

A Job Development Resource for Supported Employment Professionals Working with Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs)

EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

Historically, individuals with ASDs have not been significantly employed within the competitive workforce. Education of employers in the private and public sectors, human resource professionals, educational institutions and the community is the first step to successful job development. With ongoing training and individualized employment supports, there is a reasonable expectation for successful employment for a person with an ASD. This resource encourages the use of best practice strategies when job developing for adults on the autism spectrum.

As a job developer for an individual with an ASD, you are in a unique position to not only advocate for the individual, but also be a consultant to the business you are speaking with about improving efficiency and productivity. Information obtained from national employers has indicated that a simple accommodation for an employee with a disability has proven beneficial to all employees in the company (such as photos instead of written notes, verbal instruction and coworker modeling of the task).



Kevin Petranich works as a full-time Clerical Assistant in the Interface and Distribution Services Department at Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, New Jersey.

"Hiring a person with a disability is really a good idea from a business perspective. This is not a philanthropy. People with disabilities bring amazing value to an organization. On the whole, they have lower absentee rates. Their sick rates are much lower, and they take their jobs tremendously seriously. Whether it's people with autism, cognitive disabilities or physical disabilities, diversity in the work place adds value to the workforce."

- Kurt Landgraf, President and CEO
Educational Testing Services (ETS)
Princeton, New Jersey



Thirty-one-year-old Adam Zoroni works as a part-time Clerical Assistant at Global Associates in Metuchen, New Jersey. "Adam is a very cheerful, upbeat individual who became part of the team," said agency president Phil Provenzano. "He knows everybody by name; the employees know his name and look forward to seeing him every day. His work ethic, warm personality and great sense of humor are real assets." Adam files paperwork under the supervision of his job coach who reports that he makes more frequent eye contact and uses full sentences to engage in conversation with his coworkers. "I like working at Global because it is fun and I do a great job," Adam said. "I got a paycheck today and I will put it in my bank account."

GROWTH INDUSTRIES IN NEW JERSEY

Start by researching New Jersey companies that are among the high-growth industries. By doing so you can begin the process of building a relationship with an employer. According to the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the top ten high-growth industry sectors in New Jersey in 2008 are:

- Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources
- Arts, A/V Technology and Communications
- Business Management and Administration
- Finance
- Health Science
- Hospitality and Tourism
- Information Technology
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
- Transportation, Distribution and Logistics

"High-growth" industries, which have significant job growth, are critical to the state's economic viability and development and/or often are being transformed by technology requiring workers to acquire an entirely new skill set. While some jobs in these sectors require high levels of education and training, there also are important positions available for all job seekers.

Below are some examples of entry-level jobs with the largest numbers of projected annual job openings in the state between 2006-16:

Occupational Title

- Cashiers
- Retail Salespersons
- Waiters and Waitresses
- Customer Service Representatives
- Laborers and Freight, Stock and Material Movers
- Office Clerks, General
- Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food
- Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners
- Child Care Workers
- Stock Clerks and Order Fillers
- Bookkeeping, Accounting and Auditing Clerks
- Secretaries, Except Legal, Medical and Executive
- Receptionists and Information Clerks
- Counter Attendants, Cafeteria, Food Concession and Coffee Shop
- Teacher Assistants
- Security Guards
- Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers

Prepared By: NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development
Labor Market and Demographic Research
Occupational and Demographic Research
March 2006 and June 2008

Jobs Well-suited for Individuals with Autism

Employees with autism have their own unique strengths and preferences for certain types of jobs. Employment opportunities, therefore, should be matched to a person's skills and preferences. However, there are certain job characteristics that may be generally better suited to a person with autism. When identifying potential employment or volunteer experiences for a person with autism, consider:

- ✓ Jobs that provide a good deal of repetition: A job sorting mail, for example, provides ample repetition and practice.
- ✓ Jobs that do not require elaborate social skills: Due to some of their social challenges, jobs that require complicated social interactions - such as sales - may not be a best fit for a person with autism.
- ✓ Jobs that are consistent day to day: Jobs that are completed daily such as mail delivery, paper recycling and cleaning will provide consistency and repetition with little variation from day to day.
- ✓ Jobs that involve visual tasks: Some employees with autism are skilled at completing visually-based tasks such as sorting, matching and collating.
- ✓ Jobs that can be learned without a great deal of verbal description or explanation: Due to the challenges in understanding language, jobs that require a great deal of verbal explanation may not be a good match.

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TALKING POINTS

"There is a war for talent and anyone who intends to win it better realize two things: First, that it is a global war and, second, that if you restrict your search for talent in any way... you will be giving your competitors the edge they need to put you out of business."

