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The Nation's Speech-Language and Audiology Bi-Weekly

# advance

for Speech-Language Pathologists & Audiologists®

Evidence-Based  
Vocabulary  
Instruction

Language  
Skills and  
Hearing Loss

# Social Vocational Preparation

## Summer Program for Individuals with Autism

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ADVANCE FOR SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS & AUDIOLOGISTS

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## COVER STORY

### 6 Summer ASD Program

A Social Vocational Preparation program enhances the social and vocational skills of young people with autism, affords them opportunities to engage in supported volunteer internships, and assesses their skills to identify areas of strength and areas in need of attention for the upcoming academic year. (cover photo by Jeffrey Leiser)



## DEPARTMENTS

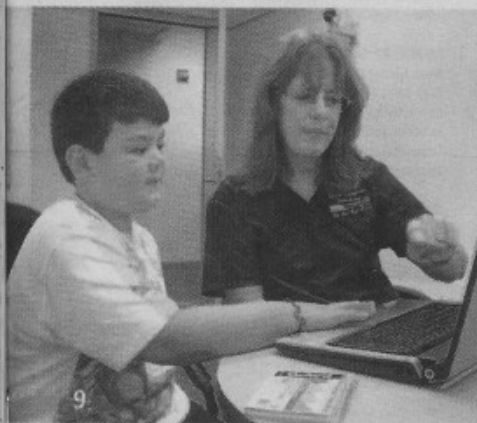
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## COMING SOON

In our next issue we profile three families that developed augmentative and alternative communication systems for their children with autism.

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## THIS WEEK



- ▶ The Four Metrics  
Evaluating the validity of a screening measure.

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## COMING SOON

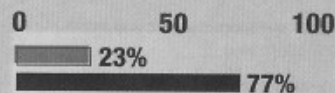
Look for these articles online beginning July 15.

- ▶ Susceptible to Autism  
The identification of genes for autism susceptibility may lead to the development of new treatment approaches.
- ▶ Velocardiofacial Syndrome  
Research about quality of life is improving the treatment of children with this chronic genetic condition.

## SPOT SURVEY

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# SOCIAL VOCATIONAL PREPARATION

Summer program for individuals with autism

By Dana Battaglia, MPhil, CCC-SLP, and Mary E. McDonald, PhD, BCBA-D

**S**o many times we are asked by parents whose children are in 10-month inclusion settings, "Where will I place my child for the summer?" Historically, the Outreach and Consultation Department of the Eden II/Genesis Programs has been able to assist in finding appropriate academic and recreational placements, with ample support.

GENESIS OUTREACH AND CONSULTATION



As our population is aging, the day care and campsites of summers past are no longer appropriate for our now young men and women with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). This was the impetus for the Social Vocational Preparation program piloted last summer. As children transition into adolescence and then adulthood, the emphasis of comprehensive intervention should be less on pure academic skills and more on social and vocational skills.<sup>1</sup>

The mission of the Eden II/Genesis Programs is to provide specialized community-based programs and other opportunities to people with autism, with the goal of enabling them to achieve the highest possible quality of living across their lifespan. These services are provided within the scientifically proven framework of applied behavior analysis (ABA).

The purpose of the summer Social Vocational Preparation program was three-fold: to maintain and enhance the social and vocational skills of participants, to afford participants opportunities to engage in supported volunteer internships, and to complete a social and vocational assessment of each person to better identify areas of strength as well as areas in need of attention for the upcoming academic year.

Individuals with ASD have impairment in social/pragmatic interaction, communication and behavioral/sensory areas.<sup>2</sup> We designed our program to address each of these domains by targeting social skills, functional communication and cognitive flexibility both formally and informally.

With a limited cohort of students for our pilot program, we were able to develop an individualized program tailored to each of the four students' needs. We initially conducted a clinical meeting within the framework of person-centered planning. The family was invited, along with any staff or other individuals who had input into the student's summer plan. Once we obtained a preliminary understanding of each student's preferences, skills and abilities, we were able to develop an individualized student plan for the summer.

As the program ran, we conducted a

variety of standardized assessments to provide the family and school district with a thorough assessment of both social and vocational skills. In addition, social skill development was a core focus of the program and provided the students with a great number of opportunities for structured, mentored socialization.

The program also provided great opportunities for vocational development. Students had the opportunity to participate in a variety of internship experiences and ultimately build a resume. Internship sites included Home Depot, Barnes & Noble, and a local gardening center, day care center and doctor's office. In addition, ample practice for clerical skills such as collating and filing was available on site. We also had the help of a volunteer program assistant with a diagnosis of autism who recently graduated from high school and was transitioning to college in the fall.

The structure of the program consisted of on-site activities and training combined with off-site vocational and recreational activities. (See Figure 1 for a sample of the weekly schedule.)

During lunch and "recess" time, we used incidental teaching strategies to encourage student interaction. Our staff facilitated sharing experiences of recent past events and making predictions about upcoming activities. The students subsequently ▶

Students had the opportunity to participate in a variety of internship experiences at local businesses, including a Barnes & Noble and a gardening center.



**FIGURE 1**

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Arrival			Business meeting		
9 a.m. – 10 a.m.	Social skills	Day care center	Vocational preparation	Barnes & Noble	
10 a.m. – 11 a.m.	Vocational preparation	Social Skills			Full-day recreational trip with on-site lunch
11 a.m. – noon	Lunch				
Noon – 2:30 p.m.	Recreational trip	Gardening center	Doctor's office	Social and vocational skills	
2:30 p.m. – 3 p.m.	Daily Reflection (Journal) and Pack Up				

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established friendships and spontaneously began to bring in activities to share with one another, such as jewelry-making supplies and Nintendo DS.

Our program did face some challenges. For example, although we had the same work sites, the individual needs of each location varied from visit to visit. To address this issue staff members completed task analysis sheets for varied job assignments and targeted these areas within the confines of the school program. These challenges afforded participants the opportunity to expand on cognitive flexibility—in terms of different arrival and departure times, sudden changes in scheduling, changes in location of activities, and speaking with unannounced guests—as well as social pragmatic skills such as tolerating unanticipated changes and initiating to supervisors for jobs and job changes.

The areas of deficit usually were not in the physical performance of a job duty but in the social pragmatic component, such as dealing with a copy machine malfunction and approaching staff members for help. We broke down these skills for each participant by using structured approaches like visual flow charts, video modeling lessons and role-playing activities.

In addition to job-related social skills, we worked on broad social skills that could be applied to multiple sites. Examples included how to approach a manager for a day off, how to deal with harassment, the appropriate use of cell phones, texting friends, establishing appointments, and scheduling social activities with peers.

Because summer is also a time for recreation, we scheduled short and long recreational trips, such as dining out and visiting a pool and aquarium. During recreational days when we weren't "working," students were exposed to opportunities to generalize their social skills, as well as make purchases and navigate the community.

Through the program, we hoped to provide participants with a high-quality, meaningful summer experience. We strove for a broader impact to increase their social skills and, ultimately, their employability, independence, and overall quality of life. The program outcomes far exceeded our expectations. Students continue to contact one another to set up social activities.

This summer, we are excited about reflecting on our experiences from the pilot program as we offer the Social Vocational Preparation program again. ■

### References

1. Volkmar, F.R., Paul, R., Klin, A., et al. (eds.) (2005). *Handbook of Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders* (3 ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
2. American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4 ed.). Washington, DC: APA.

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