PURPOSE:

In the year 2008, there is one child of every 151 being born who will be diagnosed with Autism. Those children will in large part be served by the public school system, here in the United States. The public schools of the USA are required to complete a process known as “transition planning” starting somewhere in the early teens of the students educational life. These mandates under the Federal IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, are implemented at the state level, through regulations on a state by state basis.

The following report, reviews through research of the literature actual progress to date, of what has occurred with regard to that subsection of the law, dealing with “Transitioning” from school to work, and the incidence of placement and job retention is in the 25 years 1975 when Public Law 94-142 was enacted.

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Transitioning Teens with Asperger's to Adult Life -- a review of the literature

Transitioning from School to Work

Review of the literature documents that youth with all disabilities fair poorly after high school graduation (Stainton, Hole, Charles, Yodanis, Powell and Crawford, 2006). Even those with high incidence disabilities are at risk for poor outcomes following high school (Murray, 2003). Longitudinal investigations suggest that students with learning disabilities have lower earnings, both higher high school drop out rates and lower rates of school attendance beyond high school, and are less likely to live independently than young adults without disabilities.

Having a disability places an individual at higher risk of negative developmental paths. It has long been established that factors such as gender, SES, and race are related to education and employment after high school. Many times these factors interact with one another amplifying risks. However, research also purports that individual student characteristics (for example, achievement, quality transition planning, etc.) were stronger predictors of participation in education after high school than were gender, income, or ethnicity. Moreover, not all who are at risk for poor developmental outcomes actually encounter them, some actually thrive despite risk (Murray, 2003).

While there are certainly biological, environmental, social, and a myriad of other factors that serve as obstacles to success, there are some known, documented, proactive
factors that can promote resilience, even for those with disabilities. Certainly it’s important to carefully delineate the risk factors, disability being just one, and then reduce any that can be reduced or eliminated (e.g., poverty, poor access to health care, etc.). However, risk does not guarantee long term problems.

A dual focus is needed one of reducing the risk factors while also demarcating and implementing protective factors. Strategies to buffer risks should include supportive services, proactive agents planted in the environment or strategies taught to optimize chances of success (Murray, 1993).

“Risk and Resilience Model” research points to various proactive factors that can reduce the impact of risk exposure and thus improve the outcome for young adults who are transitioning. There are individual, family, school, and community factors that reciprocally influence one another. High risk youth who are resilient and have positive outcomes after high school tend to have at least some common individual characteristics: positive temperaments, an internal locus of control, high self-esteem, problem-solving skills, optimistic outlooks in the face of obstacles, and are of moderate to high intelligence many times with good academics. These individuals tend to persist in the face of obstacles and insist on finding the right fit for their ability. In terms of family characteristics, at least one parent has a positive relationship which is warm and supportive of the youth. This person can serve as a buffer under stress. When proactive, school environments are quality ones where the teachers play an important role forming positive relationships with youth and their families. They exhibit positive role modeling for dealing with stress in addition to providing guidance with problems. In these supportive environments resilient youth have a sense of belonging (Murray, 2003).

The greater community also contributes to buffering risks associated with disability for those that fare well. The communities of these individuals may be composed of a
variety of social settings: sports events, clubs, church organizations, etc.

Each setting can provide supportive individuals. Well-grounded intervention and prevention efforts will look at the person developing within a context, a web of potential influences (Murray, 2003) both in the immediate environment (B.F. Skinner’s theory) and more distant environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). While Murray’s (2003) research focused predominantly on those with high incidence learning disabilities, those with less common yet more severe developmental disabilities have a similar set of life experiences, but are at greater risk with fewer personal resources to compensate.

Therefore, it is critical that skills are taught at a young age and supports in the environment optimize the success of these youth.

The role of the school in preparing a child for transitioning into the community begins very early. The cumulative effects of these influences, for the better or worse, are evident during junior and senior year in high school when the transitioning plans come to the forefront.

Since even those with mild disabilities have poorer success in transitioning from high school to work, it’s not surprising that, many programs attempting to transition those with more pervasive developmental disabilities from high school to work have had even more limited success.

Research delineates two approaches to training students for employment.

