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# Employment Exchange Opportunities for Teens and Adults with Autism

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Employment Exchange Opportunities for Teens and Adults with Autism

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This thesis, written under the direction of Stacy Frauwirth, OTR/L, and Dr. Julia Wilbarger, Ph.D., OTR/L and approved by the Chair of the program, Dr. Ruth Ramsey, Ed.D, OTR/L, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the Occupational Therapy department in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master Science in Occupational Therapy. The content, project, and methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidates alone.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Literature Review .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Strengths and Challenges .....	3
Cognitive skills .....	3
Sensory processing skills .....	4
Communication and social skills .....	5
Emotional regulation skills and behavior .....	6
Specific Challenges in Employment for Individuals on the Autism Spectrum .....	7
Job application process .....	7
Acclimation to job routines.....	8
Social interaction and stigma .....	8
Benefits of Employment for the Employer and the Employee .....	10
Benefits for employer .....	10
Benefits for employee .....	11
Providing Support to Employees and Employers .....	12
Employee support .....	12
Employer support.....	15
<b>Statement of Purpose.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Design .....	21
Agency Description .....	21
Project Development.....	22
Target Population.....	23
Project Implementation.....	23
Project Evaluation.....	23
Ethical and Legal Consideration.....	24
<b>Discussion, Summary, and Recommendations.....</b>	<b>26</b>
Limitations .....	27
Recommendations.....	28
<b>References .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Appendix A: Needs Assessment for Employer .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Appendix B: Needs Assessment for Vocational Support.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Appendix C: Needs Assessment for Department of Rehabilitation .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Appendix D: Needs Assessment for Consumer .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Appendix E: Resource Guide.....</b>	<b>45</b>

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this project was to create a resource guide which includes information about the steps an individual with autism (AS) or Asperger syndrome (ASD) must take with the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) to gain vocational support services within Marin County. The resource guide also includes information about the variety of services available to support individuals with autism and Asperger syndrome, both from the DOR and from private agencies.

The effectiveness of the resource guide is of significance as there are many young adults with autism or AS in Marin County who are transitioning from school to employment. Additionally, the guide is a valuable resource to potential employers as it introduces vocation related attributes of a young adult with AS or ASD and highlights the benefits of employing a young adult with AS or ASD.



## **Introduction**

In the United States 1 in 88 children are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and approximately one in every 150 people are living with an ASD diagnosis (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2010). According to the CDC (2010), ASD, which includes Asperger syndrome, autism, Rett's disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified, is the fastest growing developmental disability category. The notion of ASD as a spectrum disorder is supported by the differences in symptom presentation from person to person. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition-Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR), ASD is diagnosed based on severe and pervasive impairments in multiple developmental areas including reciprocal social interaction skills and communication skills (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000). The two most common diagnoses within ASD are autism and Asperger syndrome (AS).

Autism is characterized by impairments in social interaction marked by decreased eye contact, limited peer interaction, and a lack of social/emotional reciprocity; an impairment in communication (language delay, repetitive use of language, and/or echolalia); and stereotyped behaviors, interests, activities, and motor mannerisms (APA, 2000). Diagnostic criteria for Asperger syndrome includes impairments in social interactions, restricted or stereotyped behaviors, interactions, and interests, as well as the absence of a delay in cognition and language (APA, 2000).

Adults with Asperger syndrome (AS) and ASD have a particular set of challenges which contribute to a lack of vocational participation. Factors that limit employment are the inability to acclimate to a new job routine, difficulty with the social and communication aspects of the interview process, determining the amount of detail needed for filling out an application, and determining what information to put on a resume (Muller, Schuler, Burton, & Yates, 2003). Additionally, challenges with social interaction in the workplace and the social stigma associated with AS and autism have proven to

be barriers to maintaining successful employment (Muller, Schuler, Burton, & Yates, 2003).

The importance of successful employment is great as there are many positive effects of employment for persons with a disability. Employment can lead to greater financial independence, higher levels of self-esteem, and improved quality of life (Hendricks, 2010). This is of particular importance for a person with a disability as nearly 21% of people with a disability participate in the labor force compared to nearly 69% of persons without a disability. (<http://www.dol.gov/odep/>). Further, recent research indicated that only 32.5% of young adults with ASD held paid employment as of 2009 (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009). Nevertheless, many people with disabilities, including those with ASD or AS, are becoming successfully employed through the use of vocational support services. In 2009, approximately 59% of individuals with ASD successfully gained employment after receiving vocational rehabilitation services (Newman et al., 2009). Specific types of vocational rehabilitation have been identified by the consumer to improve employment skills and social skills (Hillier, Fish, Cloppert, & Beversdorf, 2007; Hillier, Fish, Siegel, & Beversdorf, 2011). Additionally, supported employment, transition training, and various forms of vocational support services have been effective in improving vocational experiences amongst individuals with AS and autism (Bennette, Brady, Scott, Dukes, & Frain, 2010; Taylor et al., 2012).

Individuals with autism and Asperger syndrome have a difficult time attaining the resources available to them. They have not been instructed in the steps to take in order to receive vocational support services. As a result individuals with autism and Asperger syndrome are experiencing difficulties finding and maintaining employment. The literature review will focus on the strengths surrounding autism and Asperger syndrome as well as the challenges regarding finding and maintaining employment. The authors will also discuss what services are available to support individuals with autism and Asperger syndrome during the employment process. The authors will then state the purpose of their project and discuss the guiding theoretical framework. Additionally, the authors will introduce the

methods by which this thesis project was designed, implemented, and evaluated, including a description of the target population and the collaborating community agency, the Marin Autism Collaborative. Lastly, the authors will discuss the limitations and implications of this project and offer recommendations for future projects and additional research.

## **Literature Review**

### **Strengths and Challenges**

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder experience a number of physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges, which contribute to functional limitations. Given the right context however, many characteristic traits associated with ASD may prove to be strengths rather than challenges (Hendricks, 2010). In some cases, as individuals with AS and autism age, the severity of symptom presentation and maladaptive behavior decreases (Shattuck et al., 2007). Nevertheless, challenges in sensory processing skills, cognitive skills, communication and social skills, emotional regulation and behavior are often present in adults with AS and autism. The following sections address the strengths and challenges adults with autism or AS have with regard to cognitive skills, emotional regulation and behavior, sensory processing skills, and communication and social skills.

#### **Cognitive skills.**

Many individuals with AS or autism show strong cognitive skills (Shore, 2010). Intense focus and great attention to detail, for example, are traits of this population which can translate to vocational success (Hendricks, 2010). Additionally, many individuals with AS or autism have extensive knowledge about a particular area of interest (Shore, 2010). Moreover, although there is a varying range of intelligence associated with ASD, many individuals with AS or high functioning autism have average or above average intelligence (Shore, 2010). However, many individuals with autism experience a number of cognitive challenges, despite having average or above average intelligence.

Complex information processing is affected in some adults with AS or autism (Kana, Keller, Minshew, & Just, 2007). This challenge is the direct result of slow processing of complex information (Mueller et al., 2003). This deficit leads to functional limitations involving the monitoring of task performance, conflict management, or error detection (Kana et al., 2007). The severity of this challenge contributes to a decrease in an individual's occupational performance on tasks where complex information processing is needed.

Adults with autism and AS also have memory deficits. Autobiographical memory is one particular area affected in adults with AS (Goddard, Howlin, Dritschel, & Patel, 2007). Autobiographical memory relates to an individual's memory of an event as it pertains to his/her own experience (Goddard et al., 2007). In many cases, the retrieval speed of autobiographical memory was delayed in adults with AS (Goddard et al., 2007). Further, Goddard et al. (2007) suggest that challenges in autobiographical memory are correlated with visual processing and visual memory deficits. Additionally, adults with autism often experience challenges with episodic memory and episodic future thinking (Lind & Bowler, 2010). The ability to recall past experiences and imagine possible outcomes of future experiences are therefore compromised (Lind & Bowler, 2010). As so, adults with autism or AS experience challenges in vocational settings, as job related tasks often require foresight.

### **Sensory processing skills.**

One particular challenge for adults with autism or AS is in regard to the processing of sensory information (Blakemore et al., 2006; Kana, Keller, Minshew, & Just, 2007; Minshew & Hobson, 2008). Many adults with AS or autism experience sensitivities to sensory stimuli (Blakemore et al., 2006; Minshew & Hobson, 2008). Sensitivities to tactile stimulation are one of the most commonly reported challenges. An adult with AS or autism may be sensitive to light touch (Billstedt, Gillberg, & Gillberg, 2007). Similarly, research suggests that some individuals with AS or autism may be hypersensitive to high-frequency vibration (Blakemore et al., 2006). This may inhibit the individual's ability to engage in

activities across a variety of environments. Additionally, sensitivities to auditory and visual stimuli were also commonly reported by adults with autism or AS (Billstedt et al., 2007). This may affect a person's involvement in activities with loud noises and visual clutter. Moreover, these sensitivities were reported with similar frequencies across a wide span of age and functional ability (Minshew & Hobson, 2008).