- William G. Parrett, President, Deloitte & Touche

Gain insight to a multi-billion dollar market segment. According to a National Survey of Consumer Attitudes Toward Companies that Hire People with Disabilities, conducted by the University of Massachusetts and the America's Strength Foundation:

- 92% of the American public viewed companies that hire people with disabilities more favorably than those that do not.
- 87% of the public also agreed that they would prefer to give their business to companies that hire people with disabilities.

Acquire creative problem-solving skills.

People with disabilities contribute to an organization's success by bringing unique perspectives, problem-solving skills and experiences to the workplace.

Increase employee retention.

Replacing employees is expensive not in tangible costs (e.g., advertising, screening, interviewing and training), but also in lost organizational knowledge. Employers have found their employees with disabilities to be a loyal workforce, reducing turnover.

Meet or exceed performance standards.

Studies show that employees with disabilities perform equally or superiorly to employees without disabilities. Employer testimonials further highlight the ability of employees with disabilities to not only get the job done, but influence coworkers to improve performance.

Hire employees with the skills you need.

Increased education and training opportunities prepare people with disabilities to contribute to the workforce. According to the Heath Resource Center, more than 2.1 million undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities were enrolled full-time at colleges and universities between 2003 and 2004.

Attract qualified employees in a shrinking workforce.

Some industries already are beginning to feel the crunch of a shrinking workforce. During the next 5-10 years, this phenomenon is expected to spread to other industries. Recruiting and retaining workers with disabilities is one strategy to counter the effects of the aging and shrinking workforce. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, America will continue a period of economic growth from now through 2014. During this time, employment is expected to increase by 18.9 million new jobs, about 2.5 million more jobs than were added in the previous decade. During this same period, almost 36 million workers are expected to leave their occupations and will need to be replaced.



Matt Buchsbaum is gainfully employed at the Jewish Community Center in Flemington, NJ.

KEY PREPARATION STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL JOB DEVELOPMENT

What are the steps of successful job development?

Know the individual you are supporting and the job requirements.

Unfortunately, comprehensive assessments that not only focus on skills, but also interests, hobbies, experiences, likes and dislikes, are the exception rather than the norm. Assessment tools should define the person's employability skills, social ability and specific support required to perform the job. A thorough assessment process also includes direct observation of the individual and highly specific documentation of his/her abilities and support needs. Areas targeted for improvement will likely include communication, social skills, adaptive behavior and vocational skills.

Support needs may be met through reasonable accommodations by the employer. Studies have indicated that most accommodations such as a job coach or a photo-based work schedule are at no, or a very low, cost to the employer. It is important to keep in mind that the individuals seeking employment should be afforded choice and control over their employment options. They are your customer.

The environmental variables of the job are just as important as the essential functions of the job skills. Therefore, assessments should be conducted on the job site. If possible, know the site and the expected job tasks. Know as much as you can about the supports the individual will need to succeed. Supports for adults with ASDs typically include, but are not limited to, schedules to increase independence, motivational systems to increase performance, activity and social skills training to build rapport with colleagues. It also is important to identify the potential training needs of the employer and immediate coworkers to increase the chances of a good job match. You should be able to describe how the individual can do the job with or without a reasonable accommodation. Social skills can be a particular challenge for individuals on the autism spectrum. Matching the job will require detailed information, the required social navigation skills on that particular job and the individual's current skill level.

THE ON-SITE MEETING

It's important to be able to follow the lead of the company representative. Adjust your own style of conversation as needed. Be assertive, not pushy. Remember that you are offering a great employee. It is of benefit to have employee references available (names, phone numbers, etc.) or letters from other employers. Ask what the policy is on job sampling/shadowing with participants. Discuss how job sampling can be an excellent way to interview with someone.

When appropriate, give examples of each step of the process. Be prepared to explain job coaching and how fading occurs in terms that the employer will understand. Don't forget to discuss follow-along, which also is an area that the employer needs to understand. Preparation is key to the success of the on-site meeting.

Bring materials such as a business card and an agency brochure. Try to arrange for the next opportunity. An interview or sampling opportunity for someone would be great. Finally, be prepared to discuss accommodations, if needed, for the individual to perform the job. Have a discussion with the individual and/or caregiver of cost-effective and efficient strategies that would be acceptable accommodations.

Simple Strategies

Make the hiring process simple for the employer. Complex explanations will create a barrier for the individual to get hired.

Success Stories

Successful marketing highlights individual success stories, as well as your agency's success stories. Know the history and demonstrate your pride. What is it about your agency that will stand out above all others? Provide quotes and references from employers who have successfully used your services.

First Impressions

Dress professionally. First impressions are important. Dress in a style that says you take what you are doing very seriously.

Follow up

Immediately follow up with a thank you note, e-mail or phone call. These simple gestures indicate professionalism and affirm genuine interest to the prospective employer.