The first approach is the “Readiness Model”, trains the student step-by-step with each skill needed for employment until the student is deemed “ready” for work. This model had limited success with the developmentally disabled. The poor success rate was attributed to the inability of disabled youth to generalize skills learned from one setting to another.
The second approach places the student within the employment context with needed supports while learning the skills necessary for the job. Generalizing is not necessary with this approach since the skills are learned within the work setting.

While some research provides more success with the latter approach (Eagar, Green, Gordon, Owen, Masso, and Williams, 2006), other reports indicated that autistic youth learning purchasing skills could in fact generalize when videotape modeling is used (Harring, Kennedy, Adams and Pitts-Conway, 1987). Another study found four mentally handicapped women with major speech and conversational deficits were able to be taught to initiate and respond to conversations as well as generalize these skills across settings (Hughes, Harmer, Killan, and Niarhos, 1995). It appears that for the developmentally disabled, generalizing may be more contingent on teaching method.

Either model or a combination of both may still be viable strategies for job skills preparation with developmentally disabled students. For instance, job shadowing in the work setting and than role playing, video tape modeling, or practicing with peers in the classroom and in a variety of settings have been shown to benefit developmentally disabled students as well (Harring, et. al., 1987; Hughes, et. al., 1995).

While scales are available for assessing daily living skills of the elderly, uniform scales that apply to all types of disabilities are lacking. Moreover, the skills needed may be job dependent and therefore more individualized assessments are necessary. These would consider both the disability and the context of the work. Research by Eager, Green, Gordon, Owen, Masso and Williams (2006) suggests behaviors needed for employment need be categorized within a “hierarchy of functional acquisition” whereby some behaviors (e.g., transferring from bed to chair and mobility) must be mastered before others (e.g., bathing and dressing). Additionally this study recognized that students “capacity to work” levels need also be categorized in terms of the hours they would be able to
endure: less than 8 hours per week; 8-14 hours per week; 15-25 hours per week; 30+ hours; or full time. These researchers utilized a classification that incorporated levels of support needed: day program support, community support access, short to moderate term transitional support, moderate to long term transitional support, disability employment services, and types of vocational rehabilitation services needed for each student. In transitioning these young school-leavers in Wales, behavioral assessment was also important. A rating of 0-2 was used for the following behaviors:

- self-care (bowels, bladder, grooming, toilet use, feeding, mobility, dressing, stairs and bathing);
- domestic (telephone, shopping, food preparation, housekeeping, washing and ironing laundry, transportation, self-medicating, and handling finances);
- behavior problems (wandering, intrusive, verbally disruptive, physically aggressive, emotionally dependent, and danger to self or others);
- cognitive (memory or confusion).

Eagar, et. al. (2006) interviewed parents/guardians and rated members of four cohorts of High School students totaling 1,556 young people who left school during the years of 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002. The number and type of disability impacted the outcome of the transition to work. For instance, behavioral problems were reported to be more common with autistic disability than other disorders, creating more problems in adjustment. While all assessed abilities were important in predicting current and future work adjustment, the highest correlate (.67) of future capacity to work was the total domestic assessment score. Domestic scores were also strongly correlated with assistance required (.71) and recommended programs (.74). Only 2% of those with major behavioral problems were recommended to transition to work programs, this is compared with 34% of others with disabilities (Eagar, et. al., 2006).

It seems domestic abilities are an important aspect of everyday functioning, if these skills are mastered, it’s probable that some work skills can be mastered as well.
The Developmental Disabilities Act of 1984 required occupational choices be made available to those persons who were traditionally considered unemployable. It recommended supported employment whereby the disabled would be integrated with other members of the non-disabled adult community, work for pay and supported by trained persons providing transportation, supervision or other supports whenever needed. Likewise, the Developmental Disabilities Act of 1986 provided a guide to the standards for supported employment, which included the severely handicapped. However, this regulation set 20 hours as the minimum number of hours a supported employee may work.

Simply mandating change does not produce quality in transitional preparation of youth. For instance, many of the staff working with developmentally disabled youth in educational programs do not themselves possess the skills to successfully train the disabled toward employment objectives (Rusch and Hughes, 1989). The goal was eliminate the “warehousing” of persons with disabilities and increase their quality of life with gainful employment whenever and where ever possible, optimizing their functioning (whatever that might mean on an individualized basis). The transition requires finding a job they could do and providing the supports to train the disabled youth or adult for the position. Since 1985 many states have provided grants and implemented state supported employment services, however, most have involved only the mild to moderately disabled adults with limited success (Stainton, et. al., 2006).