### **Communication and social skills.**

In the right setting, individuals with AS or autism exhibit strong communication and social skills. Some individuals with AS are highly verbal and are capable of giving detailed directions (Shore, 2010). Additionally, individuals with AS are honest and direct when communicating with others (Shore, 2010). This is a beneficial characteristic when direct objective information is required.

However, adults with autism or AS are likely to experience difficulties with social interactions (APA, 2000). Although the development of expressive language is not delayed in individuals with AS, many still exhibit challenges with regard to the pragmatics of language. The most commonly reported challenges in communication were with respect to reciprocity in conversation, lack of tone recognition, and non-verbal communication (Billstedt et al., 2007). This suggests that adults with AS or autism face challenges with appropriate interpretation and use of facial expressions and other forms of non-verbal communication (Billstedt et al., 2007). Additionally, many adults with autism face difficulties interpreting figurative language (Lewis, Murdoch, & Woodyatt, 2007). As a result, many of the subtle yet important aspects of communication and socialization are unrecognized by adults with autism or AS (Lewis et al., 2007).

Many adults with AS or autism have difficulties making inferences about another person's thoughts or feelings based on non-verbal cues (David et al., 2010). As a result, adults with AS or autism may experience difficulties predicting others' behavior (Zalla, Sav, Stopin, Ahade, & Leboyer, 2009). The ability to interpret someone's emotional state and identify others' fortune/misfortune is a challenge

for adults with autism or AS (Shamay-Tsooray, 2008). Similarly, the inability for some adults with autism or AS to empathize with others may be a detriment for involvement in complex social interaction (Dziobek et al., 2008). Additionally, understanding certain aspects of humor may be a challenge for adults with AS or autism, as humor is often derived from an understanding of another person's perspective or experience (Samson & Hegenloh, 2010).

Another barrier to full social engagement is the difficulty adults with AS or autism have with social problem-solving (Goddard et al., 2007). When providing solutions to hypothetical social problems, many adults with AS gave solutions that were less detailed and less effective than the solutions provided by adults without an AS diagnosis (Goddard et al., 2007). Complex social interactions are thus compromised without the ability to social problem-solve or understand the perspective or emotional state of others.

#### **Emotional regulation skills and behavior.**

Anecdotal evidence suggests that adults with AS are likely to be punctual and attentive to time sensitive issues and schedules (Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004). Additionally, adults with AS are often very trustworthy, reliable, and respectful of commitments (Hendricks, 2010). These traits are important for potential employers to notice, as there are many vocational positions which are well matched for adults with autism and AS.

Some adults with autism experience behavioral difficulties, such as aggression, self-injury, property destruction, and tantrums in most severe instances (Hendricks, 2010). In less severe instances, adults with autism or AS engage in repetitive behavior and/or have concern for the homogeneity of routines (Billstedt et al., 2007). Although the less severe instances are still not the social norm, the concern for routine homogeneity is a desired trait in jobs that require adherence to a strict, regimented routine.

Challenges with respect to emotion are also frequently identified amongst adults with autism or AS (Samson, Huber, & Gross, 2012). Individuals with AS or autism reported a high frequency of experiences resulting in negative emotions (Samson et al., 2012). They also reported difficulties regulating emotion (Samson et al., 2012). Additionally, adults with AS demonstrate poor emotion labeling abilities (Samson et al., 2012). Lastly, given the deficits in social skills and communication, adults with autism and AS are at high risk for anxiety and depression (Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004).

### **Specific Challenges in Employment for Individuals on the Autism Spectrum**

Individuals with ASD have difficulties with problem-solving, organization, and social interaction that pose an employment barrier (Hendricks, 2010). This section will discuss the issues that individuals with ASD face during the job application process, the acclimation to job routines, and the social interaction and stigma they endure, and how their deficits contribute to these challenges in employment.

#### **Job Application Process**

Individuals with ASD face several difficulties with the job application process (Muller et al., 2003). Creating resumes requires knowing which work experiences and skills to emphasize, and how much detail to include. Filling out job applications also pose the same challenge in that people with ASD don't know how much detail to provide when answering questions or what the potential employers want to hear (Muller et al., 2003). In the study done by Hillier, Campbell, et al., (2007), the individuals with ASD displayed minimal understanding of the importance of having a job and the repercussions of accepting, declining, or quitting a job. Contacting potential employers via phone and interviewing for the job are particularly difficult aspects of the job application process for individuals with ASD (Muller et al., 2003).

According to Muller et al. (2003), individuals with ASD describe talking on the phone as being a burdensome form of communication and, if possible, they avoid calling future employers. This behavior results in a reduced number of job opportunities that are available. Individuals with autism often miss

out on employment opportunities due to failure to check up on the application (Muller et al., 2003). Another limiting factor to job attainment is inadequate interviewing skills due to social communication impairments (Higgins, Koch, Boughfman, & Vierstra, 2008). In a study done by Muller et al. (2003), participants described the interview process as being tense and awkward and not knowing how much information to provide in response to interview questions.

Performing job searches is another aspect of the application process which proves to be a challenge for adults with autism or AS. The requirements that pose an issue are initiating a job search, how to set up job contacts, and how to follow-up on those job contacts (Muller et al., 2003). Participants in the study done by Muller et al. (2003) related their challenges with the application process to certain cognitive traits, specifically in the area of prioritizing tasks and initiating projects.

### **Acclimation to Job Routines**

Acclimating to a new job routine is challenging for those with ASD (Higgins et al., 2008). The problem arises when they have to adapt to new situations and routines, causing them to avoid new experiences because “they find them both emotionally and cognitively taxing” (Muller et al., 2003, p. 168). Individuals with ASD are able to learn new tasks, although it may take longer and require more direct attention (Muller et al., 2003). In turn, this causes adults with ASD to be worried that their supervisor or co-workers will be analytical of the time that it takes them to learn new tasks and fulfill the job requirements (Hendricks, 2010; Muller et al., 2003). This may contribute to increased levels of stress and anxiety in the workplace (Chalmers & Hurlbutt, 2004). Individuals with ASD have difficulty becoming independent at the beginning of their new job and thus need a job coach, supervisor, or designated employee to provide support (Hillier, Campbell, et al., 2007).

### **Social Interaction and Stigma**

Mastering the social demands in the workforce is an obstacle for individuals with ASD. A characteristic of people with ASD is the difficulty they have with handling social situations. Individuals



with ASD experience difficulty understanding social boundaries between co-workers and customers (Hillier, Campbell, et al., 2007). In the study by Muller et al. (2003), participants reported having difficulty in reading facial expressions and understanding the tone of voice, determining the appropriate time to end a conversation, knowing if someone was being sarcastic or teasing, and understanding the purpose of “casual workplace chit-chat” (p. 169). Other problems that individuals with ASD encounter is the difficulty they have communicating with their supervisors and coworkers, inability to recognize social cues, obsessive behaviors, and reluctance to change (Howlin, Jordan, & Evans, 1995). This often leads to confusion in social interactions and potential isolation in vocational settings (Hendricks, 2010; Muller et al., 2003).

These problems, along with the ASD characteristics, make understanding social situations difficult and results in individuals feeling “odd or different from anybody at the workplace” (Muller et al., 2003, p. 169). In the study done by Hillier, Campbell, et al. (2007), individuals scored low on the Socialization Scale, specifically in the area of making friends at work. Often times these social deficits lead to exclusion from social events outside the workplace (Hillier, Campbell, et al., 2007). In turn, this creates a sort of stigmatization and hinders the ability of those with ASD to form any relationship with their supervisor or co-workers (Hillier, Campbell, et al., 2007). In the study done by Muller et al. (2003), the participants acknowledged that their social deficits regularly kept them from being successful at their jobs regardless if they were fulfilling the job descriptions. The difficulties with communication and social interaction in the workplace often led to job termination (Hendricks, 2010).

The stigma surrounding individuals with ASD poses a barrier to full social inclusion and work integration (Krupa, Kirsh, Cockburn, & Gewurtz, 2009). Individuals with ASD internalize the stigma, which results in lower self-esteem and the personal belief that they are unable to effectively work independently (Corrigan & Powell, 2012). Additionally, the result of internalized stigma leads to insecure employment with fewer opportunities for job responsibilities, advancement, and personal and

financial growth (Krupa et al., 2009). Ultimately, these effects put individuals with AS or autism at a high risk for underemployment or unemployment (Krupa et al., 2009).

### **Benefits of Employment for the Employer and the Employee**

The following section will address what the benefits are to the employer regarding employing an individual with autism and Asperger syndrome, such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit and increased employee retention. The benefits of employment regarding the employee will also be discussed. A few of these benefits include increased independence and increased self-esteem.

