited knowledge college/university staff have regarding ASD (Alcorn MacKay, 2010).

Staff at postsecondary institutions support a larger number of persons with disabilities and are unable to engage in the training required to become ASD specialists. Professional development in ASD is currently not mandatory for professors and/or faculty staff.

Key staff members in college/university must be trained and clearly identified as a resource for students.

Professors and staff of campus disability/accessibility services need awareness concerning the range of skills that individuals with ASD may have.

Educating Others:
Faculty, Campus Staff, College/University Staff, Accessibility/Disability Services Staff

KEY FINDINGS	RESEARCH TO PRACTICE
The literature supports the need for institutions to begin to focus on professional development activities for staff in the area of ASD, especially front-end staff providing direct service, security staff, faculty and staff with the responsibility for emergency preparedness.	Information about the student or ASD in general, can be relayed in the form: • personalized written package • student/parent/advocate meeting with accessibility/disability services • workshops whereby the high school invites college/university staff to an in-service

Family Support

"Parents were the predominant informal influence on the development of career aspirations for the adolescence with a range of disabilities" (Camarena, 2009).

Parental support is a strong predictor for success in the completion of a college/university program.

Families and education systems need to work together.

In several studies socio-economic status was shown to be a predictive factor as families with a higher socio-economic status were more likely to have a child with ASD go to college/university.

In college/university parent involvement is permitted if the student has completed and signed a "release of information" consent form. The expectation is that consultation with parents will be infrequent, but in the case of students with ASD contact with parents may need to be more frequent.

Parents, as advocates for their child, felt that the following supports/accommodations were important: matching students with accommodating professors, a college/university advocate and alternative routes to program completion.

Creating a shared vision of independence among the student, family and school provides an optimal supportive relationship. Educators need to work with parents to understand their expectations and concerns for their children's postsecondary outcomes and apply effective strategies to form partnerships with families.

Involving parents in as many aspects of their child's transition helps all stakeholders. Finding ways to support parents/families may be just as important as supporting students.

Consider a support group or focus group for parents whose children may be entering college/university.

Information regarding college/university should be more accessible for families and translated into various languages.

Students must provide written consent to the college/university if they wish their parents to be involved.

Self-Disclosure and Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is one of the most important skills a student with ASD can have. Self-Advocacy is the development of specific skills (communication) and understandings (about their environment) that enable individuals to explain their specific learning disabilities to others. Students need to be prepared to identify how, where, when and with whom they need help.

Students should be actively involved in the IEP process as early as possible and as much as possible.

Explain to students why they may require a particular accommodation. Have students examine whether accommodations work for their learning needs. High schools can develop/organize a student advocacy group as well as consider peer leadership, peer support/mentoring.

Self-Disclosure and Self-Advocacy

KEY FINDINGS

In college/university, students are responsible to initiate asking for any necessary accommodations. Most of the time, the school will not automatically note that a student will be using or requesting accommodations.

To receive accommodations, students must disclose their diagnosis and know which accommodations to request.

The choice to disclose to a faculty member is up to the individual with a disability who must evaluate each situation.

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

How students describe their strengths, needs and interests and how they disclose their disability should be discussed and practiced throughout high school.

Self-advocacy supports can include: prompts to seek support from professionals in student services, regularly scheduled meetings, establishing a channel of communication from professors to professionals in accessibility/disability services.

Reassure students that it is beneficial to ask for help. Describe asking for help in the context of being self-aware and knowing how to support themselves which is what independent learners do.

Universities need to ensure that persons with disabilities can disclose in a succinct, positive manner and that they can do so without shame or fear of lost opportunity.

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Pathway to Employment

In this section, employment refers to competitive employment. This can be defined as work in the competitive labor market that is performed in an integrated setting and for which the individual is compensated at or above minimum wage, for the same or similar work performed by individuals who are not disabled. It does not include work being done in sheltered workshops. It may include the use of job coaching which can be used as a means to transition an individual to a workplace while setting up supports that enable them to be successful on their own. In current literature and other forums on this topic, the movement is to help individuals with ASD find **"real work for real pay"**.

THEMES:
- ► Employment Prevalence of those with ASD
- ► Importance of Transition Planning and Implications for the IEP
- ► Supporting Individual Needs: Job Matching
- ► Developing Necessary Skills: Social, Behaviour, Independence
- ► Role of Support Services and People in the Environment: Job Coaches, on the Job Supports
- ► Practical Experience and Exposure to Employment Environments
- ► Educating Others: Employers
- ► Family Support
- ► Self-Disclosure and Self-Advocacy

In the literature review for this pathway, learning employment skills by way of community participation programs (former day programs), sheltered workshops, or employment support programs are not included. While employment skills may be targeted in these programs, they are based on a segregated model as opposed to an integrated setting. It is not competitive employment.

The literature reviewed for this pathway is based on the following types of competitive employment:

A) Competitive employment found independently by the individual

B) Supported employment: a supportive approach to help individuals find, learn and maintain employment in an integrated setting for a competitive wage, often using a job coach. Supports may include, helping to identify abilities and interests, connecting to potential employers, supporting the application and interview process, assisting with on-the-job-training and establishing strategies to maintain job success.

C) Customized employment: an individual, alone or with support, can negotiate a personalized job that fits the individual's skill set and meets the needs of both the employee and employer. This can also be referred to as "job carving."

D) Self-employment: An individual can define his/her own job, either community or home-based, that capitalizes on his/her personal strengths and interests. This can include freelance work whereby an individual may be linked to an employer for a specific job task but not necessarily committed long term.

