



NeuroDevNet Workshops Initiative Awards September, 2011

Primary Applicant: **David Nicholas**

Workshop Title: **“On the Job”: Advancing Vocational Opportunities for Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders**

Workshop Summary:

Among adolescents and adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), the proportion who have opportunity to obtain and maintain employment or engage in other forms of meaningful, satisfying vocational activity, is unacceptably low. There is a dearth of resources, practice models and evidence supporting vocational interventions for youth and adults with ASD. This lack of knowledge and the resulting gaps in evidence-informed services result in uncertainty and stress for these youth and adults as well as their families and helping professionals seeking to ensure that the most effective interventions are provided. To address this gap, a 2 day workshop is proposed. The workshop will examine salient issues related to the advancement of vocational opportunities for youth and adults with ASD in Canada.

Specific aims of the workshop are to:

- explore key vocational issues for youth and adults with autism
- reflect on current practices including resources, challenges and opportunities for vocational support and development
- consider innovation in promoting community capacity among employers and other vocational resources
- identify considerations for measuring vocational success and satisfaction among persons with ASD and their families, and
- identify components of a proactive, integrated provincial/national vocational resource strategy.

Workshop deliverables include evidence-informed dialogue and research priority setting among key stakeholders (individuals with ASD, families, vocational service providers, employers, researchers, policy developers). It is expected that this process will yield understanding about current resources, research needs, and priorities for practice, policy and research in Canada. We plan to hold the workshop in early 2012 at a site in southern Ontario. We will invite keynote speakers with expertise in this area, and are planning a series of discussion group meetings among conference attendees. These discussion groups, which will be content analyzed and findings distributed to conference attendees and other stakeholders, will address key issues, questions and priorities for advancing this field.



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Examples of key questions addressed by each group will be: 1. What are the experiences of individuals with ASD and family caregivers related to vocational opportunity?, 2. What gaps limit vocational service delivery development and how can these gaps be resolved?, 3. What constitutes service success and how can this be measured?, 4. What are priorities for moving forward?, and 5. What are best ways to continue this discussion and the advancement of research and practice in this area? It is anticipated that a consensus statement and action steps, will emerge from workshop discussion. Accordingly, this meeting is crucial in deliberating upon current practice and knowledge as well as facilitating a research strategy.

The workshop will target inter-disciplinary individuals in Canada within multiple sectors (individuals with ASD, families, researchers, service providers, employers, policy developers, advocates) who are (i) engaged in vocational issues in ASD, and (ii) committed to knowledge advancement and service enhancement in this substantive area. They will be identified by advocacy organizations, contacts from our team, national advertisement (e.g., NeuroDevNet, Canadian Autism Intervention Research Network, Sinneave Family Foundation, Autism Societies, etc.), and snowball sampling, as needed, among service providers and policy makers. Strategic knowledge translation during and after the workshop is planned.