



Australian Government  
Department of Industry,  
Innovation and Science

**Business**  
Cooperative Research  
Centres Programme

## *Helping adolescents with autism to get a job:*

*Should we be doing more as OTs?*

Megan Hatfield  
Occupational Therapist



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## *Current evidence on autism and the transition from school*





- Overall - 42% of people with autism get jobs.
- Adolescents with autism and without ID:
  - Three times less likely to have any vocational activities.
  - Only 16% employed full-time.
- Most of the evidence comes from the USA
- Australia – NO evidence in this area!!



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## My research: An overview

<b>Survey &amp; Interviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of adolescents with autism, parents, and professionals (N=162). Interviews with parents and professionals (N=6).</li> <li>• Developed transition planning objectives for adolescents with autism.</li> </ul>
<b>Pilot Studies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of an online transition planning program for adolescents with autism – called the BOOST-A.</li> <li>• Trialled with 6 adolescents and their teams, and feedback from 88 professionals.</li> </ul>
<b>RCT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total of N=96 adolescents with autism; control (n=45) or intervention (n=49) group. Latter used BOOST-A for 12months.</li> <li>• Overall improvements in opportunity for self-determination at home, transition specific self-determination and career exploration.</li> </ul>
<b>Process Evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13 participants in the RCT interviews to determine barriers and enablers to using the BOOST-A.</li> <li>• Four themes identified - : i) taking action to overcome inertia, ii) new insights, iii) adolescent empowerment, and iv) having a champion.</li> </ul>

## 6 Tips

1. Encourage high expectations
2. Need for a champion
3. Understanding the big picture
4. Gaining real-life experiences
5. Adolescent-centred planning
6. Start early

## #1 High Expectations

- One of the biggest predictors of success post-school? Whether adolescents had someone who BELIEVED they could succeed!
- Focusing on strengths rather than difficulties – recent paper by Patten-Koenig et al. shows adolescents with autism employed areas related to their special interests.
- Parents reported the BOOST-A supported them to increase their expectations of what their child could achieve:

“Jason recently went to his first job interview. If you’d asked me before the BOOST-A, I would have said that’s not going to happen anytime soon. But he did, and he did really well, and it’s like wow!”  
(Parent)



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## Emerging evidence for strengths-based approach

### Characterization and Utilization of Preferred Interests: A Survey of Adults on the Autism Spectrum

Kristie Patten Koenig & Lauren Hough Williams

To cite this article: Kristie Patten Koenig & Lauren Hough Williams (2017): Characterization and Utilization of Preferred Interests: A Survey of Adults on the Autism Spectrum, Occupational Therapy in Mental Health, DOI: [10.1080/0164212X.2016.1248877](https://doi.org/10.1080/0164212X.2016.1248877)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0164212X.2016.1248877>



## Emerging evidence for strengths-based approach

# The practice of promoting happiness in autism

**Peter Vermeulen, Autisme Centraal**, Gent, Belgium

- Excellent presentation on this:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCEIDCniZpE&list=PL0t2dRFWj648SCJE8YmzaUOfhx5kPJMag&index=6>



## #2 Champion

- The number one reason the BOOST-A didn't work was...  
Not having a champion!
- A champion was a professional who advocated for the parent and the adolescent in the transition planning process. Shared their knowledge and provided strategies.
- As OTs – we should be champions right?
- Wrong! Parents said that:

Therapists were rarely the champions as most adolescents no longer accessed therapy services, as parents did not see a role for them at this age. (quote from process paper)



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## *We (OT) can be the champions!!*

### Occupational Therapy Interventions for Adolescents With Autism Spectrum Disorder

Tomchek, S., Koenig, K. P., Arbesman, M., & Lieberman, D. (2017). Evidence Connection—Occupational therapy interventions for adolescents with autism spectrum disorder. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 71, 7101395010. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2017.711003>

- Strong evidence for group-based social skills training to enhance social skills
- Strong evidence for video modeling, technology-enhanced visual supports, and prompting to increase functional independence in activities of daily living (ADLs) and work performance
- Moderate evidence supporting cognitive-behavioral approaches to improve function in ADL and instrumental activity of daily living (IADL) occupations
- Promising evidence to support the use of interest-based clubs to improve social engagement and interaction.