Transition to Employment

▶ The exact prevalence of employment among adults with ASD is a difficult number to obtain and varies depending on the studies reviewed. However, current literature in Canada suggests an employment rate that ranges from 10 to 55 percent (Nichols, 2013). Studies on employment in the U.S.A. show a similar pattern, with low employment rates ranging from 25 to 50 percent for adults participating in paid employment (Shattuck, 2012).

▶ In Canada, a recent study of 480 adults in Ontario with ASD indicate that 75% of the adults 20 years and older had an annual income under $30,000. The largest income source was the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) for 58.2%. Full-time employment was the primary income source for 13.9% and part-time employment for 6.1% (Stoddart, 2013). The majority of respondents in this report were male, under the age of 40 years and considered to be in the "higher functioning" range of ASD.

▶ The other significant finding in both large and small scale studies in the U.S, indicate that the individuals with ASD that are employed are often underemployed. This means that the types of jobs that they are entering are below their level of qualification and education and have difficulty maintaining stable employment (Shattuck P. T., 129(6) June 2012) (Lounds Taylor J. &., 41(5) May 2012), (Lounds Taylor J., 130 (3). August 2012), (Peter Gerhardt, Geneva Symposium, 2012).

▶ In a large scale U.S.A. study, youth who received special education services including speech and language impairments, developmental disability, learning disability and ASD were compared. Youth with ASD had the lowest rates of participation in employment and the highest rates of no participation compared to youth in other disability categories (Shattuck P., 129(6) June 2012).

▶ In a U.S.A. report of 66 young adults with ASD, similar findings were indicated. The report described their post-high school educational and occupational activities within five years of leaving high school. Only six percent fit in the competitive employment category, no one was full-time, and the jobs were menial (Lounds Taylor J. &., 41(5) May 2012).

▶ A 2012 study reviewed 5 other small scale studies regarding vocational interventions for youth and young adults with ASD. All of these studies focused on on-the-job supports as the intervention of choice to support and increase rates of employment. This study was conducted because there is limited, yet growing, research on the outcomes for adolescence and adults with ASD, with the knowledge that most adults with ASD live dependent lives, are unemployed or underemployed (Lounds Taylor J. e., 130 (3). August 2012).

Key Findings and Implications for Transition Services: Employment

Prevalence

KEY FINDINGS	RESEARCH TO PRACTICE
Prevalence rates in the literature indicate that the majority of individuals with ASD are either unemployed or underemployed and have difficulty finding and maintaining employment.	Secondary schools could prepare students for real life employment and incorporate a "work readiness" program into their curriculum to address various employment issues. Aside from building the technical skills needed for a job, some key components to consider are: social skills & the hidden curriculum of a workplace, independence, having a support system in place, knowing what sensory issues need to be addressed and self-advocacy skills.

Importance of Transition Planning and Implications for the IEP

Transition assessments are a useful tool to help develop and update the transition plan and IEP. Findings can help move a student towards his/her chosen career and help develop functional goals that can be worked on before the student leaves the school system.

A recent study that discusses the importance of transition planning has shown that improvements with maladaptive and repetitive behaviours that were made while in high school slowed down after exiting high school for those with ASD without Intellectual Disability (ID), (Lounds Taylor, 2012).

Considering the difficulty individuals with ASD have finding and maintaining employment, it is favourable to have strong connections between the school system and community programs that focus on employment and related topics. The transition team should include members of school and community programs.

Staff at the secondary school should have knowledge and understanding of employment programs and options in the community to help tailor transition planning to individual needs and increase employment opportunities.

Transition assessments can be used early in secondary school. The transition plan should reflect results from assessment tools pertaining to the chosen pathway of employment. Results from an assessment can be useful in setting goals and can be used directly in the IEP.

Supporting Individual Needs:

Job Matching

❝ *…successes were attributed either to participants having fortuitously found good job matches (e.g., positions which exploited participants technical or mechanical skills but did not require a great deal of social competence), or to tolerant supervisors and co-workers who were willing to accommodate participants' differences." (E. Muller et. al. 2003)*

Job matching is critical in individual success. It highlights personal strengths and interests and can increase job success. Job matching means finding or creating a job that takes advantage of the skill/deficit profile of an individual with ASD.

When looking for placements and/or job opportunities consider jobs which build upon technical skills or special interests, require minimal social skills, follow clearly defined routines, allow adequate time for learning new tasks, have no excessive sensory stimuli and have flexible work schedules.

Supporting Individual Needs (cont'd)
Job Matching

KEY FINDINGS	RESEARCH TO PRACTICE
	R>P Job matching can be labour intensive and can include many hours of "job finding," including meeting potential employers, making presentations to them and negotiating tasks and supports. It may be necessary to hire staff dedicated to the role of educating others and job matching for individuals with ASD.
	The literature reveals that individuals who can master the job task often report that the "other" parts of the job become difficult. It would be beneficial for high school to incorporate the social aspects of a workplace and help individuals understand what sensory needs are important for a good job match.

Developing Necessary Skills
Social, Behaviour and Independence

The social navigation of a job can be the most difficult to master for individuals with ASD.

Not surprisingly, individuals that engage in challenging behaviours will find it difficult to gain competitive employment. Students who tend to be verbally inappropriate often will not develop effective social relationships.

R>P Explicitly teach the social aspects of a work environment in order to ensure success. Social skills can be taught through role-playing, video modelling, counselling, and other methods of targeted instruction. This can be incorporated into their daily programming. Examples of social aspects of the work environment that need to be addressed include: reading facial/body expressions, understanding tone of voice, sarcasm, entering and ending a conversation and casual conversation.