Types of Supportive Employment

There are four types of supportive employment programs suggested by Rusch and Hughes (1989):
1. **Individual Placement Model** – The disabled person is placed on the job once a position is found within the community. The individual receives on-the-job training with support, the support of the employment specialist progressively decreases until the disabled is performing the job up to standard. Then supports decrease to a maintenance level of two contacts per month until employment is terminated.

2. **Clustered Placement Model or Enclave Model** – A group (not more than 8) work near adjacent each other performing similar tasks. These co-workers provide training and support throughout the employment of the disabled. Many times in this model the employment specialist is the supervisor.

3. **Mobile Crews** – A crew or small group of disabled individuals contract services within the community (e.g., housekeeping, landscaping, gardening, snow removal, etc).

   A supervisor provides continuous training and on-site work supervision.

4. **Entrepreneurial Approach** – A crew of workers produce a product within a company setting (e.g., assembly workers) who are required to perform the same movements and function over time with constant monitoring and supervision. It was suggested by the literature that this may be most amenable to those that are the most severely disabled (Rusch & Hughes, 1989).

While these approaches can be used when employing those with pronounced disabilities, they may still underestimate the potential of some severely disabled adults and children if the proper training, motivation and funding are available. For instance, MacDuff, Krantz, and McClannahan (1993) were able to keep severely retarded, communication deficient, behaviorally disruptive boys on task and schedule (in the absence of the trainer) with the use of visual prompts.

Typically strategies for teaching individuals with severe impairments were limited to learning tasks and following instructions when verbal prompts were continually present.
to guide the individual through the task.

These researchers however taught a stimulus control transfer with a series of six pictures in a metal ring binder.

Boys ages 9-14 were able to get their binders, complete the first task illustrated in the first picture, than put those items away, afterwards begin to the next task shown pictorially on the next page, and so on until all six tasks were performed and items put away.

After training, these behaviors were maintained even in the absence of the trainer. Moreover, researchers reported that while following these schedules there appeared to be “fewer aberrant behaviors” MacDuff, Krantz, and McClannahan (1993). Accordingly, work crews of developmentally disabled (Autistic) individuals, once trained in job skills, might have pictorial manuals beside them to help them stay on-task. Similarly, other research of the 1980’s documented increasing conversational skills across diverse settings, ages and disability groups with the use of prompts or “prosthetic” devices (e.g., a conversation booklet). Even more optimistic is the finding that utilizing peer training whereby many examples of conversation starters are modeled in a variety of settings coupled with training in the use of reminder statements have increased unprompted conversational skills in moderately retarded women (Hughes, et. al., 1995).

All forms of disruptive behavior have also been decreased in developmentally impaired individuals simply by increasing language skills (Sundberg, 2005).

The Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990

The Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 mandated a preliminary Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each student by age 14 and a more detailed plan by age 16. The United States, like many nations globally, instituted a School-to-Work Opportunity Act in 1994, which creates a system of standards for education that incorporate skills recognized by industries. There are two general types of skills: employability skills and technical skills. Core employability skills are similar to the SCANS competencies.
Technical skills are defined by the particular job. Successful transition necessitates the involvement of community based programs for transitioning from school to work environments.

(The [www.cesa8.k12.wi.us/services/xtw/opportunities act-htm](http://www.cesa8.k12.wi.us/services/xtw/opportunities act-htm)).

*The SCANS*

The SCANS competencies refer to the U.S. Department of Labor’s formation of the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). These are some basic skills needed to function in the workplace. There are five competencies and five personal characteristics. The five competencies include:

1. Uses resources wisely – time management (plan, prepare, follow through); money management (budgets, forecasts, records, adjustments); utilizes space and materials efficiently; and utilizes human resources effectively (using skills, evaluating and giving feedback).
2. **Interpersonal skills** – teamwork; teaches others new skills; satisfies customers; leadership qualities (communicates ideas, assumes responsibilities and challenges appropriately); negotiation and conflict resolution; and works with persons of diverse backgrounds.

3. **Well Informed** – acquires and evaluates information; organizes and maintains information; interprets and communicates information; and utilizes computer for research.

4. **Understands relationships between systems** – knows and works well within organizational structures; monitors and corrects own performance, and improves upon old methods.

