

2014

Perceptions of Employers in Spokane County Regarding Employing Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Shannon White

Eastern Washington University

Curtis Pearson

Eastern Washington University

Amylynne Sargent

Eastern Washington University

Jennifer McQuillan

Eastern Washington University

Molly Hobbs

Eastern Washington University

Follow this and additional works at: http://dc.ewu.edu/srcw_2014



Part of the [Occupational Therapy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

White, Shannon; Pearson, Curtis; Sargent, Amylynne; McQuillan, Jennifer; and Hobbs, Molly, "Perceptions of Employers in Spokane County Regarding Employing Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder" (2014). *2014 Symposium*. Paper 7.
http://dc.ewu.edu/srcw_2014/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the EWU Student Research and Creative Works Symposium at EWU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in 2014 Symposium by an authorized administrator of EWU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jotto@ewu.edu.

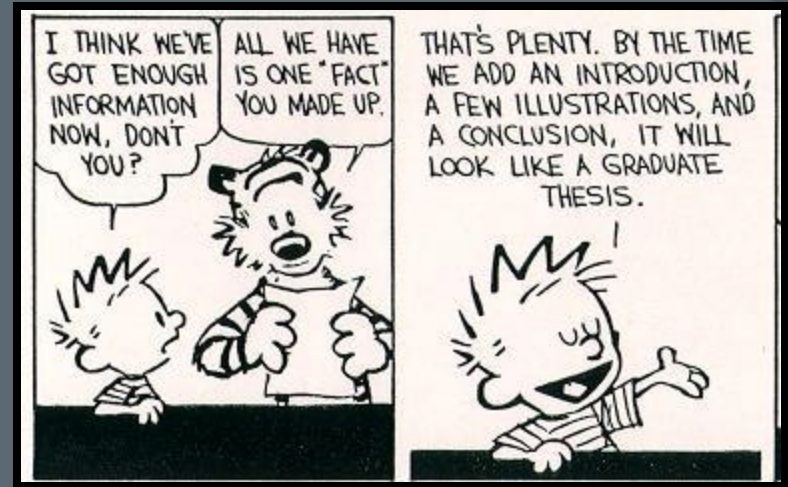
Perceptions of Employers on Employing
Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Molly Hobbs, OTS, Jennifer McQuillan, OTS, Curtis Pearson, OTS, Amy Sargent, OTS, &
Shannon White, OTS

Outline

- ❖ Defining the problem
- ❖ Research methods and results
- ❖ Analysis
- ❖ Moving forward
- ❖ What did we learn
- ❖ Questions?



What would happen?

“What would happen if the autism gene was eliminated from the gene pool?”

You would have a bunch of people standing in a cave, chatting and socializing and not getting anything done”

--Temple Grandin, 2008



Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorder

What is it?

- ❖ Neurodevelopmental
- ❖ Symptom onset prior to age 3
- ❖ Characterised by functional deficits in
 - social interaction
 - communication
 - behavior



Retrieved from <http://cdn.kveller.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/autism.jpg>

(APA, 2013)

Recent Changes

- ❖ **DSM-5** (APA, 2013)
 - Single classification
 - Symptoms along a continuum

- ❖ **CDC statistics** (CDC, 2014)
 - 1 in 68
 - 29% increase from 2008

Identified Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder
ADDM Network 2000-2010
Combining Data from All Sites

Surveillance Year	Birth Year	Number of ADDM Sites Reporting	Prevalence per 1,000 Children (Range)	This is about 1 in X children...
2000	1992	6	6.7 (4.3 - 9.9)	1 in 150
2002	1994	14	6.6 (3.3 - 10.6)	1 in 150
2004	1996	8	8.0 (4.6 - 9.8)	1 in 125
2006	1998	11	9.0 (4.2 - 12.1)	1 in 110
2008	2000	14	11.3 (4.3 - 21.2)	1 in 88
2010	2002	11	14.7 (14.3 - 15.1)	1 in 68

Impact of ASD Through the Lifespan

“Most people with ASD...have difficulty participating in everyday life occupations” (Gal, Meir, & Katz, 2013, p.1)

- Symptom presentation unique to each individual (Autism Speaks, 2013; CDC 2012)
- Impacts performance and participation through the lifespan (NINDS, 2014)
- Isolation and restricted involvement in activities (APA, 2013; NINDS, 2014)
- Outcome for adults dependent on their level of functioning (Volkmar et al., 2005)

Literature Review: What we Found

There is limited research regarding...