#### **Benefits for Employer**

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) offers tax deductions to employers who hire individuals with disabilities (ETA Handbook, 2009). The amount of tax credit, generally around \$2,400, is adjusted based on wages paid to the employee through the first year of employment (ETA Handbook, 2009). In order to receive the WOTC tax credit, employers need to hire a person that has been referred to the employer after completion of a vocational rehabilitation program (ETA Handbook, 2009). Another way employers can qualify for the WOTC tax credit is by hiring an individual who is receiving services from a state or federal agency, an Employment Network within the Ticket-to-Work Program, or the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (ETA Handbook, 2009).

Supported employment programs are often recommended to others by employers that have employed an individual through a supported employment program (Petty & Fussell, 1997). Employers state that individuals that have been trained through a supported employment program save the company time, and hiring them was cost-effective, and saved the taxpayers money (Petty & Fussell, 1997). Supported employees also provide a positive effect on the workplace and on co-workers because supported employees are reliable, have a willingness to feedback, and are capable of acclimating into the workplace culture (Petty & Fussell, 1997).

Accommodations to the workplace increase overall employee productivity and company productivity (Hartnett et al., 2011). Accommodations also allowed companies to retain qualified employees (Hartnett et al., 2011). When a company increases the retention rate that company will see an increase in work productive, a better public image, save time and money on training, and reduce turnover rate.

Individuals with autism and Asperger syndrome take pride in their precision, attention to detail, and technical skills (Muller et al., 2003). Employers often report that this population has a lower absenteeism, higher trustworthiness, and reliability (Hendricks, D., 2010). Employers can utilize these attributes in potential employees and assign individuals with ASD to jobs that require these specific skill sets (Muller et al., 2003).

### **Benefits for Employee**

Individuals with ASD benefit from employment in similar ways as the rest of society. Employment can increase the quality of life of an individual as well as enable him or her to be self-sufficient (Hendricks, 2010). Hendricks (2010) found that if an individual is able to earn money through employment he/she is less dependent upon the government. Cimera and Burgess (2011) found that for every dollar spent by the employee with regard to employment the individual earned \$5.28. Although individuals with autism lose government subsidies after they become full time employees, their net gain surpasses the amount of government subsidies they lost due to employment (Cimera & Burgess, 2011). This trend was seen in every U.S. state and territory regardless of the number of associated conditions the employee had (Cimera & Burgess, 2011). Active employment also provides the individual an opportunity to obtain health insurance, which can decrease the personal cost for required medication (Hendricks, 2010).

Workplace accommodations are made to the work environment to identify and decrease workplace distractions (Hartnett et al., 2011). Employers who made accommodations for those with

ASD reported benefits to the employee such as increased self-confidence, quality of work, and happiness (Hartnett et al., 2011). An increase in self-confidence, quality of work, and an increase in happiness allow the employee to feel like a productive member of the community and also obtain retirement.

### **Providing Support to Employees and Employers**

Due to the heterogeneity of autism spectrum disorders a variety of services must be offered in order to meet the needs of every individual with the disorder. Services are offered to both the employer and the employee to ensure a successful employment experience (Hendricks, 2010). In this section, the employment support services that are offered to both the employee and employer will be discussed. Transition services, vocational rehabilitation, and supported employment are services offered to the employee and will be discussed in the following section. Autism awareness training and employment specialists are services offered to the employer to assist them during the employment process and will be further explained below.

#### **Employee Support**

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 sec. 300.43, the federal government requires that all individuals 16 years and older have an individualized education plan (IEP), who receive transition services (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). When teens with ASD receive proper transition training they are more likely to fully integrate into the community and also obtain competitive employment (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009).

However, individuals with Asperger syndrome describe that they do not receive enough transition training to prepare them to enter the workforce after school (Hetherington et al., 2010; Powers et al., 2005). Transition training is improved by more student/parent involvement, a better relationship with school personnel, and more specific transition plans (Hetherington et al., 2010). Successful transition training informs the individuals of resources available to them as well as which services are

appropriate for their needs and maintaining transition support throughout the entire transition process (McDonough & Revell, 2010).

A study conducted by Hillier, Campbell et al. (2007), found that individuals with ASD are capable of retaining employment. Individuals who receive support through a vocational support program are more likely to retain employment with their initial agency. An element that makes vocational support programs successful is pre-placement services. Pre-placement services consist of instruction in job search skills and assistance in identifying job advertisements that are appropriate to the job seekers' skill set (Hillier, Campbell et al., 2007). Once an individual receives job placement, vocational support services focus on conducting a job site evaluation to ensure appropriate placement. Once employment is achieved, retention is increased through job training, social integration, and assistance with job site acclimation (Hillier, Campbell et al., 2007).

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) consists of services provided to support individuals with disabilities in meeting their vocational goals in finding and keeping a job (Hendricks, 2010). VR is a comprehensive approach to maximize employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. A VR program consists of services that assist in assessment and diagnosis, job search assistance, assistive technology, counseling, and on-the-job training (Lawer, Brusilovskiy, Salzer, & Mandell, 2009). A successful VR program offers assistance both before job placement and after, which includes assistance with finding a job, counseling to ensure proper job placement, job coaching until independence in the workplace is achieved, and a follow-up on the individual's progress for at least six months after placement (Hillier, Fish, et al., 2007). VR services for individuals with ASD are some of the most expensive services offered, but also are the most successful services offered amongst other disabilities (Lawer et al., 2009). Individuals exiting a VR program are four times more likely to obtain integrated employment if they receive placement services than those who do not receive placement services (Miglione, Timmons, Butterworth, & Lugas, 2012).

A study conducted by Muller et al. (2003) found that the majority of participants emphasized the importance of proper job matching. Characteristics that indicate a proper job match for individuals with autism are: a job that is built on technical skills, required minimal social skills, followed clearly defined routines, allowed adequate time for learning new tasks, did not result in excessive sensory stimulation, and allowed for flexible work schedules (Muller et al., 2003). Vocational rehabilitation counselors are able to provide direct support to the employee in navigating job listing and also assist with contacting the job site to ensure it is an appropriate match for the employee as well as the employer (Muller et al., 2003). VR counselors are capable of providing the employee with information pertaining to the exact job requirements and are able to assess the tolerance of diversity amongst the supervisors and co-workers (Muller et al., 2003).

The Aspirations program is an 8-week program that focuses on building vocational and social skills for individuals with an autism spectrum diagnosis (Hillier, Fish, et al., 2007). Through participation in the Aspirations program, individuals can improve peer relationships, attitudes towards peers, and reduce anxiety and depression (Hillier, Fish, et al., 2007; Hillier et al., 2011). Individuals that participated in the Aspirations program reported that they benefited from the opportunity to interact with other individuals with an ASD diagnosis (Hillier, Campbell, et al., 2007). Through this interaction participants were able to discuss challenging personal issues with individuals that have had similar situations. The Aspirations program fosters the development of a more positive attitude towards gaining employment and a better understanding regarding the benefits of employment (Hillier, Fish, et al., 2007).

Supported employment offers community-based jobs with job coaching to individuals with disabilities to provide a work environment that is stable and predictable (Garcia-Villamizar & Hughes, 2007). Supported employment programs seek to provide a stable work environment so that individuals with ASD can obtain independent employment (Garcia-Villamizar & Hughes, 2007). A successful

supported employment program provides the individual with ASD with on the job training, acclimation to the job site, and support with social integration (Hendricks, 2010). A two-year study was done on the efficacy of supported employment and found that individuals who participated in a supported employment group were more likely to find paid work and retain their job over a period of time than individuals who did not participate in a supported employment group (Taylor et al, 2012).

Job coaching in supported employment is an important element that can further enhance job skills in individuals with Asperger syndrome (Bennette et al., 2010). A systematic review conducted by Taylor et al. (2012) found that individuals who received job coaching within their supported employment program earned more competitive wages than those who received support through sheltered workshops. The benefits of job coaching can be enhanced through the implementation of a covert audio coaching (CAC) system (Bennette et al., 2010). CAC is a two-way radio system allowing the job coach to deliver guidance to the individual being supported from a distance directly into his/her ear through an earpiece. Through the use of this audio system, participants were able to improve work performance skills that remained consistent even once the radio system was removed (Bennette et al., 2010).

### **Employer Support**

Businesses that participate in supported employment programs are offered various support systems to adequately equip them in employing individuals with ASD (Hendricks, 2010; Petty & Fussell, 1997). The employment success of an individual with ASD can be dependent upon the attitude of the employer and coworkers (Hendricks, 2010). The ability for the employer to be creative and flexible is critical for the success of an employee with ASD (Petty & Fussell, 1997). When interviewed, many adults with ASD say that the work environment would be less perplexing if their employers were educated about their disability (Hendricks, 2010).

Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-Handicapped Children (TEACCH) is a program that provides autism awareness training to individuals at a job site that are

willing to learn about the characteristics of ASD (Hendricks, 2010). Autism awareness training allows the supervisors and co-workers to understand the behaviors of individuals with ASD. Muller et al. (2003) found that autism awareness training made the work environment more pleasant for participants with ASD. Because the supervisor and co-workers were educated about the behavioral characteristics of autism, the behaviors of participants were not perceived as rude or aggressive (Muller et al., 2003). Attitudinal support from co-workers and supervisors allowed the participants to feel included in the workplace and felt the work environment was more supportive and co-workers had more patience (Muller et al., 2003).

A component of autism awareness training is providing employers with information regarding ASD and the associated behaviors (Hillier, Fish et al., 2007). This training allows the employer to become better equipped in handling potential issues in the workplace. They are also given information about each employee's strengths and weaknesses to optimize the employment experience of all involved (Hillier, Fish et al., 2007).

Employment specialists are trained experts that support the employer, employee, and coworkers during the initial employment process of an individual with autism and Asperger syndrome (Petty & Fussell, 1997). A study conducted by Petty and Fussell (1997) included employment specialists to assist the employer when problems arose with the employee. Many employers viewed the employment specialists as reliable and readily available when their services were needed. Employers felt prepared and confident in working with the employee once the employment specialist left the site (Petty & Fussell, 1997). Overall the employers that participated in this study felt that hiring a supported employee saved their company time and money and had a positive effect on the work environment for all employees (Petty & Fussell, 1997).



## Statement of Purpose

Adults with Asperger syndrome and autism spectrum disorders experience deficits in sensory processing, emotion regulation, emotion labeling, social skills, memory and processing, as well as anxiety and depression. These deficits contribute to decreased interaction within the individual's temporal, physical, and social environment. Due to these deficits, individuals face obstacles in finding and retaining employment because of problems with acclimating to job routines, applying to jobs, stigma, and social interaction. To address these issues interventions are more effective when they are focused around the individuals to provide a support system they can utilize for successful employment. Vocational rehabilitation is an effective intervention for individuals with Asperger syndrome or autism spectrum disorders. Transition training, supported employment, and various types of vocational support are specific types of interventions that have been proven to improve cognitive function, work performance, and work satisfaction.

There is a gap in the transition period between high school and job attainment for individuals with autism and Asperger syndrome within Marin County. Families and consumers struggle to find proper vocational support. Local agencies offer services that would meet the need of this population, however the resources are scattered throughout various media formats and are time consuming to gain access to. Families and consumers are becoming discouraged when trying to gain access to services and are ultimately relying on personal connections rather than county resources. In order for this population to be adequately supported and prepared to enter the work force local resources must be accessible, attainable, and comprehensible.

The purpose of this project is to create a resource guide which includes information about the steps an individual with autism or Asperger syndrome must take with the Department of Rehabilitation to gain vocational support services within Marin County. The resource guide also includes information about the variety of services available to support individuals with autism and Asperger syndrome, both

from the DOR and from private agencies. We anticipate the resource guide will assist individuals with autism or Asperger syndrome as they navigate the employment process within Marin County and expedite the process to gaining vocational support services.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Ecology of Human Performance (EHP) is a framework that was developed by Winnie Dunn, Catana Brown, and Ann McGuigan (Dunn, Brown, & McGuigan). This model will be used to guide the development of this project. The developers of EHP created this model to explain the relationship between the person, the context, the task, and the performance. An understanding of this relationship is used to better understand human performance during specific tasks (Dunn et al., 1994). EHP has been chosen for this project because we are concerned with the relationship between the person and the context and how this interaction impacts performance (Dunn et al., 1994). The main theoretical postulate of EHP is that the interaction between the person and the environment has an impact on human behavior and performance. Without the context the performance cannot be understood (Dunn et al., 1994). This project will focus on adequately preparing employers to support workers with ASDs. In order to properly prepare employers the project developers must identify an adequate working environment and the supports needed to maintain a supportive environment for the individual. EHP will assist in this process.

EHP views human behavior and performance from four constructs: the person, the context, the task, and the performance (Dunn et al., 1994). As defined by Dunn et al. (1994), the person “includes one’s experiences and sensorimotor, cognitive, and psychosocial skills and abilities” (p. 598). The person is a unique and complex construct within EHP. The person brings his or her personal experiences, interests, skill sets, and abilities (Dunn, 2007). The person gives meaning to tasks, and that unique meaning can have a strong influence on the performance of that task (Dunn et al., 2003).

The task is defined as “objective sets of behaviors necessary to accomplish a goal” (Dunn et al., 1994, p. 599). Tasks are compiled of various demands which influence the individuals specific behaviors needed to participate successfully (Dunn, 2007). Every person is surrounded by numerous tasks which are uniquely defined by the individual (Dunn et al., 2003). When a person combines multiple tasks he or she then engages in meaningful occupations.

The context is a set of conditions that surrounds a person. According to EHP, it is impossible to understand a person outside of his or her context (Dunn et al., 1994; Dunn, et al., 2003). A person’s context is made up of the temporal, physical, social, and cultural aspects of the environment (Dunn, 2007; Dunn et al., 2003). The temporal context includes chronological age, and developmental stage (Dunn et al., 2003). Contexts can either support or impede performance of a task. Contexts can be supportive by increasing availability of material to engage in tasks, willingness of people to help support the engagement in a task, and the expectations and norms that direct performance (Dunn et al., 2003).

Interaction between the context and person during specific tasks predicts the person’s performance (Dunn et al., 2003). Individuals use their skills and abilities to engage within the context. The performance range is defined by the number of tasks and the types of tasks available to the individual (Dunn et al., 2003). Therefore, the performance range is decreased when the context doesn’t support the individual’s skills and abilities (Dunn, 2007).

There are five different intervention approaches that are utilized within EHP to address the four constructs. The first intervention approach is establish and restore. The focus of establish and restore is on the individual’s skills and abilities (Dunn et al., 2003). If the individual has not had experience in a given task, the therapist helps establish the necessary skills to participate in that task. When the individual has difficulty or has lost skills needed for a task, the therapist uses the restore strategy. This project will help employers establish strategies to successfully employ individuals with ASD/AS and provide vocational support services.

The second intervention approach is alter. Alter focuses the intervention strategy on the context (Dunn et al., 2003). The therapist identifies what the individual needs to be successful and find the appropriate context to support the individual to be successful (Dunn et al., 1994). Through this project, employers will learn about adapting their work environment to suit the needs of individuals with ASD/AS.

The third intervention approach is adapt and modify. The focus of this intervention strategy is on the context or the task (Dunn et al., 2003). Once the therapist knows what the individual needs to do, strategies are considered to adjust the demands of the task or change the context variables so that the individual can be successful (Dunn et al., 1994). Employers will learn about the adaptations that they can make within their work environments and make modifications suitable for the employed individual with ASD/AS.

The fourth intervention approach is prevent. The focus of this intervention is on anticipating issues that might occur and establishing strategies to change the outcome prior to the problems arising (Dunn et al., 2003). Therapists and employers can make educated hypotheses about what might cause a behavioral outburst at work. As so, the employer can take measures to prevent inappropriate behavioral outbursts by making adaptations to the environment.

The last intervention is create. The focus of this intervention is population based (Dunn et al., 2003). The create intervention promotes successful occupational performance by promoting manageable tasks within supportive environments (Dunn et al., 2003). The create intervention leans towards a performance goal in particular because it does not presume that a disability is present (Rempfer, Hildenbrand, Parker, & Brown, 2003).

## **Methodology**

### **Design**

In partnership with the Marin Autism Collaborative (MAC), we have created a resource guide in an attempt to minimize the challenges and barriers experienced by adults with AS or autism who seek employment. These challenges and barriers were identified by the MAC Transition Committee, which was established to aid high school students with AS or autism in their transition to gainful employment. Three separate needs assessments were created to target the unique needs of the consumer, vocational support staff, and employers respectively. Very little responses were received therefore the project developers took the same questions asked in the needs assessment and brought them to a Marin Autism Collaborative transition meeting. This transition meeting consisted of families of individuals with AS and ASD as well as various vocational support staff. The families expressed a need for assistance with navigating the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR). They found the DOR process to be confusing and time consuming. The resource guide includes the steps an individual with ASD or AS must take with the DOR to gain vocational support services within Marin County. The resource guide also contains information regarding what services are available to support individuals with AS or ASD seek and maintain employment. The purpose of creating this resource guide is to assist individuals with AS or ASD navigate the DOR within Marin County and expedite the process to gaining vocational support services.

### **Agency Description**

The resource guide was created for the Marin Autism Collaborative (MAC). According to the organization's website, MAC is a non-profit organization that helps clients identify available services and current gaps in services to families, consumers with ASD, and professionals (2013). MAC consists of various providers, agencies, families and organizations that work together to ensure those affected by ASD receive the best services available to them.