Role of Support Services/People in the Environment
Job Coaching, Job Supports

Having a good support system is crucial, including specific accommodations and on-the-job supports. Individuals that access job coaching and on-the-job supports are more likely to find and maintain employment.

Employers indicate that they lack awareness of the type of accommodations/on-the-job supports that an individual with ASD may need and how it may affect their business potential.

R>P Become aware of services in the community that support job finding and build strong connections with community partners.

School staff that are supporting individuals during their job placements should be aware of the student's profile and successful accommodations that are currently being used.

In high school, review potential accommodations/on-the-job supports with the student. Expectations in the classroom should start to simulate a work environment. Strategies that promote individual success and independence in the classroom should be discussed with the student, employer and family to help maintain success.

Role of Support Services/People in the Environment (cont'd)
Job Coaching, Job Supports

KEY FINDINGS	RESEARCH TO PRACTICE
	R>P It would be important to indicate that not all accommodations are high-tech or costly, the majority of accommodations or on-the-job supports cost much less than an employer may think. The majority have no cost or are under $500.

Practical Experience and Exposure to Various Employment Settings

Youth with ASD are more likely to find work after the transition from high school if they have meaningful work experience during high school. Gaining gradual, firsthand experience of a work environment throughout high school is beneficial.

R>P Identify teams to help students with ASD find co-op/work experience placements while still in school. Families and secondary school teams should work together to find placements for students while they are still in school and teach the skills that are needed to find and maintain work. An alternative is designing internships that result in employment before the individual graduates from high school.

Specific responsibilities need to be defined and assigned such as:
- clarifying roles among the co-operative education department, special education and/or special services at school
- collaborating with the work placement to make it successful
- assessing student's likes and strengths

Provide exposure and rehearse job finding skills, resume writing, phone contact with potential employers and interview skills before leaving secondary school.

Exposure to work and workplace skills while still in school are necessary for successful outcomes.

Educating Others

❝❝ *Many companies volunteered the importance of awareness training and education for existing staff, particularly recruiting and hiring managers" (Government of Canada, 2013).*

Although it may seem as though autism awareness is more prevalent, it is evident that potential employers lack the awareness of the advantageous skill set that may come with hiring an individual with ASD. Many possible employers have a misperception around the volume of accommodations required in the workplace to hire someone with ASD, which tend to be fairly minimal in scope.

R>P Increase ASD awareness in a variety of employment settings by providing professional development to secondary staff and potential employers including management and hiring staff. The focus of the professional development should be on general autism awareness and the associated skill set that could be advantageous in the workforce.

Educating Others (cont'd)

KEY FINDINGS

Participants repeatedly used terms such as 'hard worker' and 'good worker' to describe themselves; and expressed pride in their precision, attention to detail, and technical skill" (Muller, 2003).

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Market student strengths. It is important to market students according to their strengths, not their perceived disability. Secondary staff that knows the student could market their talents during co-operative education and work experience placements. Students can create a portfolio consisting of accomplishments to share with hiring staff, due to the fact that individuals with ASD often struggle with both verbal and non-verbal communication during an interview. Look for opportunities with businesses that have a Corporate Responsibility Mandate and/ or a Diversity and Inclusion Council.

Use information to connect with the community. Secondary schools could consider preparing ASD awareness packages and then, together with families, individualize it according to their student's strengths and needs. Include a list of accommodations that the student needs to be successful. This information could be used when connecting to the community and may increase acceptance and tolerance and allow an individual with ASD to feel more comfortable in a workplace. An employer may not realize that a minimal accommodation can make a huge difference.

Family Support

Research indicates that most individuals with ASD live dependent lives and rely on family support long after the transition from high school.

Studies show that students from low income areas are at higher risk for not receiving services as well as having an increase in maladaptive behaviours after transition from high school.

Studies suggest that strong family or social support, including having a mentor, can increase job finding and workplace success.

Family members often act as advocates for their adult children so it is important to work together and have the family involved in the transition planning from high school.

Consider ways to increase parental involvement and access to support, especially in low-income areas. Consider support groups for parents.

Provide outreach and information in various languages and in a user-friendly format.

Reach out to students who are socially isolated and assist them to develop a social network to increase independence and decrease life-long reliance on family.

Self-Disclosure and Self-Advocacy

KEY FINDINGS

It is an individual's choice to disclose personal information to an employer. A diagnosis does not need to be disclosed, however, an individual needs to self-advocate for any needed workplace accommodations.

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Self-advocacy and disclosure are important topics to address in a secondary school program.

Deciding to whom, when and where to disclose is an important component of self-advocacy. The ability to make choices and learn one's rights should be taught at the high school level or earlier.

Resources Reviewed for Employment Pathway

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Pathway to Community Based Services

Pathway to community based services can include a variety of experiences such as Developmental Services Ontario (DSO), day programs, employment support programs, leisure/recreational based activities or volunteer positions within the community. The students pursuing this pathway are generally non-credit earning students, take K-coded courses and also have a Developmental Disability (DD). In secondary school, these students may participate in work experiences organized by the Multiple Exceptionality/Developmental Disability Teacher (ME/DD) or by the Co-Op Department. They would graduate after participating in secondary school for up to seven years with a Certificate of Accomplishment (COA).