5. **Technological knowledge** - uses tools and technology (including computers); sets-up and operates equipment; trouble shoots problems related to the use of technology.

The five personal qualities identified by the SCANS are:
1. **Basic Skills**: reads (text, graphs, charts and schedules), writes (letters, reports and charts, conveys ideas and feelings, gives directions), performs arithmetic (computations, logical thinking), listening skills (attends, interprets and responds to verbal messages), and speaking skills (responds, organizes ideas and communicates orally).

2. **Thinking Skills**: generates new ideas, considers risks and rewards before deciding, weights alternative before solving problems, learns new material and apply knowledge learned, and reasons according to rules of logic.

3. **Personal Qualities**: shows responsibility (works toward goals), has good self-esteem, and social skills (friendly, adaptable, empathetic and polite).

4. **Self-management skills**: assessing oneself, goal setting, monitoring progress and self-control.
5. Honesty and the ability to make ethical choices.

(www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/methods/assessment/as7scans.htm).

The Community Living Research Project: Summary of Research

A research team compiled a summary of how projects across the globe were dealing with the transitioning of developmentally disabled young adults. This team studied what was being done, what worked and what didn’t (Stainton, Hole, Chales, Yodanis, Powell, and Crawford, 2006). This research concluded there are many skills and supports necessary to transition disabled students from the classroom to the workplace. Some considerations are: assessing the capabilities and desires of the student, being aware of the potential employment opportunities available, breaking down the job requirements into trainable behavioral skills, developing the best techniques for skills training, and providing the supports needed throughout the transition process.

These programs which address the directives of the Disabilities Education Act (and other mandates globally) have both unique and overlapping strategies including:
- Matching the abilities and learning environment of the student with opportunities for employment in the environment.

- Providing each student with a mentor at school to act as a liaison between the school, teachers, the employer, school administrations, the administrator and parents. Once transitioned out of the school setting, providing a case manager for follow-up.

- Provide assistance to employers to incorporate learning experiences, counseling and case management services. Likewise providing resources for teachers, workplace mentors, school site mentors and counselors to facilitate the transition.

- Assist schools and employers to integrate basic skills academic learning and the skills necessary for a particular employment context.

- Encourage the participation of employers with school planning.
- Provide assistance in job placement to those who completed the training program.

- Utilize community services for successful transition from school to work.

- Monitor post-program outcomes, particularly with respect to SES, race gender, ethnicity, culture and disability. LEP status, dropouts, and academically talented students.

Specific Vocational Skills

Since the implementation of this act and similar legislation globally programs have focused on a number of possible ways of moving students from school to work. Most offer specific employment skills (keyboarding, filing, auto repair, woodshop, bookkeeping, web design, etc), life skills (coping, planning, cooking, childcare, etc), consumer skills (marketing, budgeting), and both on the job training and in class job skills training. Academic training could include teaching very specific office skills, such as filing alphabetically, keyboarding and collating pages and stapling (Stainton, et. al., 2006). The simple task of stapling for instance would require a number of steps. Typically stapling requires collating a number of pages as well. According to
the Murdoch Center, instructing one to staple two pages in a bulk mailing would require:

- first pick up the first page with one hand
- transfer the page to the other hand
- pick up a second page with the free hand
- place the second page under the first page
- hold the pages with both hands
- jog the pages together
- insert the upper left corner of the page into the stapler
- staple the pages and place the pages in a stack

Accordingly, Murdoch has developed a task analysis for a number of tasks that are applicable to life skills training as well as employment settings.
Alternately, being able to operate a photocopying machine that collates and staples would be another way of completing the same task.

Daily Living Skills

Ideally, the education begins at an early age in order to master each task skillfully. Severely delayed autistic 6-9 year olds were successfully taught daily living skills by using pictorial self-management in an unsupervised setting (Pierce and Schriebman, 1994). That is, children were given a picture book, each page showing the individual steps to self-dressing, at the end of the book was a smiley face sticker which was taken when the task was completed. Likewise, specific jobs require specific tasks, a task analysis of skills required to perform janitorial tasks (such as cleaning a restroom) were identified. Skills were taught utilizing four different prompt levels: verbalizing with modeling, verbal interaction and graduated physical guidance, verbal interaction and no help. Six moderately retarded adolescents were trained in a school setting to perform this task (Cuvo, Leaf, and Borakove 1978.)
More than simply transitioning to employment, students must transition to adult roles. At a very basic level this means being capable of engaging in Activities of Daily Living.