## **Project Development**

The focus of this project was to simplify the DOR process and make the required steps to receive services more available and easier to understand for families and individuals with AS and ASD. Needs assessments were developed to determine the information included in the DVD and pamphlet. The assessment for the employer asked guided questions regarding previous experience with employing individuals with AS or ASD, which services they found helpful and what issues have come up regarding employing an individual with AS or ASD. Another assessment was developed to ask guided questions to the consumer (individual with AS or ASD) regarding his/her previous experience with employment, what services he/she found helpful regarding the employment process, and what aspects of the worksite were supportive or restricting.

Two additional needs assessment were developed and given to the DOR and supported employment agencies to determine how to more effectively utilize their respective services. Very few responses were received therefore the same questions were asked at a MAC Transition meeting. This meeting consisted of families of individuals with AS or ASD and various vocational support staff. The families expressed a need to better understand the DOR process. A resource guide was then created that simplified the DOR process by organizing the steps one must take in order to receive services through the DOR. The resource guide also includes a list of vocational support services you can receive through the DOR as well as a list of vocational rehabilitation resources within Marin County along with the organization's phone number, address, and website. The information found within the resource guide was gathered from the Marin County DOR website as well as through the MAC website. The DOR has a resource guide available on their site, however families expressed experiencing difficulty finding it and understanding it.

## **Target Population**

The project was developed for individuals with AS or ASD who seek gainful employment in Marin County. The resource guide was intended to simplify the DOR process so that individuals with AS and ASD can receive the services they need more quickly and easily.

## **Project Implementation**

Through discussion within this thesis group, we determined that the production of a resource guide would be more effective in meeting the needs of the collaborating agency as well as meeting the time restrictions imposed by the occupational therapy department at Dominican University of California. After the production of the resource guide, it was distributed in October of 2013 to a mother in Marin County whose son has autism and is applying for DOR services. Additionally, the resource guide was distributed to a supported employment agency in Marin County as well as to Autistry Studios. Lastly, this information was uploaded on “Youtube” as a series of screen shots of the resource guide with the content narrated by one of the project developers. The resource guide will be available for future use through a link on the Autistry Studios website as well as by viewing the “Youtube” video.

## **Project Evaluation**

A five point Likert scale questionnaire was created for the consumer, consumer’s family, and vocational support staff to determine the efficacy of the resource guide. The questionnaire sent out to the families asked questions to determine how helpful the resource guide was, how informational it was, whether or not the information was easy to follow, and how likely the individual receiving the resource guide was to recommend it to other people. The resource guide was delivered to a mother of an adolescent with an ASD diagnosis before they began the DOR process. She used the resource guide to help guide her through the DOR process. A questionnaire was given to her to once her and her son concluded the DOR process. Question one of the questionnaire asked: One a scale of 1-5 (1= not helpful, 5 = most helpful), how helpful do you imagine the resource guide will be in becoming gainfully

employed? She rated that question a 5 and stated “the layout for following the procedure for the DOR is such important information that I would have to have researched on my own. Knowing the steps in the process and having it laid out so clearly is invaluable”. Question 2 asked: On a scale of 1-5 (1 = not at all, 5 = very well). How well do you feel the resource guide prepared you for your first DOR meeting? She answered with a 5 stating “as mentioned above, having the information provided in advance of our DOR process gave me time to prepare for meetings and not waste my time, my son’s time, not the DOR’s time”. Question 3 asked: On a scale of 1-5 (1 = not easy, 5 = very easy), how easy was it to follow the progression of information within the resource guide? She answered with a 5 and did not leave any comments. Question 4 asked: On a scale of 1-5 (1 = not informative, 5 = very informative), how informative was the resource guide? She answered with a 5 stating “Because I had this information and was able to expedite this process for my son, it also helped us to become aware that...is not ready for the workability program. This saved us numerous hours of starting a process that would not be suitable just yet in his life.” The mother stated that her son will be attending a full time day program until he is ready to start the DOR process again, at which point she will reference the resource guide. Question 5 asked: On a scale of 1-5 (1 = not likely, 5 = very likely), how likely are you to recommend this resource guide to other young adults with Autism or Asperger syndrome who are transitioning from high school to employment?” She answered with a 5 stating “I would highly recommend it to all of my friends who have children ready for the workability program! I hope this guide is easily available to the thousands of families who will be facing this process in the near future”.

### **Ethical and Legal Considerations**

Throughout the entirety of this project, we maintained compliance with The Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics and Ethics Standards (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2010). Several key principles from the aforementioned document were of importance to us during the development and implementation of the project. These principles included autonomy and



confidentiality, procedural justice, and fidelity. We ensured the integrity of this project by maintaining the high ethical standards of the American Occupational Therapy Association (2010).

Autonomy and confidentiality is a principle based on the idea of self-determination (AOTA, 2010). We respected this principle by fully explaining the right to self-determination to the video interview participants. We demonstrated this by obtaining consent from anyone who was featured in the video, respecting the participants' right to withdraw from the project, and by maintaining strict confidentiality and adherence to all HIPAA regulations (AOTA, 2010). Video participants were notified of the risks and benefits of the project prior to completion of the video consent form.

Social justice is another principle from the AOTA's Code of Ethics and Ethics Standards which was considered during the planning and implementation of the project. Social justice is a principle which supports the notion of fair treatment and equal benefits to each individual or group in society (AOTA, 2010). We upheld this principle by aiding individuals with AS or autism in their search for supported employment and Department of Rehabilitation services. Additionally, we acted in accordance to the principle of social justice as we attempted to highlight many of the positive aspects of hiring an adult with AS or autism.

Lastly, we conducted our project with respect to the principle of fidelity. This concept states the professional expectations of the occupational therapist with regard to interdisciplinary interaction (AOTA, 2010). As so, we treated colleagues and other professionals with discretion, integrity, and fairness (AOTA, 2010). This is an important concept for us to employ, as our project is heavily reliant on interdisciplinary collaborative efforts. We demonstrated this principle by respecting the practices of all involved institutions, avoiding conflict with other professionals, and by using appropriate resolution techniques in the event of conflict (AOTA, 2010).

## **Discussion, Summary, and Recommendations**

### **Discussion**

With information from our own research, interactions with the DOR, and informal interviews with consumers of DOR based vocational rehabilitation services, we produced a resource guide outlining the steps necessary to apply for and receive DOR services. The results of a consumer's evaluation of the effectiveness of the resource guide are congruent with our anticipated findings: The resource guide is effective in preparing the consumer for the process of applying for and receiving DOR supported employment services and is a tool which can be used by the consumer to expedite the application process.

The effectiveness of the resource guide is of significance as there are many young adults with autism or AS in Marin County who are making the transition from school to employment. Further, in 2009, approximately 59% of individuals with ASD successfully gained employment after receiving vocational rehabilitation services, however, as of 2009, only 32.5% of young adults with ASD held paid employment (Newman et al., 2009). This highlights the benefit to receiving vocational rehabilitation and the significance of our findings as the resource guide serves a tool to prepare for and potentially expedite the process to receive vocational rehabilitation services from the DOR. Additionally, the guide is a valuable resource to potential employers as it introduces vocation related attributes of a young adult with AS or ASD and highlights the benefits of employing a young adult with ASD or AS.

Despite limited input of the Department of Rehabilitation, local business owners, and local consumers of DOR services, this project was successful in meeting the needs of members on the MAC transition committee. As so, the informational resource guide is available online at the MAC website, as well as in the form of a "YouTube" video, and will likely reach the population of interest. As this information becomes easily accessible, we anticipate consumers of DOR services will find this guide useful in preparing them for vocational rehabilitation. This assumption is based on the feedback we

received from the consumer, who received the guide prior to applying for DOR services and meeting with a DOR counselor. As an advocate for her son, Janet was able to use the resource guide to prepare for the DOR application process and stated that the guide permitted her to be efficient with her time during each DOR meeting. As the use of the informational resource guide becomes more frequent, we anticipate an increase in applications for DOR vocational rehabilitation services as well as a subsequent rise in the employment of young adults with autism or AS in Marin County. With the right support and access to resources, young adults with autism or Asperger's syndrome can transition from school to meaningful employment, and showcase their unique and desirable personality traits and vocational strengths.

### **Limitations**

We encountered several limitations during the planning and implementation phases of our project. The first limitation faced was with regard to the variety of project options appropriate for addressing the needs of young adults with Asperger's syndrome or Autism Spectrum Disorder transitioning from high school to employment. The projects were reviewed by the members of this thesis group and the faculty advisor to determine which project would be most effective in delivering information to families, consumers with Asperger's syndrome or Autism Spectrum Disorder, and for potential employers in Marin County. Conducting a thorough review of the potential effectiveness of the projects resulted in the creation of a resource guide. The resource guide includes valuable information about receiving vocational rehabilitation services from the Department of Rehabilitation, as well as information about additional supported employment agencies in Marin County.