THEMES:

- ▶ Prevalence
- ▶ Importance of Transition Planning and Implications for the IEP
- ▶ Supporting Individual Needs: Person Directed Planning
- ▶ Developing Necessary Skills: Functional Life Skills
- ▶ Role of Support Services and People in the Environment: Active Support
- ▶ Practical Experience and Exposure to Community Settings
- ▶ Educating Others
- ▶ Family Support
- ▶ Self-Disclosure and Self-Advocacy

Transition to Community Based Services

- ▶ Research on adults with ASD and ID is limited, however, it is estimated that there are approximately 60 million people with an ID worldwide. Approximately 38-40% of those with an ID also have ASD (CDC, 2012).
- ▶ Life expectancies of adults with mild ID are rapidly approaching near parity with the general population. Persons with moderate or severe ID now routinely live into their late 60s and late 50s respectively.
- ▶ Those with more intense needs may remain dependent on lifelong support from families or community agencies. More than 50% of individuals with an ID continue to live with their families.
- ▶ For individuals with an IQ in the severe range, the presence of ASD will have substantial implications for prognosis and for the nature and intensity of intervention required. Individuals with ID and ASD are likely to need support that is far more individualized, specialized and structured than do those without ASD of the same IQ level and even then their prognosis will often be worse.
- ▶ Eligibility criteria for services for adults with ASD are based on their intellectual functioning rather than functional needs.

▶ People who have both an ID and ASD can be a vulnerable group in the community. They are often unable to advocate for their own needs, face more physical and mental health problems and can be alienated within the broader community and yet there are few specialized services for them (Lunsky and Isaacs, 2013).

▶ People with an ID are at increased risk of suffering a mental health disorder for a variety of reasons which include social exclusion and isolation, poverty, contact with the criminal justice system, poor physical health, physical disability and the ID itself. Research tells us that between 20% and 40% of people with Intellectual Disability have mental disorders, and Schizophrenia is two to four times more prevalent than in the general population.

▶ There are no national figures on the number of people waiting for residential housing. It is estimated there are 686 000 intellectually disabled people across the country and one of the biggest issues, is having access to suitable and affordable housing in the country. In Ontario, 12 000 people are in the queue for residential housing, The wait has been described as "oppressively long."

▶ There is going to be an increased demand across systems because of improved methods of diagnosis of ID and ASD, and the increasing number of people with ID reaching older age. Forward planning to build capacity is encouraged to alleviate current needs and to prepare for this increase of population.

Key Findings and Implications for Transition Services: Community Based Services

Prevalence

KEY FINDINGS	RESEARCH TO PRACTICE
Over the next decade, more students with ASD and ID will be graduating from secondary school. Also, many people with ID are living longer than historically noted with an increasing number of individuals over the age of 50. With this information, we can expect more adults with ASD and ID needing access to services and supports than in previous years.	Needs of adults with ID should be factored into planning for and developing, "age-friendly" communities. Many adults living on their own, or with their families, require and can benefit from the same specially designed services and supports being provided to the elderly who are in good health.

❝ *The current framework for community participation does not match the complex, ongoing needs of adults on the autism spectrum" (Autism Ontario, 2008).*

The relatively rapid increase in a new population of aging adults with complex medical and mental health problems has resulted in inadequate geriatric health care provision. Special attention needs to be given to this growing elderly population. Collaboration is needed between disability and mental health services to establish a wide policy framework in order to provide sufficient community participation for the growing population with ASD and ID.

Importance of Transition Planning and Implications for the IEP

KEY FINDINGS

The typical way of preparing for and accessing adult services is to apply and be put on a wait list before access to services will begin. While it is necessary to do this, many success stories come from creative ways of planning for alternative options while waiting for services.

Transition assessments and interest inventories are valuable tools to help develop IEP goals. Postsecondary goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time specific.

Families whose children with ASD are making the transition to adulthood do not find the same level of services for adults as they experienced within the school system.

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

It is important to plan beyond secondary school. In the event of long waiting lists, it may be wise to plan for alternative options. By the time a student is ready to leave secondary school, supports need to be in place to transition to a specific facility/environment and goals need to be specific to ensure success.

Alternative curriculum topics should be included in the IEP and the Transition Plan. Instruction in alternative curriculum areas may include: self-advocacy, self-determination and the behaviour it requires, to monitor and perform these behaviours and self-confidence.

Include IEP goals related to core independence skills, such as toileting, eating, dressing, hygiene as well as an established way to communicate needs, wants and desires to interact with their next environment. Addressing these skills as early as possible leaves time to build a transition plan that includes their interests as well as goals that may eventually be linked to employability and independent living.

Be prepared for long waiting lists. Plan for what the student will do while they are waiting for services. Do not rule out potential employment with this group. With strong school and family support individuals with ASD and ID can work if given the proper accommodations, training and attention to job match characteristics.

One way to support families during the transition to adulthood is to involve them in the development of the IEP. One study suggests that one in three parents would like to be more involved in the process.

Supporting Individual Needs

Person Directed Planning

> *Transition will be more successful when there is a shift in thinking from "these are the programs available in which the student needs to fit" to "these are the student's dreams and visions, now how can they be fulfilled?" (Michaels, 2005)*

Person Directed Planning has been found to be an effective approach to use with families and school staff during transition planning.
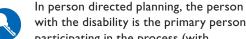
> Person Directed Planning can be provided to those eligible through DSO.

Person directed planning will help to support successful transition planning. It has been found to increase parent and student participation and leads to an action plan. It also promotes collaboration and problem solving to ensure transition plans are meaningful, goal oriented and centered on the student.

