10 Tips to Help Young Adults with Autism Transition into the Workforce

Linda Mastroianni

For many young adults, the transition from school to employment is often a frightening and intimidating one. Leaving the familiarity of routine behind and beginning a new journey into the unknown is difficult for anyone. For young adults with autism, this experience can be even more terrifying. They face many different challenges than that of their neuro-typical peers.

Entering into the workforce is a milestone in one's life; a rite of passage that is often identified as the beginning of their journey into adulthood. But for so many young adults with autism, this transition can be the most difficult and stressful time in their lives.

Some reports state that an estimated 500,000 people with autism will enter into the workplace over the next ten years.

With so many young adults looking for employment and without sufficient and sustainable job opportunities for them, we are looking at a high percentage of unemployment rates for autistic individuals.

In addition to job creation, we must also help prepare them for the moment when they are ready for employment as well as supporting them through the transitional process.
Many have excellent job skills that can easily be applied to a number of organizations but first we must find what they enjoy doing, their strengths, their abilities and finding a viable employment environment where they can apply their skills and thrive while doing so. This doesn't happen overnight and it may even take a few jobs before finding that perfect fit but with a little planning, it is possible.

Here are 10 tips to help young adults with autism transition into the workforce:

**Job Matching.** Identifying the best possible job that fits their strengths and abilities. They will be much happier doing something they enjoy doing than doing something they hate. Finding employment that showcases their abilities will, in turn, lead them to having a positive engagement with their work environment. And a positive work environment tends to lead to better job performance as well.

**Volunteer and/or Intern.** While looking for employment, they can volunteer their time in any organization they feel comfortable with. This could be a local business or even the library. As long as they feel at ease in their environment, that is all that matters. This not only gives them the practice and exposure they need but it also gives them that much needed experience that can be then transferred onto their job resume. Not to mention references that can vouch for their abilities and job performance.

**Take a course.** If they have a specific skill that they excel at, taking a course to build and expand on this skill is an added bonus. This is refining what they are already good at and mastering an area that can potentially give them an edge over the next person that is bidding for the same job position.

**Find a mentor.** Look for someone who has similar interests and has had similar challenges that they have overcome. Reach out to them and ask them for some tips and advice. This can be someone in the community, a friend, a family member, anyone that makes them feel comfortable sharing their story with and that can provide some support. A different perspective is always refreshing, maybe even challenging to think outside the box and perhaps help them with overcoming some obstacles.

**Package their skills.** In addition to a well-written resume, making a portfolio of work that has been done can also be shown as reference. This can include personal work that showcases their skills and aptitudes as well as on the job field work. Anything that can help define their abilities is an asset.

**Building social skills.** In any working environment, there will come a point where social interaction will eventually come into play. If social situations are somewhat uncomfortable, they can slowly build these skills by getting involved in social activities at their own pace with people and situations they're comfortable with. While social interaction is important, it shouldn't be forced. We must always listen and respect their feelings. They should be encouraged to step out of their comfort zone but at their own rhythm; always moving forward and continuing to build on these skills a little more each day.

**Practice job interviews.** This is a great exercise to do because it builds on social skills and confidence simultaneously. Going through possible questions that potential employers may ask makes the real job interview process less frightening, less unknown. Knowing how to answer certain questions will make them feel more confident about themselves, as well as the manner in which to respond during their actual job interview.

**Building a buddy system.** A buddy system approach is finding and developing a friendship at work with someone that they are comfortable with. This person can help them with the ins and outs of the working environment and what they can expect. They can help them with any transitions or work issues that may arise. Almost like a mentor that we spoke of earlier but this time it's actually in the workplace.
**Keep a schedule.** Keeping a schedule is very important both at work and at home. This keeps you on track and visually seeing what needs to be done makes it much easier to understand and process. It keeps the end goal in sight. This can also be done in a form of a vision board. It can be done on a daily, weekly even monthly basis. The important thing to remember is finding the right schedule that can help them reach their goals without feeling overwhelmed.