The second limitation was a limited response of our needs assessment from surrounding supported employment agencies potential employers. We contacted fourteen agencies and delivered our needs assessment via email. One agency replied to our email and completed the needs assessment. We followed up with the remaining agencies with emails and phone calls to verify delivery of and access to

the needs assessment. Despite limited responses they proved to contain valuable information and instrumental in guiding the creation of the resource guide.

The final limitation was a low return of a consumer based needs assessment from families in Marin County. After meeting with a family associated with MAC, the family agreed to help us distribute the needs assessment. The consumer needs assessment was sent through a “listserv”, which contains a list of families in the Marin area who are directly affected by a developmental disability such as Autism Spectrum Disorder. Unfortunately, we did not receive any responses from families on the “listserv”.

### **Recommendations**

A recommendation for future projects is to hold a job fair at Dominican University of California. This job fair would allow consumers with Asperger’s syndrome or Autism Spectrum Disorder to connect with potential employers in the area to showcase their unique vocational and personality strengths. Additionally, each potential employee will be able to obtain information on the supported employment services which best support the consumer’s job search. Another recommendation is for second year occupational therapy students at Dominican University of California to organize and produce a vocational workshop. The vocational workshop would occur during the students’ community practice lab. The lab would allow the students to work one on one with the consumer for eight weeks on skills such as interviewing techniques, resume writing, initiating a job search, and finding solutions to potential workplace issues.

An additional recommendation is the development and creation of a DVD to educate potential employers about Asperger’s syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorders. Additionally, the DVD will showcase the vocational attributes of an individual with Asperger’s syndrome or autism and the potential financial benefits for the employer such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit. Another recommendation is to provide an in-service for administrators within the Marin County school district.

This in-service will provide information on the importance of having occupational therapists involved in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. Furthermore, the in-service will highlight the importance of starting the transition process from high school to employment earlier in the student's high school career. Additionally, further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of the resource guide in helping consumers and families navigate the Department of Rehabilitation, attain employment support services, and become gainfully employed.

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doi: 10.1007/s10803-008-0634-y

Needs Assessment for Employer

**Employer**

1. Do you have previous experience employing persons with Asperger syndrome (AS) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

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2. Do you know the symptoms of autism?

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3. Is your staff familiar with the symptoms of autism?

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4. Do you offer company programs to help educate the staff about some of the challenges adults with autism face in the work environment? If so, which classes do you offer? (Such classes may include sensitivity training or autism awareness training.)

---

---

---

5. What were the successful aspects/benefits of hiring a person with AS or ASD? (Specify)

---

---

---

6. What were the challenging aspects of hiring a person with AS or ASD? (Specify)

---

---

---

7. How frequently do you employ persons with ASD or AS?

---

Needs Assessment for Employer

8. Please explain your understanding of vocational rehabilitation services?

---

---

9. Can the workplace be modified to better fit the needs of the employees? If so, what kinds of changes have you made or could you make?

---

---

10. Please answer the following questions about the work environment:

A) Is the lighting in the facility bright, dim, or dark? (Please circle your answer.)

BRIGHT

DIM

DARK

B) Is the facility loud, quiet, or somewhere in between? (Please circle your answer.)

LOUD

QUIET

IN BETWEEN

11. Are there a variety of jobs that might be appropriate for individuals with autism? Please give a few examples and attach a description of the jobs previously listed.

---

---

12. Does the job require any certain skills that are not listed in the job description? If so, please list them.

---

---

13. What type of equipment is used?

---

---

14. Does the equipment produce vibration, sounds, heat/cold? Please explain.

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Needs Assessment for Vocational Support

**Vocational Support**

1. Explain any prior experience working with or training adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Asperger syndrome (AS).

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2. Do you have knowledge regarding the strengths and challenges associated with Autism or Asperger syndrome?

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3. What is your experience in training/placing individuals with ASD in work settings?

---

---

---

4. Do you feel your services are adequately utilized by individuals with ASD?

---

---

---

5. What do you think can be done to increase utilization of your services?

---

---

---

6. What types of assessments are used to determine needed supports?

---

---

---

7. Which intervention strategies are being implemented to assist adults with AS or ASD in finding and maintaining gainful employment?

---

Needs Assessment for Vocational Support

8. Are there adequate funds available to offer services needed by adults with AS or ASD who are seeking vocational support? How are they allocated?

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---

9. In what types of settings do you most typically work?

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10. What resources are available to aid vocational support services?

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---

---

11. Which resources do you find to be most helpful?

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---

12. Are there other professionals that you work with to support the client, if so list them?

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Needs Assessment for Department of Rehabilitation

**Department of Rehabilitation**

1. How do you train your vocational rehabilitation support staff on the characteristics of autism spectrum disorders?

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---

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2. What type of specialists do you employ in the field of vocational rehabilitation?

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---

3. How is eligibility of services determined?

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---

---

4. How do you determine which services a client receives?

---

---

---

5. What type of support services do you offer to individuals with Asperger syndrome or and Autism spectrum diagnosis?

---

---

---

6. What services do you offer that have been found to be most successful?

---

---

---

7. What have you found to be challenging about offering services to this population?

---

Needs Assessment for Department of Rehabilitation

8. What would make the services you offer more cost efficient?

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9. What would make the services you offer more time efficient?

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10. What can be done to make your services more accessible?

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11. How long does it take to receive support services?

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12. Is there anything that would speed up this process?

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---

13. Does the legislation support the service?

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---

---

14. Is there an adequate amount of funds?

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15. Are services equally available in urban and rural areas?

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Needs Assessment for Consumer

**Consumer**

1. What aspects of your job search do you find most difficult? (Please specify).

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2. What aspects of your job search do you find the easiest? (Please specify).

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3. How did you learn about job search strategies?

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4. What methods do you use to conduct your job search? (Craigslist, bulletin boards, etc.)

---

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5. Please list your employment history.

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6. What aspects of your past jobs did you find most interesting?

---

---

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7. What type of work do you find least appealing?

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---

---

Needs Assessment for Consumer

8. What aspects of your past jobs did you find least interesting?

---

---

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9. In which areas of your past jobs did you excel?

---

---

---

10. What job in your past did you find to be least enjoyable?

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---

---

11. What job in your past did you find to be most enjoyable?

---

---

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12. Have your past employers made accommodations in the physical environment to fit your needs? If so, what accommodations were made?

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13. Do you feel employers and co-workers understand your needs in the work place?

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14. Have you experienced discrimination in the workplace? If so, please explain.

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---

Needs Assessment for Consumer

15. Have you ever used supported employment services? Please specify.

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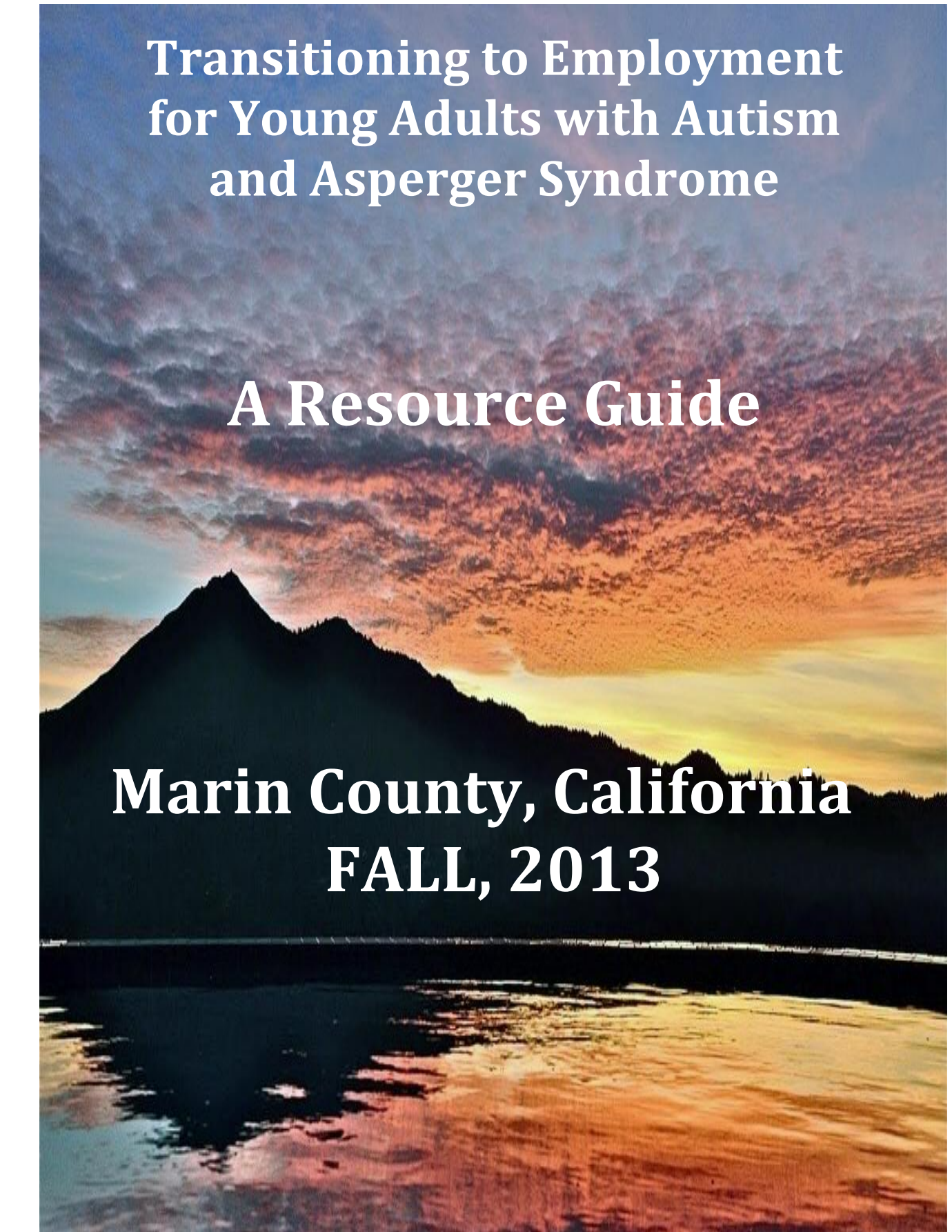
---