Lawton & Brody (1969) developed a scale to monitor the functioning of individuals as they age, the same skills measured apply to simply functioning in adults roles. According to Lawton & Brody (1969) these would include: using a telephone, getting to places beyond walking distance, grocery shopping, preparing meals, doing housework or handyman work, doing laundry, taking medications, and managing money. Another scale, the Developmental Disabilities Support Needs Assessment Profile (DD-SNAP) measures the amount of daily living supports, health care supports and behavioral supports the individual may need (www.murdochfoundation.org/DOMAIN.htm).

Supports Intensity Scale is a relatively new, research based tool available from AAMR, designed to calculate specific need levels based on a myriad of support areas. Initially the tool was/is developed to assist state and governmental funding sources identify needs as they relate to funding required to live independently in community settings. The tool is likely to have predictive value of vocational transitioning success, based on the research cited above. (Edgar 2006).

Additionally, transitioning to adult roles could include post-secondary education, employment, and community involvement. Wehman and Revell (1997) suggested 7 preparations in 7 domains: employment, living arrangements, financial independence, making friends, sexuality, self-esteem, and leisure.

Webmeyer (2001), like the SCANS, emphasizes a development of a whole lifestyle including the encouragement of the development of autonomy: self-management, goal setting, problem solving and decision making as well as having an awareness of skills and weaknesses.
Self-Determination

It appears however that many teachers in special education programs may lack the skills necessary to teach self-determination to disabled students. The concept of self-determination incorporates a paradigm shift – shifting the responsibility away from adults (and supportive community members) deciding what’s best (although the supports remain in place) to enabling the disabled youth to decide for themselves and direct the course of their choices (Thoma, Baker, and Saddler, 2002).

One survey of special education teachers found that many of these teachers are not equipped to instruct on decision-making. It was found that even when teachers wanted to support students they frequently engaged in behaviors that discouraged decision making and self-determination including: prompting preconceived answers from students, asking questions that students were not informed about, interrupting students, not including student preferences in transition goals (Thoma, et. al, 2002).

The Disabilities Education Act of 1997 mandates IEP’s based on student’s preferences and interests. It requires special educators to facilitate self-determination. Yet, the analysis of surveys mailed to special education teachers found only 54% of the respondents (N=41) had instruction on how to teach self-determination in their own courses. Self-determination instruction would include teaching component skills of: choice-making, decision making, problem solving, goal setting, goal attainment, self-advocacy, leadership sills, self-management, self-regulation, self-awareness and self-knowledge (Thoma, et. al., 2002).

Apparently, teacher preparation typically does not include these components and the cost to access available materials is a deterrent to utilizing them. Some recommended proactive curricula are ChoiceMaker, The ARC’s Self-Determination Scale, and Project INSITE (Thoma, et.al., 2002).
Techniques for Skills Training

There are many recommendations on how the skill can be taught, even to severely impaired. Role-playing, modeling and on-the-job training (Stainton, et al, 2006), simulations coupled with on-the-job training can assist learning skills (Perry Lattimore & Parsons, 2006).

Self-management is ultimately the goal; picture books can be used for review and maintenance of skills (Pierce & Schreibman, 1994). Morgan and Saizberg (1992) found that utilizing video-assisted training alone to guide with work related problems was effective with some but not all of the severely mentally handicapped adults in the study, some required watching the video-assisted training while also rehearsing the procedures in order to resolve work related problems. Again, this is a training strategy that should begin in the classroom and continued in the employment setting.

Site visits, job shadowing, 8-12 week internships, tech camps, career days, career planning assistance, and software training are all plausible ways of easing the transition (Stainton, et al, 2006, e.g., High School High Tech Program).

Mandates

The National Council on Disabilities (NCD) in 2000 recommends that High Schools incorporate a curriculum that includes: self-advocacy and self-determination; interpersonal skills and on the job training; staff professional development; interagency transition support (between students, family, businesses and community); Individualized Educational Plans with teams of persons involved; career opportunities and job placement; and follow-up until the student transitions and
connects with adult services. Skills are needed for teachers in many areas, new techniques of training others in self-determination as well as being updated and informed about community services available for the transitioning student.