- ❖ Adolescents or adults with autism
- ❖ Support for individuals with ASD in employment
- ❖ Programs available to companies employing individuals with ASD

Adults and ASD

As the population of adults with ASD grows, so too will the demand for supports to help them live independently (Cimera & Cowan, 2009; Hendricks, 2010; Morgan & Schultz, 2012)

“She has more to offer the world than just separating trash” (Clickprod, 2012)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNm8qnf2jpY>



Retrieved from <http://www.agingwithautism.org/images/boy-sky-logo.jpg>

Research Questions

- What level of knowledge or awareness do employers have regarding ASD?
- What are the perceptions to hiring individuals with ASD?
- What kind of opportunities are available for individuals with ASD?
- Are there employment opportunities for individuals with ASD in our own community?

Challenges to Employment

Behaviors associated with ASD impact the ability to find and maintain employment (Lee & Carter, 2012; Matson & Rivet, 2008)

Characteristics considered difficult to manage in the workplace:

- Concrete thinking
- Problems with executive functioning
- Overly attentive to detail/fixation
- Social awareness
- Difficulty with communication

(Lee & Carter, 2012; Standifer, 2009)

Benefits to Employers

“ People with disabilities have a lot more potential than people give them credit for.” (as cited in Ladika, 2012)

Some programs have recognized strengths of individuals with ASD

- High level of math and computer skills (Gal, Meir, & Katz, 2013)
- High quality of work (Hopkins, 2013; Ladika, 2012)
- Good memory (Gal, Meir, & Katz, 2013)



Employer Perceptions

“Who wants to be labeled as ‘oh, that odd person’?” (Clickprod, 2012)

Negative perceptions can create a barrier to employment

- Problems with communication and socialization (Fitzgerald, 2014; Wallis, 2012)
- Challenging behavior (Schall, 2010; Ladika, 2012)
- Increased training time (Schall, 2010)

National Employment Climate for Individuals with ASD

National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS-2)

- 32.5 percent of young adults with ASD currently worked compared to 79 percent of all respondents
- 47.7 percent of youth with ASD worked for a paycheck in the past 2 years compared to 78.4 percent of all respondents
- 29 percent of youth with ASD were currently looking for employment compared to 47.7 percent of all respondents

National Employment Climate continued

- ❖ 46 percent of adults with ASD were employed through regular, supported, or sheltered employment; or were participating in full-time education
- ❖ Those employed individuals with ASD were in low level and under-paid positions
- ❖ Individuals with ASD are making 86 percent as much per hour compared to other adults with a developmental disability

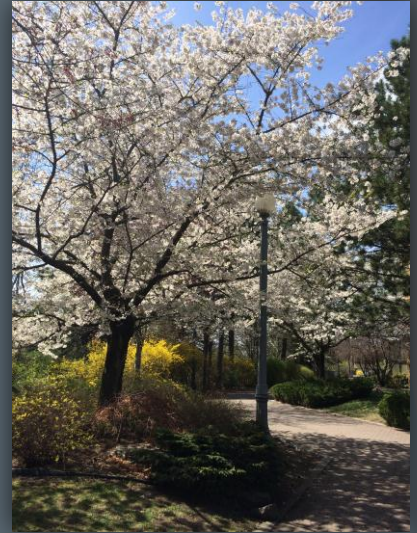
Spokane County

Developmental Disabilities Board of Spokane

- ❖ Assist individuals with developmental disabilities obtain and maintain employment including individuals ASD

Current support agencies in Spokane

- ❖ *Arc of Spokane, The Artisans, Career Path Services, Easter Seals, East Central, ENSO, Freedom Consulting, Goodwill, Imagine, Job REsource Center, *Northwest Center, PACE, Peaceful Valley, Plan to Work, Sinto, *Skilskin, West Central, and SL Start



Spokane County

- ❖ 750 individuals with a developmental disability are currently receiving assistance from employment support agencies
- ❖ Currently there is no agency devoted strictly to the employment needs of individuals with ASD, employers, and possible employers
- ❖ It is hypothesized that many people with developmental disabilities, and their support systems, are unaware of resources and assistance available for employment
- ❖ It is hypothesized that one of the reasons employers do not hire more individuals with ASD is their lack of knowledge about such programs

(B. Nichols, personal communication, May 24, 2013)

Introduction to the Problem

- Currently, no employment agencies provide services exclusively to the ASD population in Spokane County
- Of all individuals with developmental disabilities in Spokane County, only 750 are receiving employment support of some kind

Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this study was to discover employers perceptions of employing individuals with ASD in Spokane County



Study Design

- **Concurrent Nested Descriptive Case Study**
 - Qualitative core
 - Exploration of a problem
 - Identification of variables for future research
 - Flexibility
 - Detailed understanding of issue

- **Pilot study**
 - Descriptive detail
 - Development of a new phenomenon
 - Pave way for future research

Case Study

“The study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73)

- ❖ Builds a foundation for understanding
- ❖ Our research question
- ❖ Collective case study
- ❖ Bounded system → Spokane County, WA
 - Collect data from multiple sources within our bounded system
 - Participating businesses