Supporting Individual Needs (cont'd)

Person Directed Planning

KEY FINDINGS	RESEARCH TO PRACTICE
In person directed planning, the person with the disability is the primary person participating in the process (with appropriate supports as required). In this planning there is a re-distribution of power to the person with the disability and his/her natural supports, instead of the experts and others planning on behalf of the individual.	Person directed planning would influence educators to set specific rather than generic goals.
The goal is to produce a comprehensive, cohesive, picture of the student's recreational, educational, vocational and independent living goals and objectives. It begins by focusing on a student's gifts, capabilities, dreams and desires (Michaels, 2005)	When a student is involved in planning for his/her future, with supports as needed, it provides the opportunity to be more independent while encouraging the student to make important decisions about his/her life.
	For those individuals with significant challenges, consider alternative ways to involve them, such as sharing interests and talents in a visual way.

Developing Necessary Skills:

Functional Life Skills and Structured Work Systems

> *Working independently is an important skill for all students as the ability to work on their own is key to opening opportunities in the school, home and community". (Reeve and Kabot, 2012)*

Research indicates that young adults with ASD and ID have poor adaptive functioning skills. This limits their abilities in many ways. Understanding their intellectual abilities, along with adaptive functioning, leads to optimal assessments, strategies and interventions for successful independent life skills.	Ongoing assessment of interests and abilities in real world settings will identify needs and strengths for programming. Support students to try new things, so they can discover what they prefer or enjoy.
An evidence based practice that supports the development of functional life skills is structured work systems. TCDSB data collection has also shown positive feedback from students and educators utilizing the structured work systems. These help individuals start and complete tasks, practice and generalize skills, learn to work without assistance from others, and develop pride in their accomplished work.	An age appropriate, well balanced curriculum is needed to motivate and foster independence (e.g. structured work systems).
	Teach skills in areas of matching, sorting, assembly, packaging, sequencing, social interactions and functional academics using age appropriate materials and methods so skills can be transferred to the community and workplace.
	Consider lessons in community living (transportation, shopping for groceries, clothing, etc.); self-care (hygiene, grooming, eating, health, etc.); independent living skills (home maintenance); and social skills (greetings, etc.).
	Refer to The Pathway to Community Participation Framework Document (TCDSB, January 2013), a seven year program that scaffolds opportunities and skills for students with ID, Looking Ahead Together (TCDSB, and SPC), Community Resource Directory (SPC).

Developing Necessary Skills (cont'd)
Functional Life Skills & Structured Work Systems

KEY FINDINGS	RESEARCH TO PRACTICE
Peer relationships are important. Limited or absent peer relationships can negatively influence physical and mental health, especially during adolescence. Findings indicate that half of the adolescents with ASD experience no or very limited social activities with friends and only one-third participate in social activities in the community with peers.	Teachers and support staff can visit the environments to which students may be transitioning. This will help identify the skills that need to be taught/practiced in the classroom. Consider specialized college programs for students with strong independent skills. These programs are life skill based and do not offer diplomas (e.g. CICE program at Humber College).

Role of Support Services and People in the Environment:
Active Support, Community Inclusion & Setting up the Environment

> ❝ *It is likely that it is not just the amount of assistance that is important but the quality of assistance—getting the right level of help for each individual is important". (Lounds Taylor and Seltzer, Dec., 2011)*

People with ASD and ID should be able to attend, use and benefit from the social, recreational and leisure resources and amenities that communities develop and operate for their other citizens. Research indicates that the current focus is on full community inclusion to ensure that individuals do not live in isolation within their communities but instead become active members in all aspects of community life.

When the quantity and quality of assistance is increased there is significant increase in engagement, participation and choice-making opportunities of the student. A significant reduction in challenging behaviour and in particular, self-stimulatory behavior was observed as a result of increased assistance.

A common model of support, particularly in residential settings, has been for staff to support residents by doing things for them. The Active Support model brings the focus back to doing things with people. The goal is for people to be interested and engaged in their own lives and to enjoy the positive results that come from such involvement. Evidence of increased choice making by the students was an important indicator of the full implementation of active support.

Since same age peer relationships may be limited, support workers often help with major life events. People with ID and ASD may consider support workers as part of their social network.

School and agency collaboration is required to co-ordinate the increasing challenges and needs around transitioning individuals with ASD and ID into the community.

To help individuals become more involved within the community, they need to be made aware of the alternative modes of transportation available to those who cannot access transportation independently.

Think about other people in the school environment that can support students, especially in areas of special interest, such as student leaders, peer mentors, librarians and coaches.

Consider utilizing staff from specialized school services such as social work, psychology, speech and language, secondary autism support teachers and postsecondary transition teacher.

To expand community involvement opportunities consider accessing support people from organizations outside of school or DSO for e.g. Church, family and friends with businesses.

Encourage support workers in the community to use an active support model. A concrete example could include choice making. When appropriate, provide choices to all individuals. Sometimes this means using visual supports or tangible objects to help the individual make a choice.

Practical Experience and Exposure to Community Settings

" Success is being able to function outside of the classroom as independently as possible." (Gerhardt, 2012)

KEY FINDINGS

It is most beneficial to build natural supports within communities specific to the individual. For example, a favourite restaurant becomes a natural community and the staff/regular customers become supports within that community. Similarly, if the individual learns to take the TTC to the restaurant then the driver/regular passengers on the particular bus route also become natural supports in this community.

Exposure to a variety of different types of community experiences based on interests and hobbies of the individual is key to success.

Students with ASD learn from repetition and lots of opportunity to practice skills. The greater the intensity (how often instruction takes place), the sooner the individual will acquire the skill.

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Ensure IEP goals are meaningful and relevant outside the classroom.