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## *#3 Big Picture*

- Transition planning results in poorer outcomes for adolescents with autism. Why?
- Adolescents with autism less motivated to be involved in transition planning, because they didn't see the point!
- Difficulty with understanding abstract and intangible concepts meant they didn't understand the importance of getting a job:

'He's not very receptive to the idea of one day having to provide for himself 'cause he's quite comfortable where he is; he doesn't have the big picture' (Parent).



## #4 Real-life Experiences

- Work experience, part-time work, getting a mentor, going to open days, hobbies, volunteering.
- Super important for all teens!
- Even more so for adolescents with autism – helps them to understand the big picture.
- Often parents might shy away from these experiences because we are worried about them failing, but it's all about building resilience and self-determination – they will never get this if we don't give them the opportunities.

'It's more difficult to have less experience no matter if you have a diagnosis or not'. (Professional)



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## #5 Adolescent-centred planning

- The adolescent should be involved in every transition planning meeting.
- The aim is for them to eventually start leading the sessions – this builds self-determination, linked to post-school success.
- However, because adolescents with autism have difficulty with *social situations* and often experience *anxiety* when they do not know what is expected the transition planning process should be *structured* and very clear.

"The more input that he has, the more likely he is to want to do it ... he needs to feel that he has control' (Parent).



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## #6 Start early!

- Currently transition planning starts in year 10, 11 or 12 for most adolescents, if at all.
- Formal transition planning should start in year 9
- Informal planning should start earlier! Building strengths, self-advocacy skills, social skills, understanding of the big picture, etc.



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## For more information:

**JORSEN**

nasen  
Helping Students Achieve

Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs • Volume 11 • Number 1 • 2017

doi: 10.1111/1471-3802.12377

### "LEAPS OF FAITH": PARENTS' AND PROFESSIONALS' VIEWPOINTS ON PREPARING ADOLESCENTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM FOR LEAVING SCHOOL

Megan Hatfield<sup>1,2</sup>, Marita Falkmer<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Torbjörn Falkmer<sup>1,2,4,5</sup> and Marina Clocarelli<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Curtin University, Australia; <sup>2</sup>Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC), Australia; <sup>3</sup>Linköping University, Sweden; <sup>4</sup>La Trobe University, Australia; <sup>5</sup>Linköping University, Pain and Rehabilitation Centre, Sweden

**JORSEN**

nasen  
Helping Students Achieve

Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs • Volume 11 • Number 1 • 2017

doi: 10.1111/1471-3802.12368

### Factors related to successful transition planning for adolescents on the autism spectrum

Megan Hatfield<sup>1,2</sup>, Marina Clocarelli<sup>1,2</sup>, Torbjörn Falkmer<sup>1,2,3</sup> and Marita Falkmer<sup>1,2,4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Curtin University, Australia; <sup>2</sup>Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC), Australia; <sup>3</sup>Linköping University and Pain Rehabilitation Centre, Sweden; <sup>4</sup>Institution of Disability Research Jönköping University, Sweden



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# BOOST-A

*Better Outcomes & Successful Transitions for Autism*

Points of difference:

- Online program
- Interactive and engaging
- Considers autism-specific needs
- Provides structure



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## But... What is it?



### Module 1: About Me

Guides the adolescent to identify interests, strengths, work preferences & life skills through six activities.



### Module 2: My Team

Prompts the adolescent to identify a team to support transition planning. Strategies to actively involve the adolescent in meetings.



### Module 3: First Meeting

Makes recommendations for job areas & goals based on the adolescent's strengths & peer-reviewed literature.



### Module 4: My Progress

Guides the review of the adolescent's goals & facilitates discussion about positive learning experiences.