Population

❖ Target Population

- Businesses within Spokane County, WA

❖ Inclusion Criteria

- Industry categories: food, retail, building supply, entertainment, technology, and manufacturing

❖ Exclusion Criteria

- Government agencies
- Active involvement with an ASD organization
- Immediate family member diagnosed with ASD

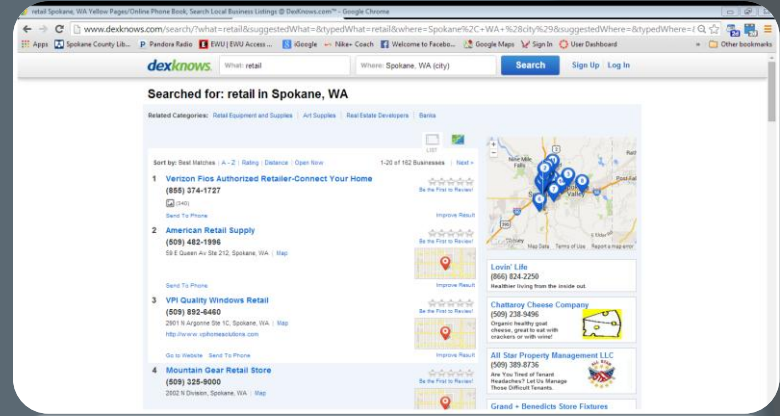


Retrieved from <http://www.commons.wikimedia.org>

Sampling

Sampling

- ❖ Utilized Dexknows.com
- ❖ Businesses within Spokane County, WA
- ❖ Non-randomized purposive sampling
 - ❖ Needed data that was useful and understandable
- ❖ Every 3rd business on alphabetized list
 - sample pool of 745 businesses
 - eliminates bias

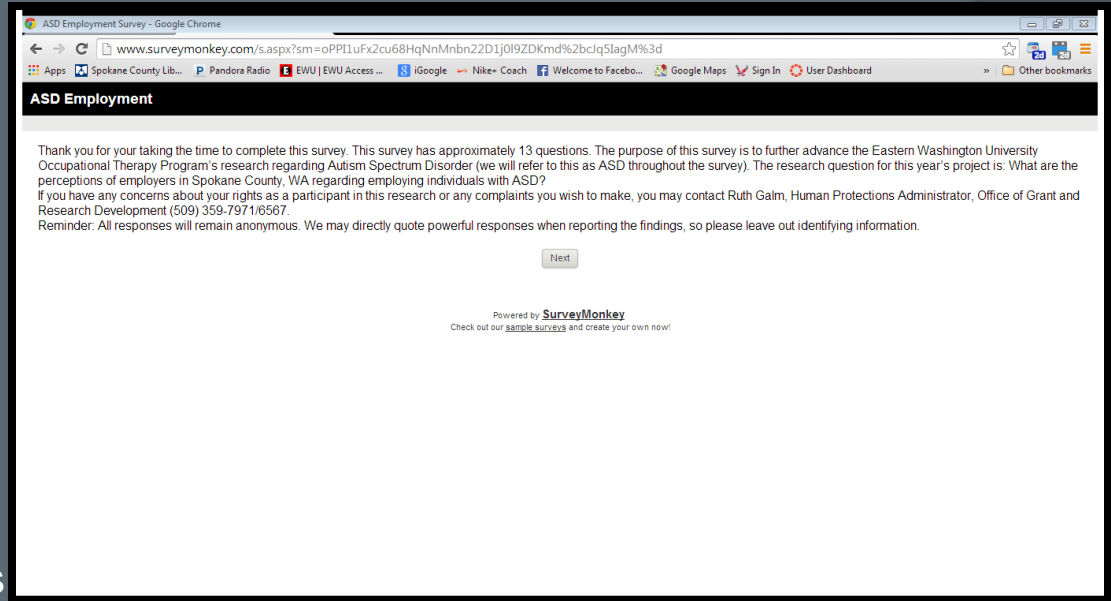


<http://www.dexknows.com>

Data Collection

Survey

- Survey Monkey
- Letter of Intent
 - Employer in charge of hiring
- Qualitative
 - Frequencies of responses



Survey

Five domains and 15 total questions

- 1) Demographics
- 2) Awareness of ASD
- 3) Awareness of need for employment
- 4) Perceived opportunities in the business to employ individuals with ASD
- 5) Awareness of support services available for employment of individuals with ASD



<http://cdn2.cagepotato.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/funny-pictures-pardon-me-do-you-have-a-few-minutes-to-answer-a-short-survey.jpg>