Research

Research a company before you job develop with management staff. Learn what their needs are. How is the individual you are supporting going to meet those needs? Employers are most often interested in the bottom line. First, they typically focus on productivity and profit. In time, they will start to see the positive changes they are making in someone's life and their workplace.

LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD WITH TECHNOLOGY

Technology is routinely used to increase productivity of employees with and without disabilities:

- Instant messaging and e-mail software allow an employee who is deaf or hard of hearing to efficiently communicate with coworkers.
- "Virtual" offices and meetings allow all employers, including those with disabilities, to improve productivity while increasing employee satisfaction.
- Material-handling equipment and other technology used in non-office environments reduce physical requirements of jobs and open up more opportunities for people with disabilities.

Make accommodations easy and cost-effective.

Every day, employers accommodate workers, with and without disabilities, to build a loyal, dedicated and productive workforce. A few examples of accommodations include:

- Flexible work schedules
- Software that allows an individual to more efficiently manipulate data
- An ergonomic chair to alleviate back pain

KNOW THE JOB MARKET

Publicized vs. Non-Publicized Job Market

Publicized refers to jobs that are advertised and available to anyone who chooses to apply.

Non-Publicized refers to jobs that are not publicly advertised. Strategies to consider when seeking employment through the Non-Publicized Job Market include networking with family and friends, community agencies like the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and One-Stop Career Centers, and visiting businesses.

Places to research Publicized Jobs include: business directories, newspapers, job fairs and Internet postings.

Websites for jobs include:

www.monster.com
www.hireds.com
www.hotjobs.com
www.nationjob.com
www.careerbuilder.com
www.eop.com/cdtop50.html
lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor
www.jobsfwd.com
www.hirediversity.com
www.jobbankusa.com
www.jobcircle.com

TRANSPORTATION

Accessible public transportation and demand-response Para-transit are two of the most pressing problems facing individuals with disabilities who want to lead independent and productive lives. Public transportation provides greater access to employment. Therefore, individuals with disabilities need the option of accessible public transportation. Here are key contacts:

General Information

(888) 484-3339 toll-free in NJ
(609) 292-4500 out of state
(609) 292-5120 TTY
<http://www.state.nj.us/mvc/About/Contact.htm>

NJ Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC)

www.state.nj.us/mvc

NJ Transit Accessible Services

www.njtransit.com/as.shtml

County Para-Transit Services

(800) 955-2321

(TT) 800-955-6765

Red Cross

www.redcross.org

ABOUT AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS (ASDs)

Autism, Asperger's Disorder and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDDNOS) are related disorders. They are commonly referred to as autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) and are the focus of this document. ASDs affect approximately 1 in 150 individuals nationwide and 1 in 94 New Jersey residents, in families of all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. While research into the causes of these disorders advances our understanding of ASDs as genetically-based disorders, as of this writing, no consistent biological markers have been identified.

ASDs are behaviorally defined and diagnosed. The three hallmark impairments in autism are social interaction, communication and behavior. Individuals with autism often have great difficulty interacting with others, even in everyday situations. Also, they typically have a limited ability to communicate verbally and, as a result, may use pictures or sign language. Most individuals with autism engage in repetitive behavior and routines. Many times, these seemingly odd behaviors are a means of communicating their needs and wants. Many individuals with autism require active supervision to ensure their health and safety and have significant difficulty living independently and maintaining employment.

Both Asperger's Disorder and PDDNOS are similar to and different from autism. The common element among the three disorders is impaired social skills. The differences between the disorders relate to communication and adaptive behavior. In Asperger's Disorder, social communication is affected, but typically there is no delay in the development of communication skills. PDDNOS involves a combination of characteristics that are similar to autism and Asperger's Disorder, but do not meet the full criteria. While Asperger's Disorder and PDDNOS are considered milder forms of autism, individuals with these disorders still require significant educational and vocational supports to be successful. Finally, the symptoms and abilities of individuals with ASDs can be quite variable and are a part of what makes each individual unique.

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) affect 1 in 150 children nationwide and 1 in 94 in New Jersey. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

This year, more children will be diagnosed with an ASD than with AIDS, diabetes and cancer combined. (Autism Speaks)

When individuals with an ASD age out of school, they age out of the guarantee of support and services. Adults need...
-- somewhere to live. More than 3,000 are on waiting lists for housing
-- something to do. Many cannot find employment. (Autism New Jersey)

AUTISM AWARENESS TRAINING

Autism awareness education is recommended for interested companies wishing to advance employers' knowledge of an expanding demographic. For a list of qualified speakers, contact Autism New Jersey.

Autism New Jersey

Autism New Jersey (formerly COSAC)
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800-4-AUTISM • www.autismnj.org

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