**Be upfront with employer.** If specific accommodations are required in order to do their job efficiently and effectively, let the employer know immediately. Their skills with speak for themselves and if accommodations are needed then it is best to speak about them right away. It is important not only to see the abilities but understanding when certain limitation may arise and how to work around them.

Finding employment is difficult for anyone, but the challenges that young adults with autism face are magnified. Autistic people are often stigmatized for their differences without ever getting a chance to demonstrate their skills.

Autistic people have a lot to contribute to society and in the workplace. They deserve equal opportunity to showcase their aptitudes and talents, just like anyone else.

We must always remember that we all have abilities and we all have limitations. We are after all only human. It is our humanity that makes us more similar than different.

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**Snow Ice Cream**

This 5-minute recipe for homemade snow ice cream is a sweet way to celebrate a snow day!

**Prep: 5 mins Total: 5 mins**

**Ingredients:**

- 1 cup milk (any kind)
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 pinch salt
- 8 cups clean snow or shaved ice (more or less depending on the density of the snow)
- Optional (but strongly suggested) topping: sprinkles!!!

**Directions:**

In a large bowl, whisk milk, sugar, vanilla and salt together until combined. Go scoop up some fresh (clean!) snow, and immediately stir it into the milk mixture until you reach your desired consistency. Top with sprinkles or other ice cream toppings if desired.

The ice cream should be fluffy and not runny, but it melts quickly, so dive in right away!

*Consume fresh snow at your own risk.*
What is Co-Teaching?

Co-teaching is when a general education teacher and a special education teacher share the responsibilities of planning, delivering instruction, and assessing skills.

**What does it look like?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One Teach, One Observe</th>
<th>One teacher leads the instruction while the other observes and gathers data to be reviewed after the lesson.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Teach, One Assist</td>
<td>One teacher leads instruction while the other circulates the room and provides assistance to students as needed. This method should be used the least.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallel Teaching</td>
<td>Both teachers teach the same content, but to a divided class. This allows for differentiation. The teachers should alternate the group they work with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Teaching</td>
<td>Both teachers share the delivery of the same content at the same time to the whole group. This is the most complex co-teaching style and requires the most planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Station Teaching</td>
<td>Both teachers divide content and students. Students spend time with each teacher. A third station can be added for independent work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Teaching</td>
<td>One teacher delivers instruction to the whole class while the other works in small groups to provide preteaching and reteaching, as needed.</td>
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A BRAND NEW THING-Sesame Street’s Autism Acceptance Campaign:

“See Amazing in All Children!”
By: Anne Carpenter

Sesame Street, the Grand Dame of children’s programming since the late 1960’s, has a spanking-new program: “See Amazing in All Children!” It focuses on autism and helping young viewers understand ASD so that they can learn to be more accepting of their classmates or siblings. It stars Julia, an adorable little girl, who is a friend of Elmo’s and who has autism. The storybook “We’re Amazing, 1, 2, 3!” is in digital form and features Elmo and his friends Abby Cadabby and Julia.

Written in purple with the read-aloud words turning to red, the narrator tells the story of an adorable red-haired girl named Julia who is said to respond a bit differently to the world around her. The story focuses on Julia, Elmo and Abby and Julia responds in her own unique way to different situations such as playing with blocks. Elmo likes to knock them down so that they fall with a loud CRASH, but she likes to line them up. “Cool Wall,” he says, appreciating the nice, orderly arrangement of the pretty pastel blocks. She also loves to swing on the swings and so does Elmo, so they swing together singing the Swinginity Swing song.