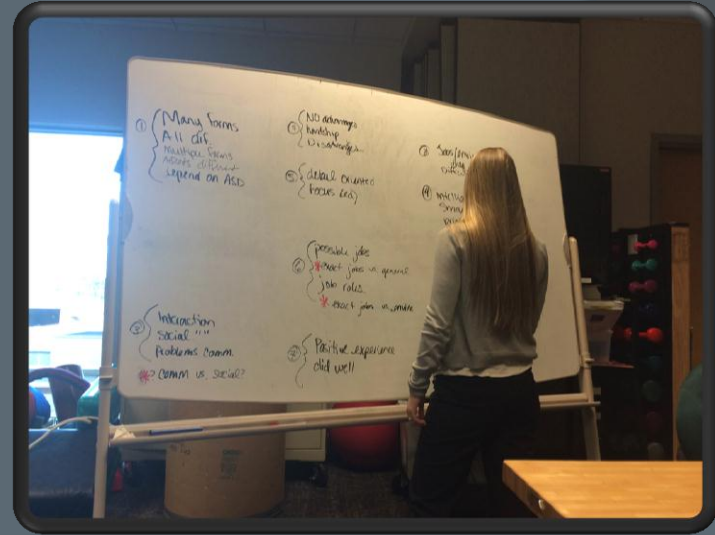
Data Analysis

Data Analysis

❖ Thematic analysis

❖ 5 steps

- 1) Compiling data
- 2) Individual analysis and initial code development
- 3) Collaboration of ideas and development of finalized codes
- 4) Group analysis of codes to establish themes
- 5) Direct interpretation of themes to develop generalizations, an in-depth picture of the case, and identify implications to OT