16. Which work based accommodations would be most supportive? Please explain.

---

---

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**Transitioning to Employment  
for Young Adults with Autism  
and Asperger Syndrome**

**A Resource Guide**

**Marin County, California  
FALL, 2013**

## Resource Guide

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Transitioning to Employment for Young Adults with Autism and Asperger Syndrome

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# Table of Contents

Check-list to Receive Services From the Department of Rehabilitation.....	2
Determining Eligibility.....	3
Consumer Handbook .....	4
Application .....	5
Scheduling an Appointment with Your Counselor .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assessment Process .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Significance of Disability Score.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Individualized Plan for Employment .....	10
Individualized Plan for Employment Development .....	11
Consumer Responsibilities .....	12
Employment Services.....	13
Self-Advocacy.....	14
Marin County Resources .....	15





# Getting Services within the Department of Rehabilitation of Marin County

- Determine Eligibility
- Read the Consumer Handbook
- Submit Application
- Schedule an Appointment with a Counselor
- Begin the Assessment Process
- Receive “Significance of Disability Score”
- Complete “Individualized Plan for Employment”
- Receive Services

# Determining Eligibility



## Am I Eligible for services through the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)?

### Eligibility requirements:

1. You must have a physical or mental impairment that limits your ability to gain employment and vocational rehabilitation services are necessary to become employed, maintain employment, or prepare for employment.
  2. You must be able to benefit from services offered through the DOR to gain employment.
  3. Vocational rehabilitation must be necessary to prepare for, obtain, retain, or resume employment.
- ❖ If your disability is severe enough to impair your ability to benefit from DOR services, you will be set up with a trial work experience to determine whether or not you would benefit from DOR services in a realistic work environment.
  - ❖ You are eligible for DOR services if you are receiving Social Security Administration benefits or have a valid “Ticket to Work”.

# Consumer Information Handbook

The Consumer Information Handbook describes the process, in detail, that one must take in order to receive services through the DOR. It lists the necessary steps and describes the requirements to complete each step.



DEPARTMENT of  
REHABILITATION

Employment, Independence & Equality



**Consumer Information Handbook**

# Application

There are **three steps** you must complete in order to submit your application:

1. Request services through one of the below methods:

- ❖ Complete and sign a DR-222 (Vocational Rehabilitation Services Application) in person, online, or by mail OR
- ❖ Visit a One-Step center and complete an intake application form requesting vocational rehabilitation services OR
- ❖ Otherwise request services from the DOR

2. Provide the DOR with the information necessary to begin an assessment to determine eligibility and priority for services.

3. Be available to complete the initial interview, watch an orientation video, participate in an evaluation of your skills and capabilities, and complete actions agreed upon between you and your counselor.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
**VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES APPLICATION**  
 DR-222 (REVISED 06/11) DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION

Privacy Statement: The Information Practices Act of 1977 (Civil Code Section 1798.17) and the Federal Privacy Act (5 USC 552a(e)(3)) require this notice to be provided to individuals when collecting personal information. The information requested on this form, including the Social Security Number, is necessary to properly identify the individual to ensure that the Department provides services to the correct individual. Failure to provide the information requested may result in delays in services. Department authority: Welfare & Institutions Code Sec. 19005, 19005.1, 19010.

Last Name	Other Name(s) Used	First Name	Middle Initial
Street Address		Mailing Address if Different	
City		Zip Code	County
Phone Number	Social Security Number	Date of Birth	Age
Cell Phone Number	Email		

Please describe your physical or mental impairment that constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment.

How can we help you?

Who referred you?

Full name of person not in your home who will always know where you live:

Address	City	Phone Number	Relationship
---------	------	--------------	--------------

**RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYERS:** I hereby authorize the Department of Rehabilitation to release information (except medical and psychological) to prospective employers for the purpose of assisting me in job placement. I understand that only information necessary to assist me in job placement will be released. This consent applies until such time as my case is closed or specifically withdraw my consent.  
 YES  NO

**ORIENTATION MATERIALS:** I have received & read my "Consumer Information Handbook" and have discussed with my Counselor the following concepts: Civil Rights, Eligibility Requirements, Informed Choice, Employment Outcome & Professional Development, Scope of Services, Confidentiality, Appeal Procedures, and the Client Assistance Program (CAP).  
 Initial: \_\_\_\_\_ (Counselor) \_\_\_\_\_ (Consumer)

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 states employers should only hire American citizens and aliens who are authorized to work in the United States. To verify your employment eligibility, please check a box below. This does not replace requirements of employers as specified under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.

I am:  1. A citizen or national of the United States.  
 2. An alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence (Alien Number A \_\_\_\_\_)  
 3. An alien authorized by the Immigration and Naturalization Service to work in the United States (Alien Number A \_\_\_\_\_ or Admission Number \_\_\_\_\_ expiration of employment authorization, if any \_\_\_\_\_)  
 4. None of the above.

**SEE REVERSE FOR YOUR APPEAL RIGHTS INFORMATION AND HOW TO CONTACT YOUR CAP ADVOCATE.**

Applicant's Signature	Date Signed	Plaintiff/Counselor's Signature (required for review)
<i>[Signature]</i>		<i>[Signature]</i>

**TO BE COMPLETED BY COUNSELOR**

Counselor's Signature	Date Signed	Counselor's Name (Printed)	Counselor's Phone Number
<i>[Signature]</i>			

**DISTRIBUTION:** Original (Pink) - Case Folder Copy (White) - Applicant

## Marin County Office

75 Rowland Way, Suite 370

Novato, CA 94945

(415) 893-7701 (Voice)

(415) 893-7712 (TTY)



# Schedule Appointment with Counselor



An appointment is scheduled with an employment counselor to begin the assessment process. If the employment counselor has all of the necessary information, a decision will be made, in writing, within 60 days.



# Assessment Process

During the assessment process, you and your counselor will discuss your disability and how it may affect your ability to work and the types of Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) services you may need to become employed.

- ❖ **Eligibility:** You and your counselor will review your medical and other relevant information to determine how your disability affects your ability to work and which DOR services can help you keep or get a job. Once your information has been reviewed, your counselor will determine if you're eligible for services.
- ❖ **Priority for Services:** After reviewing and discussing your information about your disability, you and your counselor will discuss how your disability limits you in the six following areas of functioning: communication, mobility, interpersonal skills, self-care, work tolerance, and work skills. Based on this evaluation, a disability priority score will be given which represents your work-related limitations.
- ❖ **Vocational Rehabilitation Needs Assessment:** You and your counselor will discuss relevant assessments that will determine the services and/or assistance you will need to keep or get a job. Your abilities and capabilities will also be discussed during this time.



# Assessment Process

## *How To Help With Your Assessment Process:*

### Bring:

- ❖ Any documents you have about your disability
- ❖ Records and benefit letters such as: Social Security Administration or your Ticket from the “Ticket to Work” program
- ❖ A list of contacts that you have consulted about your disability
- ❖ Any form of documentation about your disability, such as a recent Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
- ❖ Become familiar with the vocational rehabilitation process
- ❖ Keep your appointments and arrive on time
- ❖ Fulfill your obligations that you and your counselor agree upon



# Significance of Disability Score

When the DOR does not have enough funding to serve all applicants, the DOR will use a process called “Order of Selection” to make sure that those with the most severe disabilities are served first.