The story highlights her sensory processing, noting that she doesn’t like the loud blender noise inside the store so Allen, the owner, turns it off. This digital book with its bright colors and short story is an introduction to autism for very young children and while some people may not like the so-called stereotyped image of autism, it’s a start for Sesame Street and a way to introduce more children to autism. In addition to the digital storybook about Julia who will be in the regular episodes in the near future, the Sesame Street “See Amazing in All Children” website has a number of videos. There is a video about a little boy named Ben who has autism, a story about siblings, one on being a supportive parent and one about a parent’s role. These present different sides of the subject making for a broader understanding of autism and the issues that come along with it. Abby Cadabby, who is in most of the videos, is charming and makes the subjects less intimidating for young children.

This initiative is sponsored by a variety of organizations including Autism Speaks, the Autism Society, The Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN) and the ARC. As a bonus, there is also a section of clickable activity cards that walks the child through the steps of an activity such as brushing one’s teeth or going to the store. While some people may not agree with the approach or that too little is being done, this is a step forward for Sesame Street and a big one, too!
Anne Carpenter’s Book Review

TITLE: The Autistic Author and Animator: A Mother’s View of a Daughter’s Triumph

AUTHOR: Walmsley, Janet

SUBJECT AREA: Autism-Parent Narratives

PUBLISHER: Influence Publishing

PUBLICATION DATE: 2015

NUMBER OF PAGES: 198

As more and more is known about autism, we are seeing more people on the autism spectrum revealing some amazing abilities such as deep levels of creativity, musical genius and extraordinary memory. Janet Walmsley enters the arena with her absolutely spellbinding narrative about raising a daughter who started out seemingly intact, but who started to regress after having had a vaccination, losing speech, eye contact and developmental milestones and was later diagnosed as having autism.

So the author set about doing as much early intervention as possible, but instead of relying solely on ABA or any other single approach, she got resourceful and came up with her own ways of helping Jen. Jen had a great deal of support as a child and young adult, starting with the wonderful Brer Rabbit Pre School in Canada, where they live, with wonderful teachers who worked tirelessly with Jen. Each chapter has a short narrative by one of Jen’s many support people which were legion; Walmsley was lucky to have been able to marshal the resources and supports for Jen as this has not been possible for so many families of people with ASD. The author paints a realistic portrayal of autism as her daughter continues to have many challenges until she reaches late childhood and early adolescence. Then, something happens and she really starts to blossom. She is like a flower that lays dormant during the winter but suddenly brings forth brilliant blossoms. Jenny starts on an accelerated trajectory of development that continues through adulthood with no signs of slowing down. This is especially apparent in high school, where she develops her interest in animation and film, applies to an animation school and is admitted!

I was fascinated and blown away by this relentlessly positive and optimistic story because it is true! The book shows photos of Jen in a beautiful graduation dress looking radiant and mature and absolutely gorgeous! It is truly amazing to see just how far Jen progresses as she goes through high school and prepares to travel to a famous school to learn animation techniques; the book is literally sprinkled with testimonies from the numerous support people that help and guide her and they pour out the love! This makes all the difference in the world and the fact that she was with these people for many years must have triggered something in her brain, just as all this help and motivation to learn, grow and change has done for me. The author is positive and relentlessly so, to the point where some people may think she was being unrealistic, yet this may be just what has to be done when it comes to supporting someone on the autism spectrum. This is presuming competence to the highest degree and this could very well be the linchpin in Jenny’s growth and amazing transformation. The author shines a light that is so bright that is almost blinding, but it is beautiful bright light that we all must see.
**Candy Cane Marshmallow Pops**

1 child to crush candy canes *(optional, but fun)*  
large marshmallows  
mini candy canes  
melted chocolate  
crushed candy canes

Stick a mini candy cane into the large marshmallow. Dip the marshmallow into the melted chocolate, allow excess chocolate to drip off, then roll into the crushed candy cane. Place on a waxed paper lined baking sheet and allow to set.