Teach social skills, community skills, and self-advocacy skills in real settings where the skills are most likely to be used. These skills will reduce dependency. Think, "If the student doesn't learn the skill, will someone else have to do it for them?"

Regular practice of specific functional skills is key to the student acquiring the skill. For example, if the goal is to make a purchase at the grocery store then this should be practiced once a day rather than once a week.

A secondary school program that provides a variety of experiences regularly will allow the student to explore/discover their potential interests and strengths.

Educating Others

All stakeholders require information on how to best support an adult with ASD and ID. When students leave school there is a shift in the type and extent of services available. It is critical that families are informed of the impact of this shift as early as possible and how to access adult services.

It is estimated that there are more visits to the emergency room and more hospitalization for adults with DD at the age of 21, during the transition to adulthood, than adults without developmental disabilities.

Behaviour change is often a way that people with a DD express that something is wrong. It may indicate that the person has physical health symptoms (pain/discomfort) and that their environment is not meeting their needs.

Individuals with DD need to be better equipped for any environment to which they are transitioning. Studies show as many as 83% of females and 32% of males with DD are victims of sexual assault (Johnson, I., and Sigler, R., 2000).

Host events at the school or school board level to educate families on how to access adult services and how to prepare for adulthood. Invite community agencies to help link families with resources.

To help a student educate others about themselves, create a portfolio with interests, abilities and exemplary work. Encourage students to become involved in meetings and discussions about themselves. Be creative with ways to help them explain who they are. Consider various visual techniques and technology for support.

Train medical community, provide community directory to GTA physicians, become familiar with hospitals and physicians that specialize in disabilities.

It is important for the physician to see themselves as an advocate for their patient, which can involve increasing communication to/from secondary school staff and other community agency involvement, and having knowledge of laws, regulations, policies and initiatives that are in place for people and their caregivers.

Educating Others (con't)

KEY FINDINGS	**RESEARCH TO PRACTICE**

KEY FINDINGS

The majority of abusers are known to the victim:

- 33% - friends or acquaintances
- 33% - natural or foster family members
- 25% - care givers or service providers (Sobsey, D., 1998).

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

While in secondary school, treat your student as an "adult". Some concrete actions may be to teach appropriate boundaries, how/when to say "no" (in a variety of contexts) and reducing the amount of physical contact that the student receives. While it may feel appropriate to hold a small child's hand to lead them down the hallway, it is inappropriate to hold an adult's hand or give them hugs. As well, if there is supervision during personal care routines, ensure that the individual is given privacy and respect during that time (e.g., closed doors, no excessive talking between adults and with students, etc.).

Family Support

When parents and professionals partner with one another to meet the needs of individuals with ASD it can have a positive impact on the quality of their cognitive, social and emotional development." (Murray & Ryley, 2011)

Families play a pivotal role in their child's transition and often identify themselves as case managers, advocating for greater supports and services. Parents identify that they require more information about adult services and that services be continuous rather than present only in times of crisis.

Major transition issues confronting parents are how the young adult is going to spend his/her day after exiting the school system as well as planning for their child's long-term future beyond the time when they can be the primary caregivers.

Increasing attention is being given to family support because in their absence, the number of adults with special needs requiring services is far greater than service providers' capacity to accommodate them.

Transition programs that result in excellent outcomes for youth with ASD involve families in the process throughout the youth's school career.

Having strong positive relationships with families is crucial to developing a support system for successful transitioning from teen to adulthood in their community.

Accommodate the family members in the planning process as much as possible (e.g. time and location of transition meetings to suit their needs).

Parents and carers of individuals with a disability require the necessary services and supports on an ongoing basis to reduce their stress that may lead to anxiety and depression.

To reduce parental fears and increase expectations for a better quality of life (for themselves and their son/daughter) transition planning is required to address vocational opportunities, housing options, daytime opportunities, social/recreational and respite needs.

Self-Advocacy/ Self-Disclosure

KEY FINDINGS

All too often, adults in the life of the individual with a DD determine the path to be travelled. Without incorporating the voice of the individual with a disability, you are leaving out the most important person of the plan.

Students have become very well versed in performing choice selection and emphasizing needs and wants within the classroom and home environment. Where students seem to be lacking is in the areas of problem solving, decision-making and self-advocacy.

As an example, one study found that when in the community, those with mild and moderate ID were often not given the same quality of medical care as their counterparts. This was due to a lack of self-advocacy skills and awareness of the individual's ability to communicate and be understood by the medical practitioner.

When a student can communicate and plan his/her goals for the future while accessing the necessary supports through self-advocacy skills, he/she will be able to transition successfully to life beyond high school.

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Self-advocacy skills will look differently for those students transitioning to community programming from those on other pathways. A shift in thinking about the student as being fully dependent to having some independence as an adult needs to occur so that self-advocacy skills can be valued and practiced. Self-advocacy skills should be developed in areas of choice making, life skills, leisure time activities, and communication skills for needs and wants. Self-advocacy skills can be taught using concrete examples, visual aids, gestural/ physical prompting and authentic learning tasks. Matching the classroom lesson to the environment where the skills will be transferred (ie. ordering food and drink in the cafeteria is then expanded to community restaurants). All students would benefit from explicit instruction in various modalities and environments where self-advocacy skills would be needed.

Incorporating the student, where appropriate, in the development of the IEP will enhance ownership and responsibility in the acquisition of skills by the student.