Your disability priority score will help determine the priority of services. Based on your disability priority score, you will be placed into one of three groups:

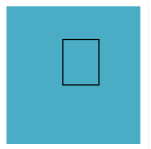
1. Persons in the “most significantly disabled” category will be served first
2. Persons in the “significantly disabled” category will be served second
3. Persons in the “disabled” category will be served last

\*Within each disability priority category, the applicant will be served according to his/her date of application submission. If the DOR does not have enough funding to serve all applicants within your category, you will be:

- ❖ Placed on a waiting list within your category
- ❖ Informed annually as to which category is being served
- ❖ Served according to your application date as soon as funds become available

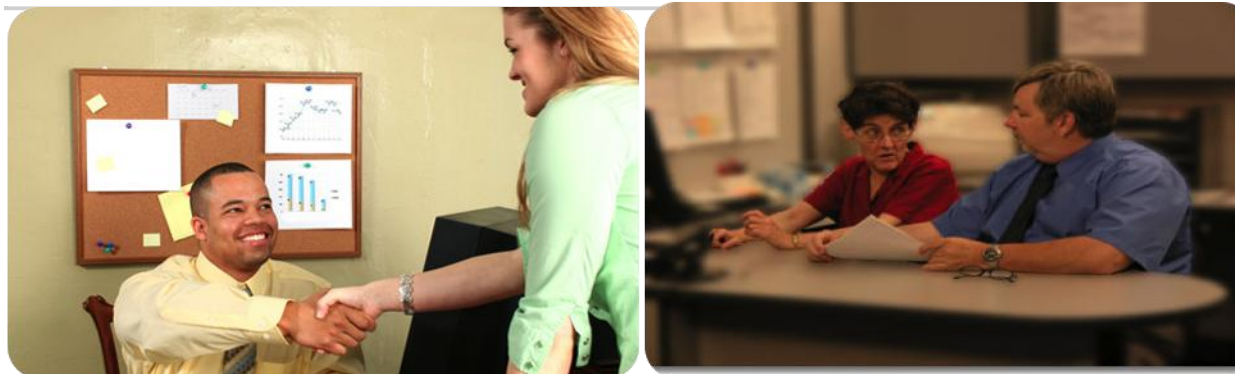
\*The DOR will provide you with information and referrals to other services to help you reach your employment goals while you are on the DOR wait list.

\*Go to [www.dor.ca.gov](http://www.dor.ca.gov) for more information about the wait list process.





# Individualized Plan for Employment



## You can complete an IPE if you:

- ❖ Applied for services
- ❖ Completed the assessment process
- ❖ Are eligible for services
- ❖ Are placed in a disability priority category being served

The IPE is a written plan which lists your employment objectives and the vocational rehabilitation services you will receive to reach your employment goals. You and your counselor will develop the IPE jointly, as you will discuss your personal and unique strengths, priorities, concerns, interests, and abilities.

# Individualized Plan for Employment Development

## What an IPE includes:

- Employment goal description and timeline
- Description of services and service providers you require
- Timeline for services provided
- Description of the service process
- Explanation of criteria to measure progress
- Responsibilities of you, your counselor, and others in the IPE process
- If applicable, outline of consumer responsibility in paying for part of the IPE
- List of comparable services and benefits you may apply for

## Your options for creating your IPE:

- Developing a personal IPE
- Receiving aid from outside resources
- Receiving aid from your vocational rehabilitation (VR) team

## A member of your VR team will:

- Explain DOR guidelines and IPE components
- Review whether or not you must pay for a portion of your services
- Explain your need for outside resources
- Assist you in completing DOR forms
- Explain the Ticket to Work program

# Consumer Responsibilities

Once your IPE has been developed, you must:

- Remain in contact with your counselor and keep all appointments
- Discuss any problems that arise that will impact your IPE with your vocational rehabilitation team
- Address any changes that need to be made to your plan
- Apply for and obtain any comparable services available to you (financial aid, grants, or non-DOR services)
- If applicable, participate financially in your plan
- Attend and fully engage in all training programs and classes
- Provide regular process updates, grades and attend annual review meetings as necessary
- Obtain PRE-APPROVAL from your counselor or Rehabilitation Supervisor BEFORE you purchase any items or services related to your IPE. You must obtain written authorization before any services can be provided
- If making a significant change to your IPE, you must come to an agreement with your counselor and sign a written amendment to your IPE
- Be respectful, courteous, and considerate with your communication and interaction

**Should the consumer fail to cooperate, fail to maintain ongoing communication or scheduled appointments, or fail to make a reasonable effort may result in the discontinuation of further services and closure of your case.**

# Employment Services

The below services are available through the DOR, not all services will be needed by every consumer:

- Counseling and guidance
- Referrals and assistance to get services from other agencies
- Job search and placement assistance
- Vocational and other training services
- Evaluation of physical and mental impairments
- On-the-job or personal assistance services
- Interpreter services
- Rehabilitation and orientation/mobility services for individuals who are deaf and/or blind
- Occupational licenses, tools, equipment, initial stocks, and supplies
- Technical assistance for self-employment
- Rehabilitation assistive technology
- Supported employment services
- Services to the family
- Transportation as required, such as travel and related expenses, that are necessary to enable you to participate in a vocational rehabilitation service
- Post-employment services
- Transition services for students
- Expansion of employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, which include, but are not limited to, professional employment and self-employment

# Self-Advocacy

## Employee Positive Attributes:

- ❖ Intense focus
- ❖ Great attention to detail
- ❖ Give detailed directions
- ❖ Honest and direct
- ❖ Punctual and attentive to time sensitive issues
- ❖ Trustworthy, reliable, and respectful to commitments



## Benefits for the Employer:

- ❖ Work Opportunity Tax Credit  
(<http://www.doleta.gov/business/incentives/opptax/>)
- ❖ Save company time and money
- ❖ Accommodations increase overall employee and company productivity
- ❖ Increased employee retention
- ❖ Lower absenteeism





# Marin County Employment Services

## Alchemia

1929 Novato Blvd.  
Novato, CA 94947  
(415) 897-2222  
[www.alchemia.org](http://www.alchemia.org)

## Autistry Studios

37 Duffy Place  
San Rafael, CA 94901  
(415) 454-1037  
[www.autistrystudios.com](http://www.autistrystudios.com)

## Careplus

35 Mitchell Blvd., Suite 8  
San Rafael, CA 94903  
(415) 499-1116

## Casa Allegra Community Services

35 Mitchell Blvd., Suite B.  
San Rafael, CA 94903  
(415) 499-1116  
[www.casaallegra.org](http://www.casaallegra.org)

## Cedars of Marin

115 Upper Rd.  
Ross, CA 94957  
(415) 454-5310  
[www.thecedarsofmarin.org](http://www.thecedarsofmarin.org)

## Community Homes & Services

405 Norman Dr.  
Novato, CA 94949  
(415) 883-4048  
[www.communityhomesandservices.com](http://www.communityhomesandservices.com)

## Department of Rehabilitation

75 Rowland Way, Suite 370  
Novato, CA 94945  
[www.dor.ca.gov](http://www.dor.ca.gov)

## Golden Gate Regional Center

4000 Civic Center Dr., Suite 310  
San Rafael, CA 94903  
(415) 446-3000

## Golden Gate Regional Center

4000 Civic Center Dr., Suite 310  
San Rafael, CA 94903  
(415) 446-3000

## Integrated Community Services

3020 Kerner Blvd., Suite A  
San Rafael, CA,  
(415) 455-8481  
[www.connectics.org](http://www.connectics.org)

## Lifehouse

899 Northgate Dr.  
San Rafael, CA 94903  
(415) 472-2373  
[www.lifehouseagency.org](http://www.lifehouseagency.org)

## Marin Day Activity Programs

3833 Redwood Hwy.  
San Rafael, CA 94903  
(415) 507-0692

## Marin Employment Connection

120 N. Redwood Dr.  
San Rafael, CA 94903  
(415) 473-3300  
[www.marinemployment.org](http://www.marinemployment.org)

## Marin Ventures

350 Merrydale Rd.  
San Rafael, CA 94903  
(415) 427-4961  
[www.marinventures.org](http://www.marinventures.org)

## Opportunities For Independence (OFI)

20 H St.  
San Rafael, CA 94901  
(415) 721-7772  
[www.ofiinc.org](http://www.ofiinc.org)

## Ticket-to-Work

1-866-968-7842  
[www.choosework.net](http://www.choosework.net)



**This resource guide was developed by:**

**Rafi Garcia, OTS, Kisa Geiger, OTS, and Alex Shragg,  
OTS**

**as a masters thesis with the occupational therapy  
department at Dominican University of California.  
The developers worked in collaboration with Janet  
Lawson with Autistry Studios, Marin Autism  
Collaborative (MAC), and the Transition committee**