**The Individualized Education Plan (IEP)**

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) should include both a pre and post graduation component outlining the student’s strengths, abilities, interests, needs and challenges. Revisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) required all children ages 3-21 to have access to education. It also mandated students to have a transition program by age 16. Revisions of the act require multiple transition plans be incorporated in the IEP beginning at earlier ages. The goal is to empower the student to establish long term goals early enabling the family to get involved early and perhaps continue to be engaged in the long-term plan. This can be facilitated by disseminating information to the student and family, role playing with the student, providing feedback, visiting job sites and having trial short term placement in the community, considering the match between the skills and desires of the student, the community supports and the potential jobs available.

There are IEP’s that are updated and follow a child from Pre-K through high school graduation. While IEP’s may begin the educational process for transition as early as middle school years, many programs begin the actual transition to work setting in junior or senior year of high school. If the transition to work is begun before graduation – especially for those with disabilities – the student support systems that are available at school can interact with those in the employment
setting before the transition is complete, graduation occurs and the school supports drop-out. Additionally some programs have workshops at the potential employer’s site to prepare the employees for the special needs of an incoming new hire who is disabled (Stainton, Hole, Charles, Yodanis, Powell, and Crawford, 2006).

Other strategies include educators becoming partners with agencies in the community by accurate community mapping; evaluating the success of transitioning students, and supporting students through overcoming barriers. Preparation includes: job skills and life skills workshops for families and students; workshops for employers, sessions for discussing plans, evaluating strengths and weaknesses and delineating the expectations and differences between work environments and school environments.

Some of the hybrid programs in which students receive vocational support and community living while still in High School have had some positive outcomes. In these programs, students begin transitioning to work while still in High School, benefiting from the IEP and funded supports available. This is coupled with vocational training and the onset of community based support. Dialogue between school based supports and community based helps ease the transition (Stainton, et al, 2006).

**Improving the Quality of IEP’s**

Two additional components established by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability (2006) were to add conflict resolution skills and opportunities for leadership. In fact, these are also aspects of self-determination. DeFur (2003) suggests tactics for making
transition from simply compliance with mandates for developing IEP’s to actually emphasizing the quality of the IEP. Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Act require documentation of transitional service for all students with disabilities 16 years and older. Needs assessment must be stated in the IEP by age 14, and a description of the comprehensive services that will be needed to achieve goals needs documentation by age 16 with a clear procedure. Problems since its inception have been unclear goals, poor timelines, few links between goals and educational objectives. Review of research supports some education based practices that have been shown to positively influence post-school outcomes.

These include:

- direct instruction in self-determination and social skills
- involve students and families to take a proactive role in transition planning
- provide experiences in inclusive environments
- work experience while in high school
- exposure to various vocations and creating clear vocational educational goals
- promote academic skills achievement
- utilize available technology
Families and students in the past have been rather passive recipients of program recommendations rather than proactive players. This may have been due to families lacking knowledge of resources available, feeling unwelcome in the process or feeling helpless. Educators need to work hard at empowering families.

This can be done by sending agendas for meetings home ahead of time, scheduling meetings at mutually convenient times, having clear goals, listening to the input of students and families, give families and students a central role where they feel free to direct and ask questions (deFur, 2003).

In the past educators have not linked with the community, were unfamiliar with resources, funding and services available. This reduces the effectiveness of programs and limits goals unnecessarily. IEP’s need to begin as a shared vision, realistically evaluating strengths and weaknesses of the individual while providing an outline for action. This action plan delineates the services and education needed to actualize goals.

It can be updated and modified as needed depending upon changes in the availability of funds, services and functioning of the student. It provides a format of services for at least four years in high school as well as a plan for transitioning to adult living by junior or senior year.

(deFur, 2003).

Sample Programs
The NJ Collaborative Transition Project required high school and college students to meet three times per week for 1 ½ hours. At the colleges the visiting students performed various types of work (such as working in the mail room, an office or as a custodian) while being accompanied by a college student. Most enjoyed the experience and felt it helped them understand their jobs and the skills necessary.

The college students reported having more positive attitudes toward disabled individuals as a consequence of the experience as well. This program as well as others suggests peers or other young adults in the general population of students can be useful as role models, coaches and added supports for disabled youth (Haring and Breen, 1992; Hughes, et.al, 1995).