Consideration needs to be in place for future environments such as communicating with medical practitioners. Knowledge about functions and processes of the body, illnesses and treatment as well as diet and exercise and how to communicate with others about oneself are important skills to develop to aid the development of self-advocacy.

The group known as Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE), recommend that instruction be provided in supported employment opportunities.

Involvement in the IEP and transition planning provides a person-centered approach to developing strategies in self-advocacy while engaging the individual in goal setting and decision making in relation to his/her future. It also enhances school completion, promotes attendance and success in postsecondary settings, and encourages family involvement and independence.

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SECTION 5

Summary

The following is a summary of the content found in the literature review on postsecondary planning. Future planning by all stakeholders is necessary to address the overall implications. As well, TCDSB endeavors to participate in next steps to address planning for postsecondary pathways for students with ASD.

THEME 1 - PREVALENCE

The current literature review indicates that there will be increasing numbers of students with ASD entering university/college, the workplace and the community. The reported increase in ASD prevalence has become a major concern in the past decade. Many studies have stated that there is a lack of specialized services to meet the need of this growing population. According to the research, the surge of children who were diagnosed in the 90's means that there are increasing numbers of students with ASD approaching adulthood. Many studies within this review suggest that there are more "higher functioning" individuals with ASD and this is a trend for the future.

IMPLICATIONS:

There is a need for the education system, the college/university system, employers and adult service system to prepare for this increase by:

► Collaboration and joint planning across sectors and institutions.
► Opportunities for partnership and joint projects to enhance transition planning should be explored at the local level as well as at the system (provincial) level.

THEME 2 - IMPORTANCE OF TRANSITION PLANNING AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE IEP

The transition "process" is just as important as the plan. Literature indicates that individualized transition plans should include specific action steps and identify the persons/agencies responsible for completing the action steps. The development of specific IEP goals and a comprehensive transition plan that leads to employment, and other activities, for students with ASD is a crucial process for secondary teams to engage in. For plans to be successful they should be reviewed and monitored regularly and students should be active participants in the planning process. Without this kind of planning and preparation, students with ASD are at risk for lifelong dependence on others.

IMPLICATIONS:

► Transition planning needs to be tailored to the selected pathway. It is important for parents and students to participate in transition planning and development of IEP goals each year, whether they are on a pathway to college/university, employment or to the community. This involvement should be considered to be 'best practice.'
► It would be important to consider work experience and/or co-op opportunities during the final years of secondary school to aid in the transition to postsecondary environments.
► Curriculum should focus on developing skills to aid students in the pathway he/she will be following and activities closely connected to the IEP goals. This can be achieved by using transition assessments to help identify goals.

THEME 3 - SUPPORTING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Understanding, acknowledging and building upon a student's strengths and interest are important for keeping the student at the centre of a successful transition. Most students with ASD frequently require accommodations, whether they need more time to complete a test in college, a simple list of tasks written down for their shift at work or the use of a visual schedule while they are in a community participation support program. Understanding each person as a unique individual with specific needs, strengths and interests will ensure that accommodations are appropriate and will help the individual succeed.

IMPLICATIONS:

► Careful thought is needed to decide if and which accommodations and/or adaptations are necessary for the environment to which the student is transitioning.

► The transition to postsecondary settings requires intensive transition planning. Considerations, especially for those entering postsecondary education, are required around building a timetable and course load while self advocating for their needs independently with professors.

► Visits to a variety of postsecondary campuses would benefit the student in finding the right fit for their needs

► Many students will be looking to enter the workforce and will require the necessary skills to navigate it successfully. Alternative curriculums should address the growing needs around the soft skills needed in the workplace. This would include incorporating explicit, concrete instruction on the hidden curriculum and appropriate social skills.

► School staff are encouraged to find the right balance of supporting an individual with the purpose of increasing independence (e.g. fading level of support). This balance is necessary for all students to succeed.

THEME 4 - DEVELOPING NECESSARY SKILLS

For any given pathway, there are skill sets that are needed in order to achieve success. The literature suggests that some of the barriers to success in each pathway are directly related to poor social skills, organizational skills as well as maladaptive behaviours and lack of independence. All efforts should be made to address these non-academic skills before students' transition to adulthood.

IMPLICATIONS:

► A greater focus on "non-academic" skills may be necessary at home, in school and in the community.

► Alternative curriculum and learning experiences should be tailored around building independence in each student.

► All students would benefit from explicit instruction in social skill development and executive functioning skills.

► Explicit instruction regarding various aspects of communication is necessary for all pathways.

THEME 5 - ROLE OF SUPPORT SERVICES & PEOPLE IN THE ENVIRONMENT

Research indicates that the current focus is on full community inclusion to ensure that individuals do not live in isolation within their communities but are active members in all aspects of community life. However, those with ASD making the transition to adulthood do not find the same level of services as they experienced within the school system. Eligibility criteria for Ministry funded adult services are based on their intellectual functioning rather than functional needs. Eligibility for access to academic accommodations and accessibility/disability services depend on whether the student with ASD has self-disclosed their disability.

IMPLICATIONS:

► Access to professionals and support services beyond high school is limited.

► Support services for students while in school need to focus on paving the way for the student to be successful once they leave, helping to connect the student and their family to the most appropriate services.

► It would be of great benefit for school staff to actively seek out information about postsecondary environments to help bridge the gap between secondary school and community resources.

► Students need to be actively involved in the planning of their pathway by setting achievable goals within their course work and selecting their courses for each coming year.

► Alternative curriculum should address specific skills required in the workplace.

► Alternative curriculum should encompass leisure skill development to aid students in determining their preferences for personal time.