Results

- ❖ 745 letters mailed out
- ❖ Response rate: 1.8%

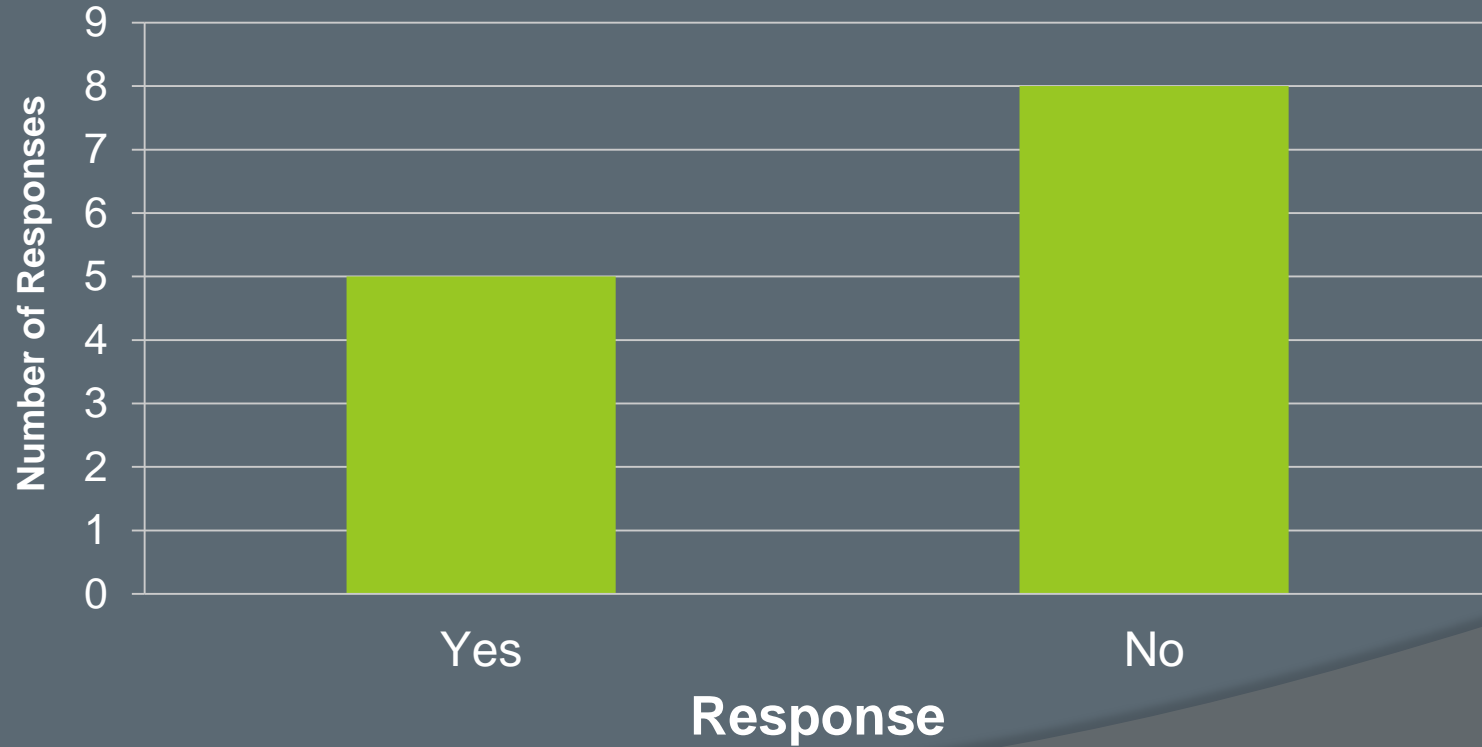


Retrieved from <http://www.thefeedingdoctor.com>

Number of Employees			Business Sector		
Range	Frequency	Percentage	Sector	Frequency	Percentage
1-10	4	31%	Food	1	8%
11-20	2	15%	Retail	1	8%
21-50	3	23%	technology	2	15%
51-100	1	8%	Services	2	15%
> 100	3	23%	Other	7	54%
	13	100%		13	100%

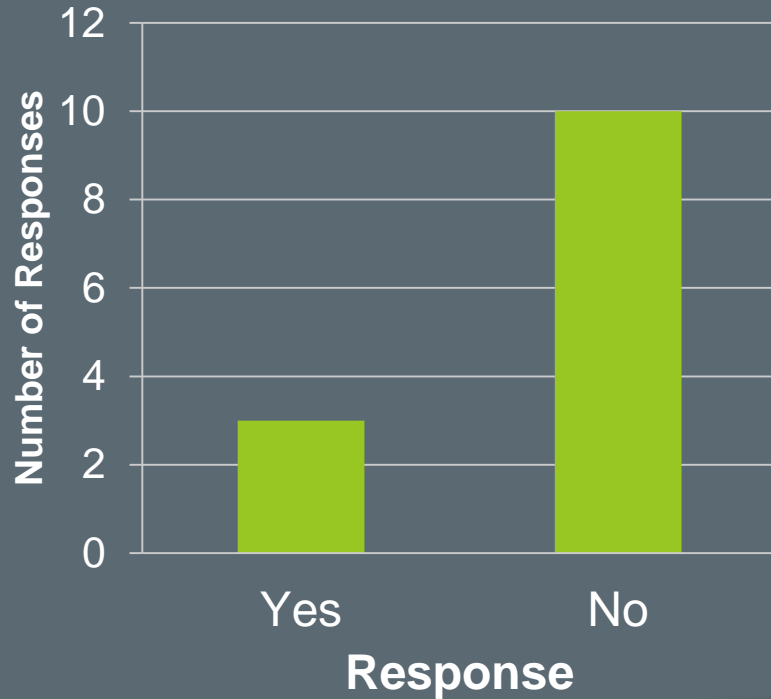
*Other sectors mentioned were: “manufacturing” and “wholesale distribution”

Has your Company Employed an Individual with ASD?