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## Section 1: About Me

### Interests

Choose the one you prefer. You may not like either, but just choose the better one.  
(Click on the picture)



Engineering

OR



Agriculture

### Work Preferences

Choose the options you would prefer for most of the time.  
Pick the middle option if you don't mind.  
(Click on the box)

Indoors (most of the time) I don't mind Outdoors (most of the time)

Think about lights, the weather and temperature inside and outside

Quiet (most of the time) I don't mind Noisy (most of the time)

Think about if you get distracted or annoyed by noise

### Strengths

(what you're good at)

Read each statement, and then choose how much this is like you. (Select a number)

30

- I'm good at remembering details.
- I'm good at understanding and following rules.
- I'm good at using maths or numbers to solve problems.
- I'm good at managing and planning with money.

Not like you	A bit like you	A lot like you
1	2	3
1	2	3
1	2	3
1	2	3



### My Skills

Choose the option that best describes how you do this activity  
(Click the box)

Getting ready (showering, choosing clothes, doing hair)

I can do this by myself I need help with this, but I am working on this already I need help with this, but I would like to start working on this I need help with this, but I don't want to work on this yet



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## Section 2: My Team

### My Team

Thomas Elliot  
Team Leader  
Phone: 0433 333 333  
Email: Tom.Elliot@gmail.com

Pamela Elliot

Parent/Carer  
Phone: 0455 555 555  
Email: Pam.Elliot@gmail.com

Joseph Elliot

Brother  
Phone: 0455 555 555  
Email: Jet122@gmail.com

Fred Galloway

Mentor  
Phone: 0455 555 555  
Email: Fred\_Gall@gmail.com

Mrs Kerry Fig

Teacher  
Phone: 0455 555 555  
Email: K.Fig@education.com

Ellie Dunlop

Coordinator  
Phone: 0455 555 555  
Email: ellie@the.com



Choose how you will be involved in the first meeting (tick one box)

- ☐ Just listening and not talking (no one asking you questions)
- ☐ Have a team member speak for you (write things or talk quietly to them)
- ☐ Do some talking (Prepare some things to talk about or answer some questions)
- ☐ Run the meeting with someone else
- ☐ Run the meeting by yourself (your team will still help)







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## Section 3+4: My Goals + My Progress

### Goal 1: Get a part-time job

Achieve by: End of 2015

Steps	Who's working on this
 Team will talk to people they know (friends, family, people they work with) to find someone in the area of interest who can help	All of the team
 Develop a resume and cover letter Template: <a href="http://www.jobguide.thegoodguides.com.au/resume/format">www.jobguide.thegoodguides.com.au/resume/format</a> Tips: <a href="http://myfuture.edu.au/getting-started/prepare-to-apply-for-jobs/create-a-resume-that-stands-out">myfuture.edu.au/getting-started/prepare-to-apply-for-jobs/create-a-resume-that-stands-out</a>	Thomas Pamela Fred
 Call or visit businesses to ask for a job or work experience. Give them my resume and cover letter.	Thomas Pamela
 Once I have work experience, ask to use this process to get the most out of it: <a href="http://www.workinspiration.com.au/whats-involved/">www.workinspiration.com.au/whats-involved/</a>	Pamela Fred

+ Add another step



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## For more information on methodology:

Hatfield et al.  
*Child Adolesc Psychiatry Ment Health* (2016) 10:48  
 DOI 10.1186/s13034-016-0137-0

Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
 and Mental Health

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Open Access



### Evaluation of the effectiveness of an online transition planning program for adolescents on the autism spectrum: trial protocol

Megan Hatfield<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Marita Falkmer<sup>1,2,5</sup>, Torbjorn Falkmer<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> and Marina Ciccarelli<sup>1,2</sup>

Open access, can find it here: <http://rdcu.be/ocgl>



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## What next?

Utilisation grant from the Autism CRC to roll out the BOOST-A and provide training to professionals and parents.

## Thank you!

For questions or to register interest in the utilisation grant:

Email: [Megan.hatfield@curtin.edu.au](mailto:Megan.hatfield@curtin.edu.au)

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