THEME 6 - PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE AND EXPOSURE TO REAL LIFE ENVIRONMENTS

Despite the pathway the student is taking the literature reveals the need for students to be exposed to the environments that they will be transitioning to as much as possible. Students with ASD learn from repetition and lots of opportunity to practice skills. The greater the frequency (how often instruction takes place) in a natural environment outside of the high school, the sooner the individual will acquire the skill and be able to apply it.

IMPLICATIONS:

► Students need to visit their new environment as much as possible and have the opportunity to practice and maintain skills.

► Curriculum should provide explicit instructions in communication skills through the topics of resumé development, interview skills and socializing in the workplace.

► The learning environment should be as authentic to life as possible, to ensure successful transference of skills.

► Postsecondary settings could offer transition services to meet the needs of students entering their facility.

THEME 7 - EDUCATING OTHERS

Literature indicates that there is a need in educating and training for all stakeholders. The focus of the professional development should be on general ASD awareness and the associated skill set that could be advantageous for the pathway to which the student is transitioning. Furthermore, stakeholders need to be more aware of assessment tools and evidence based practices to support positive outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS:

► Educating others is an important factor in determining the success of the transition to any given pathway. While general information around ASD awareness is important, information specifically tailored to the individual and the pathway they are entering is ideal.

► Education on ASD needs to take place both in the secondary schools as well as to the environment to which the student is entering.

► Teachers should examine employability skills with their students while simultaneously finding ways to market student strengths for the job market.

THEME 8 - FAMILY SUPPORT

Family involvement was shown to be a strong predictor of student success. Ensure that outreach, information and services are accessible to all families. Different outreach methods (focus groups, workshops etc.) may be necessary to engage families especially those at risk. Stronger partnerships and closer monitoring may be required to increase family involvement.

IMPLICATIONS:

► It is necessary for families to be involved to ensure success.

► Families need to have a voice especially during postsecondary transitions and should be visible members of the transition team.

► It may be beneficial to set up students with a mentor within the community to aid transitioning to the workplace or postsecondary setting.

► School board to continue hosting Autism Awareness Evening whereby families and agencies are invited to share information and build relationships.

► Each sector involved needs to build stronger relationships to ensure that services are more seamless.

THEME 9 - SELF-DISCLOSURE AND SELF-ADVOCACY

Students who are aware and have knowledge of their strengths, interests and areas of need are better prepared to advocate for themselves in all postsecondary environments. There needs to be opportunities during the school day apart from traditional academics to teach independence and self-advocacy. The continuous development of these skills (advocacy, choice making) should be taught within all experiences and across all settings throughout the student's secondary school career. Even if a student is non-verbal, they need to be taught important skills to give them control of their lives within the community.

IMPLICATIONS:

► These skills need to be in place as much as possible before the student transitions to their desired pathway.

► Decisions need to be made early on about teaching a student about his/her diagnosis so that there is a better understanding of one's own needs. Discussions about this between school and home need to be more frequent so that a clear consensus is made early on.

► School staff should be made aware of the importance of self-advocacy skills and how to teach these skills to students.

► All students should be given explicit instruction and ample opportunities to practice developing self-advocacy skills while in the classroom setting.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The following recommendations have been identified as areas of priority for Autism Programs and Services staff as a result of the literature review. Areas identified include priorities for the Toronto Catholic School Board Autism Programs and Services staff, as well as priorities when working with school staff, parents and community partners.

PRIORITIES FOR TCDSB, AUTISM PROGRAMS AND SERVICES, TRANSITION TEAM:

1. Investigate appropriate transition assessments, planning tools and alternative curricula to support program planning and IEP development.
2. Create resources (instructional and assessment) to support students and educators to address each postsecondary pathway.
3. Investigate resources and strategies to develop functional life skills, independence and self-advocacy.
4. Continue to provide professional development to elementary and secondary teachers to share ideas and learn about programming strategies, tools for assessment/evaluation, preparation of IEPs, transition planning from elementary to secondary and from secondary to postsecondary pathways.
5. Continue to involve Autism Programs and Services team members to assist with postsecondary transitions as appropriate.

PRIORITIES FOR TCDSB, AUTISM PROGRAMS AND SERVICES, TRANSITION TEAM TO WORK IN COLLABORATION WITH TCDSB SCHOOLS AND DEPARTMENTS:

1. Share findings from this document, *Transition to Postsecondary Pathways for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Translating Research into Practice* with school staff, parents and other departments. Investigate opportunities for collaboration and joint planning.
2. Provide strategies and resources to involve students in their IEPs to the best of their ability (i.e. use of technology to support ideas).
3. Focus on students who are leaving the education system and support them with transition planning (i.e. Exit Plan). Encourage a team planning approach and involve the Postsecondary Transition Teacher.
4. Continue to support families with information on relevant postsecondary resources (i.e. Looking Ahead Document, Community Resource Directories, and parent information workshops). Create a guide for parents on postsecondary planning.
5. Continue to collect data on the number of students with Autism transitioning from TCDSB

to postsecondary pathways to assist with program and service planning.

PRIORITIES FOR TCDSB IN WORKING IN COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

1. Continue to work in partnership with Surrey Place Centre ASD Consultants on recommendations from this document.
2. Continue to provide co-op and authentic experiential learning in community settings, building awareness and understanding in others.
3. Continue to facilitate partnerships with community agencies, postsecondary institutions and work place opportunities (e.g. workshops, information fairs).

God's Promise of Help and Healing
"Remove every obstacle from their path! Build the road and make it ready!"
Book of Isaiah (57.14)