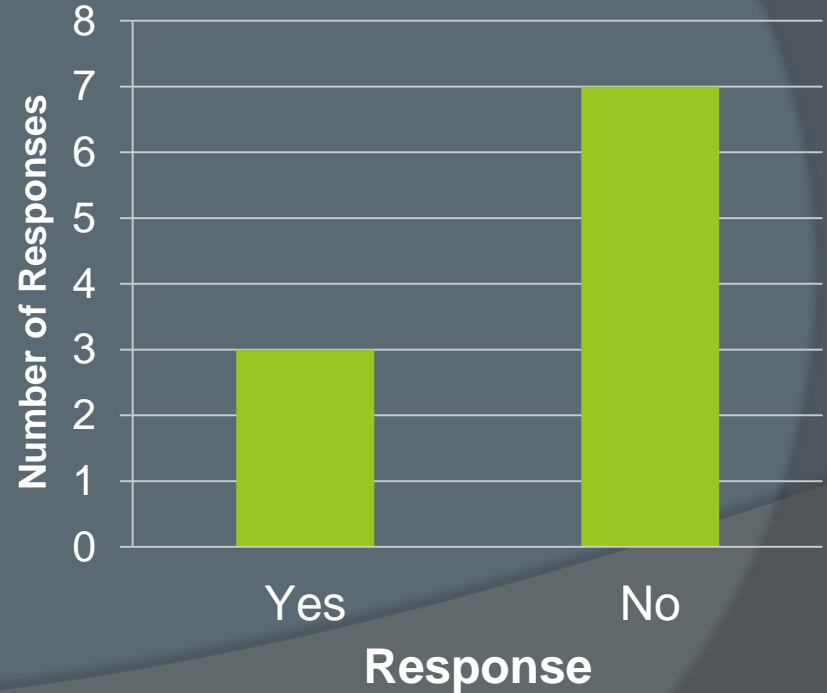


Exclusions

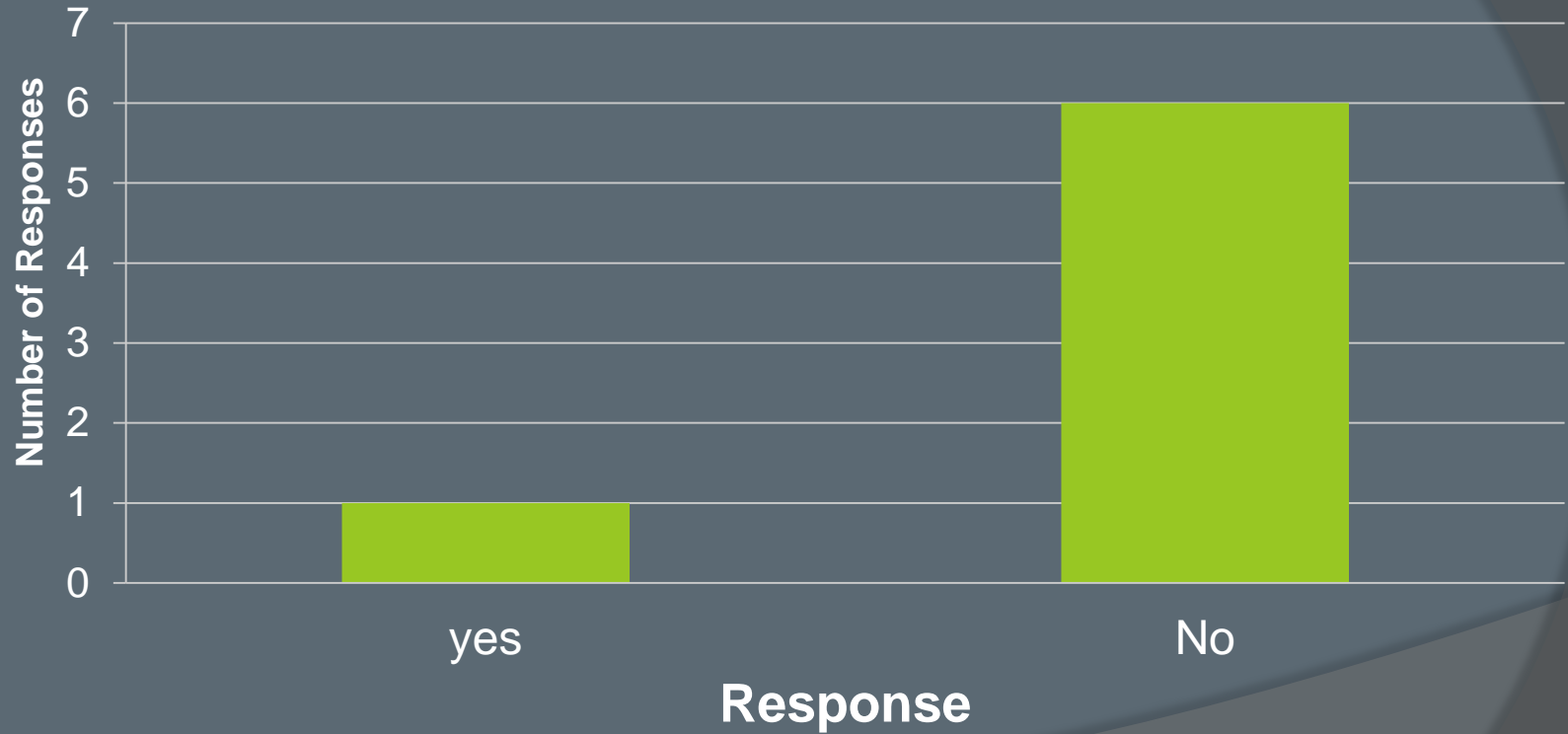
Do you have an Immediate Family Member who has been Diagnosed with ASD?



Are you Currently or have you ever been Involved in any ASD Related Organizations?



Are you Aware of any Employment Opportunities for Individuals with ASD in Spokane, County?



Frequency of Codes



Available Knowledge

There is a lack of knowledge concerning autism in the workforce within Spokane County

- *“unaware... no knowledge”*
- *“I am not aware of any”*
- *“no idea”*



Retrieved from <http://www.effective-actions.com/>

Employment Opportunities

There are limited jobs individuals with autism can fulfill within a company



Retrieved from <http://blog.jobsgopublic.com/>

- *“Depends on their ASD. Maybe nothing. We work with large machines, cutting tools, not sure if that is a safe environment for them. Being a receptionist has a lot of numbers involved.”*

Potential Traits

Employers perceive that individuals with autism are intelligent, focused, and detailed orientated

- *“Great employee, honest, trustworthy, always on time and in proper dress.”*



Retrieved from <http://colorfuzion.com/>

Additional Resources

Employers perceive that it requires more resources and time from them to employ an individual with autism compared to an employee without ASD