*Using food handling gloves helped with this project as the candy cane can get a bit sticky.*

APP REVIEW: Fluidity HD for Ipad

By Nebulous Design  
Anne Carpenter

The iPad with its smooth glass screen and clear, colorful display is an ideal tool for helping kids and teens with ASD to regulate their sensory systems in a fun and enjoyable way. One such app is Fluidity HD, a gorgeous app that is a mass of swirling colored blogs that looks like it is suspended in liquid. The free version has a lot to offer which is unusual for iPad apps; they often don’t do very much unless you pay for the full version. The free version has a menu and when you tap the screen you get some nice options including control of the speed of the flow, the viscosity, fading to light or dark and selecting the color. You can also set the app to cycle through the different colors either slowly or rapidly. If you set the speed to really fast, a comet swirls on the screen.

The effects are soothing and beautiful and this can be used to help a child calm down when upset or as an alerting tool. This can be a part of a child’s sensory diet and OT therapy routine, and a fun one, too. This one’s a beauty and not to be missed. The best part is that you can do so much with the free version!
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Fall Conference Speaker:
Paula Kluth

Thank You
Fall 2015 Conference Awards & Scholarship Recipients

Corey’s Courage Award Recipient: Maxim Ziskie
Maxim was diagnosed at age 6 with high functioning autism. Maxim is a 1st degree black belt in Tang Soo Do, a member of the National Honor Society, participates in his school’s theatre group, and church youth group. Maxim presents a program to 2nd grade students each year that helps them learn about autism. He has worked with another younger student on the spectrum with socialization. Maxim’s proud parents are Mark & Lisa Ziskie and his younger brother is Caden. Congratulations, Maxim!

Lipinski Professional Award Recipient: David St. Aubin
David St. Aubin has been a high school principal for many years, and is a United States military reserve officer who has served multiple tours in Afghanistan. Mr. St. Aubin is a great problem solver, honest, listens to parent’s concerns, and helps to ensure that students on the spectrum needs are being met. Mr. St. Aubin continues to go above and beyond to help ensure students are receiving the appropriate accommodations and services. Congratulations, Mr. St. Aubin, thank you for all that you do for our children and for serving our country!

Stephen Tsai Award Recipient: Susan Kaffenberger
Susan Kaffenberger has been an elementary teacher at Goodrich Schools for many years. Mrs. Kaffenberger was Maxim Ziskie’s 2nd grade teacher. During that time, Mrs. Kaffenberger implemented a program that educated her class about students on the spectrum. Maxim continues to visit her classroom in April to educate her students. Mrs. Kaffenberger’s dedication, patience and love of teaching are just a few reasons why she was selected to receive this award. Congratulations, Mrs. Kaffenberger and thank you for being a great teacher to all students!

Stephen Tsai Award Recipient: Steven Mitchell
Steven Mitchell has been the theater director and English teacher at Goodrich High School and created the district’s theater program. Mr. Mitchell not only welcomes all students to participate in the theater program, he strongly encourages them. He has assisted in helping students find their nitch, whether the students are acting, building sets or working with the lights & sounds. Congratulations, Mr. Mitchell and thank you for being a wonderful teacher to all students.

Stephen Tsai Award Recipient: James Pecar
James Pecar has been a choir teacher at Chippewa Valley High School since 2013. Mr. Pecar has made autism awareness an integral part of his curriculum. Every spring, Mr. Pecar and his students hold a concert to raise funds for the St. Clair/Macomb County Chapter. Mr. Pecar requires his students to research and create oral presentations about autism. His choir students volunteer every year to help the St. Clair/Macomb Co. Chapter at their annual Ball and Walk for Autism. Mr. Pecar created a beautiful sensory garden for his cousin, Carrie at her home. Congratulations, Mr. Pecar and thank you for all that you do to bring autism awareness to your students and your many hours of service as a teacher and community member.
On the Road with ASM

★ October 8th - Kalamazoo, MI - Michigan Autism Conference

★ October 19th - Grand Rapids, MI - ASM’s Fall Conference

★ October 24th - Flint, MI - Parent Workshop
winter bucket list

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