A Youth Transition Project run in Oregon found that transitioning should begin at least by Junior year in High School and continue for two years after graduation. It was even suggested to forgo the awarding a high school diploma until after the transition to work was completed in order to maintain the high school supports that are available while still a student (Kansas CTRAN). One program conducted out of England (Connexions) advocated assigning a personal advisor to each student who would be available on-line, by e-mail or text messaging.

While students generally liked these personal advisors, the advisors didn’t have status with other support agencies and may not have been specialists in disabilities (Stainton, et. al., 2006).

Another program run in Canada, Passport Mentoring, utilized disabled adult mentors for disabled youth aged 14-21. Internet chat support and advising has also been used in Canada with some success (Stainton, et. al., 2006).
A High School Tech program in Iowa emphasized science and engineering skills as well as graphic arts, web design and computer programs. Other employment settings were retail, lodging, manufacturing and food service.

The exact position and field placement would be contingent upon the skills, interests and aspirations of the High School student. The Do-it program with the University of Washington found that having year round access to computer activities, and online discussions helped the transition for students. When developmental disabilities are severe, the workplace may also need modifications (Project Corporate Support; Project Corps; Stainton, et al, 2006).

Problems

According to Stainton, et al, 2006 problems in implementing these programs include eligibility, location, level of disability, funds, waitlists, mismatch between students and services, students being placed in jobs where the company is ill-prepared to receive a special needs employee, exclusion of family or client’s desires (or lack of consideration for self-determination).

Problems have been reported with funding depletion, lack of follow-up, identifying potential industries, and lack of placement with high unemployment rates especially for those with disabilities. Broad-based approaches with multiple supports are important. Planning committees’ stake-holders, representatives from schools, employers, community members and families are all important. Include legislatures and grant writers in the creation of the vision for a program.

Transitioning into adulthood can also be accomplished via post-secondary education. Vocational skills-training is one way, college education yet another even for the most
severe developmentally disabled.

The Canadian STEPS Forward Program and On-Campus Program provide the means for any developmentally disabled student to attend college, by auditing the courses.

Community Living is another aspect of transitioning into adulthood. There are a number of options available for young adults. Some of the developmentally disabled will continue to live with extended families, others will live on their own, still others will live in group home settings. Group homes and developmental centers are required to continue to habilitate these individuals with individual programs. Social networking groups and employment agencies which cater to the disabled have been instituted in some areas of Canada with success (Stainton, et al, 2006).

Social Skills

Competitive jobs require employees with social skills. Past research has focused on social skills training where specific behaviors are rehearsed through role playing which is combined with instruction, modeling and feedback. Yet problems were found with generalizing to other settings (Park and Gaylord-Ross, 1989). On site training with conversational probes was utilized to effectively teach mentally handicapped persons social skills. Likewise another investigation found the use of a variety of non-disabled and disabled peers as teachers were effective in training students with disabilities to increase the frequency of initiating and maintaining conversations. This coupled with self encouraging statements helped maintain skills that generalized to a variety of situations (Hughes, et al, 1995).
Even those with profound multiple disabilities benefit from increases in the ability to make simple choices during social interaction.

The general alertness of students was improved when they learned to use a micro-switch to control stimulus presentation choosing when to change stimuli they were exposed to (Kennedy & haring, 1993).

Well-run programs help families assess and plan for the transition. They work with families and create community support. Realistically assessing aspirations, the individual’s skills (and limitations) and matching these with the available employment opportunities in the community are all important components of programs used by school districts (Stainton, et al, 2006).

Areas for Future Research

Parents and individuals with disabilities have reported dissatisfaction with many programs. The transitioning was many times based on manufactured programs rather than individual aspirations.

If planning is aspiration based, then more variety is to be expected in terms of adult transition paths. Despite legal requirements to make a plan that is based on individual interests, goals, abilities and desires, the planning is many times lacking and the
outcomes of students with disabilities are not favorable compared with outcomes for students overall. Only 35% of those with a disability are employed compared to 78% of those without a disability (Egar, Green, Gordon, Owen, Masso and Williams, 2006). Preparation of the child with the disability need begin earlier with clearly defined objectives for each year. Academic, life skills, domestic skills and vocational skills all need to be taught for the successful transitioning of these students.

Use of the review of the literature above – can assist us in highlighting specific behaviors that are likely to increase the success rates of transitioning for young adults with ASD. Future efforts in this regard will
References