- *“hiring someone with ASD would be a hardship because our employees work with very little supervision or direction.”*



Social & Communication Skills

Social interaction and communication skills of individuals with autism hinder employer's willingness to hire them

- *“For example, he could run the cash register extremely well, but wasn't great at customer interaction.”*
- *“It would be difficult for an individual to be a manager that had to multitask a lot or interact a ton with others.”*



Moving Forward

What does this mean for:

- The profession of occupational therapy
- Individuals with ASD
- Employers
- Future research



Implications for OT Intervention

- ❖ Work → an area of occupation (AOTA, 2008)
 - Selecting, obtaining, and maintaining employment opportunities
- ❖ Assisting individuals with ASD
 - Identify skills, traits, positions
 - Accommodations that work best
 - daily schedule, dividers, sunglasses
 - Self-advocacy in the workplace



(Brouhard, 2013; Jordan, 2008; Scott 2011)

Retrieved from <http://www.carltonscreens.co.uk>

Implications for OT intervention cont'd

❖ Assisting employers

- Provide resources –mass or targeted distribution
 - Institute for Community Inclusion & Boston University
- Provide accommodations
 - Alternative interviews
 - Specific instructions
- Accompany the individual and their employer to educate
 - Segment of day
 - Orientation day

(Brouhard, 2013; Jordan, 2008; Scott 2011)

Next step: Future Research

- Employers
 - Skills to be successful
 - transitional programs
 - Workspace modifications
 - Best way to be educated
- Individuals with ASD
 - Do they have the skills they need
- Larger sample size



Retrieved from <http://www.education-portal.com>

Future Research continued

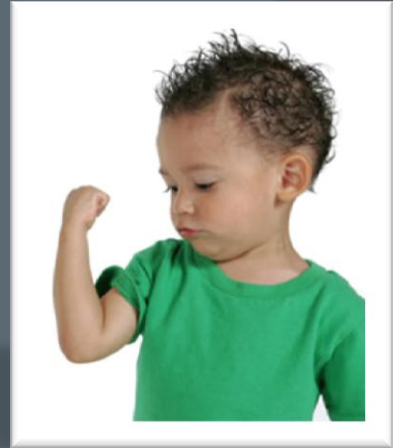
Metropolitan are comparison

- ❖ **Towson University**
 - Similar research question and study design; co-occurring
 - Goal to compare results
 - Similar themes
 - Rural vs. Metropolitan
 - Resources



Strengths of Study

- ❖ Qualitative study
- ❖ Exclusion criteria
 - True representation of those not yet invested
- ❖ Sampling method
 - Eliminated the potential for bias and inconsistency
- ❖ Use of Survey Monkey
- ❖ True Spokane County representation attempted
 - Exclusions outside of Spokane County



Retrieved from <http://www.buildinitiative.org>

Weaknesses of Study

- ❖ Wording of survey questions
- ❖ Lack of survey reminders
- ❖ Sensitive topic
- ❖ Response rate
 - 1.8%

Limitations

- ❖ Funds
 - Database access, reminders
- ❖ DexKnows
 - Categorization
 - Lack of email addresses
 - Didn't stick to our parameters
- ❖ Geographical limitation
 - Spokane County, WA
- ❖ Survey monkey
 - Access to computer or request hard copy
 - Transferring link from paper to computer



Retrieved from <http://www.napkyn.com>

Hope for the future

“I’m going to change the world someday by, like, changing the way the world thinks about autism” (Clickprod, 2012)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNm8qnf2jpY>



Retrieved from <http://sustainableman.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/future-vision.jpg>

References

- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2008). Occupational therapy practice framework: Domain and process (2nd ed.). American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 62, 625-683
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Autism spectrum disorder. Retrieved from <http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/Autism%20Spectrum%20Disorder%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>
- Autism Now. (2013, June 13). Employment, research and reports. Retrieved from <http://autismnow.org/on-the-job/employment-research-and-reports/>
- Autism Speaks. (2013). What is autism? Retrieved from [http://www. Autismspeaks.org/](http://www.Autismspeaks.org/)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*,3, 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp0630a
- Brouhard, K. (2013). Autism spectrum disorders in the workplace. Retrieved from <http://www.bu.edu>
- Center for Disease Control. (2014). Prevalence of autism spectrum disorder among children aged 8 years - autism and developmental disabilities monitoring network, 11 sites, United States, 2010. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Surveillance Summaries
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). Prevalence of autism spectrum disorders-Autism and developmental disabilities monitoring network, 14 sites, United States, 2008. MMWR 61(No. SS-O3); 1-19. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6103a1.htm?s_cid=ss6103a1_w
- Cimera, R., & Cowan, R. J. (2009). The costs of services and employment outcomes achieved by adults with autism in the US. *Autism*, 13(3), 285-302. doi:10.1177/1362361309103791
- Clickprod. (2012). Programming hope: A documentary about employment for adults on the autism spectrum [Video file]. Retrieved from

References

- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. (Washington, D.C.: 2002), 63 Suppl 21-21. Retrieved from <http://www.CDC.gov>
- Dickerson, A. E. (2006). Securing samples for effective research across research designs. In G. Keilhofner (Ed.), *Research in occupational therapy: Methods of inquiry for enhancing practice* (pp. 515-529). Philadelphia, PA: F. A. Davis
- Fitzgerald, A. (2014). Autism and employment: How even small companies can employ staff with autism. Retrieved from http://www.autism.com/adults_fitzgerald
- Gal, E., Meir, A. B., & Katz, N. (2013). Developmental and reliability of the autism work skills questionnaire. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 67(1), doi: 10.5014/ajot.2013.005066.
- Grandin, T. (2008). *The way I see it: A personal look at autism and Asperger's*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons, Inc.
- Hendricks, D. (2010). Employment and adults with autism spectrum disorders: Challenges and strategies for success. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 32(2), 125-134. doi:10.3233/JVR-2010-0502
- Hopkins, J. S. (2013, April 28). Connecting workers on the autism spectrum with tech jobs. *The Baltimore Sun*. Retrieved from <http://www.2010disabilitysurveys.org>
- Howlin, P., & Moss, P. (2012). Adults with autism spectrum disorders. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 57(5), 275-283. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com>
- Jordan, M. (2008). *Supporting Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Quality Employment Practices* (Issue Brief NO. 25). Retrieved from <http://www.communityinclusion.org>
- Kessler Foundation & National Organization on Disability. (2010). *Survey of Americans with Disabilities*. Retrieved from <http://www.2010disabilitysurveys.org>

References

- Kielhofner, G. & Fossey, E. (2006). The range of research. In Kielhofner, G. (Ed.), *Research in occupational therapy: Methods of inquiry for enhancing practice* (pp. 20-35). Philadelphia, PA: F. A. Davis.
- Ladika, S. (2012). Why companies choose to pick autistic workers. *Workforce Management*, 91(8), 21-22. Retrieved from <http://www.search.proquest.comdocview/1032788409?accountid=7305>
- Lee, G. K., & Carter, E. W. (2012). Preparing transition-age students with high-functioning autism spectrum disorders for meaningful work. *Psychology in the Schools*, 49(10), 988-1000. doi:10.1002/pits.21651
- Matson, J. L., & Rivet, T. T. (2008). Characteristics of challenging behaviors in adults with autistic disorder, PDD-NOS, and intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 33(4), 323-329. doi: 10.1080/13668250802492600
- Moisse, K. (2013, May 22). Tech giant sees 'competitive advantage' in autistic workforce. ABC News. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com>
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. (2014). Autism fact sheet. Publication # 09-1877. Retrieved from http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/detail_autism.htm
- Pringle, B., Colpe, L., Blumberg, S., Avila, R., & Kogan, M. (2012). Diagnostic history and treatment of school-aged children with autism spectrum disorder and special health care needs. *NCHS Data Brief*, (97), 1-8.
- Schall, C. (2010). Positive behavior support: Supporting adults with autism spectrum disorders in the workplace. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*. 32, 109-115. doi: 10.3233/JVR-2010-0500
- Scott, J. B. (2011). Occupational therapy's role with autism. Retrieved from <http://www.aota.org>
- Siperstein, G. N., Romano, N., Mohler, A., & Parker, R. (2006). A national survey of consumer attitudes towards companies that hire people with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 24(1), 3-9. Retrieved from <http://www.mdworkforcepromise.org/docs/business/National%20Survey.pdf>

References

- Standifer, S. (2009). Adult autism and employment: A guide for vocational rehabilitation professionals. Disability Policy and Studies School of Health Professions. Retrieved from <http://www.dps.missouri.edu>
- Standifer, S. (2011). Fact sheet on autism employment. Presented at the National Conference on Autism and Employment, St. Louis, MO. Retrieved from <http://www.dps.missouri.edu>
- Volkmar, F. R., Paul, R., Klin, A., & Cohen, D. (2005). In Volkmar F. R., Paul R., Klin A., and Cohen D. (Eds.). Handbook of autism and pervasive developmental disorders, vol. 1: Diagnosis, development, neurobiology, and behavior (3rd ed.). Hoboken, NJ US: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Wallis, L. (2012). 'They said I was rude'. Nursing Standard, 26(39), 24-25. Retrieved from <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/>
- Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. (2013, March 15). Developmental Disabilities Administration. Retrieved from <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ddd/>



QUESTIONS?

