# Transitioning to Employment

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Honest, loyal, highly focused, creative, logical, and attentive to detail are some of the common traits associated with people with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder).

Would you want to hire someone with these traits?

How about someone who has better attendance and retention rate than their average colleague?

Your answer is probably yes to these questions; however, **86% of adults with ASD are unemployed or under-employed in Ontario.** The majority of adults (58%) rely on Ontario Disability Income Supports as their primary source of income.

## Transition planning for those with ASD needs to start sooner to help them move into adulthood!

Individuals with ASD may need more help in the following areas related to employment:

- Social interactions with colleagues, organizational skills and sensory challenges.
- Making the work activities adequately challenging, rewarding and/or meaningful.
- Understanding one's own strengths and abilities.
- Understanding different roles/careers – people with ASD often struggle to take perspective and envision what someone else's experiences would be like (This is called Theory of Mind).
- Preparing for and attending an interview— difficulties managing anxiety, reading social cues, and/or communicating appropriate information is often challenging.
- Self-advocating - sharing information about personal needs and accommodations.
- Mental health - ensuring stability to be workplace ready.

Many people with ASD also live with related mental health conditions such as anxiety or depression.

## Ideas for schools

- Enroll students in co-operative education (co-op) opportunities in the community to help them explore their interests.
- Educate co-op supervisors on cultivating talents and preferences of those with ASD.

Ensure that there is a training plan in place that matches the individual's learning style.

- Support volunteer roles for people with ASD by actively offering opportunities and helping to ensure the individual is prepared for this role.
- Make career planning and regular transition meetings mandatory. Students with ASD may require more time to contemplate and understand different career/education options. Additional meetings will help guide the individual to their career path.
- Identify the individual's strengths, skills, interests, talents and cognitive style through career assessment tools provided in schools across Ontario.
- Connect with local community transition programs, colleges and employment services.
- Ensure that the young adult contributes to their Individual Education Plan (IEP).

## Ideas for the individual and family

- Participate in chores and regularly structured responsibilities in the home. Allowance or other rewards given for task completion is likely to be motivating.
- Volunteer in the community, and seek out summer employment to get experience in a variety of settings.
- Enroll in programs that focus on employment, life skills, and social skills to prepare for adult independence.
- Connect the individual living with ASD to family and friends he or she can interview to gather information about specific jobs or careers.
- Engage the person in job-shadowing opportunities.
- Develop strong self-advocacy skills so that personal strengths and needs can be communicated to the employer in an effective manner.
- Identify the person's strengths, skills, interests, talents and cognitive style.
- Make use of psycho-vocational testing and assessments.
- When self-employment is viable, evaluate the individual's talents, whether he or she has a product or service that has the potential to be sold, strengthen the individual's entrepreneurial skills, and look for small business training and mentoring.
- Create the opportunity for ongoing counselling to ensure mental health support (especially during times of transition).

## References

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**The Redpath Centre** (in Toronto, Ontario) addresses the social and emotional needs of children, adolescents and adults with Asperger Syndrome and mental health concerns through best practices, cross-sector collaboration, education and research. Our experienced clinicians bring their knowledge of Autism Spectrum Disorder, mental health and neuro-diversity to our work. For more information, visit: www.redpathcentre.ca and www.sarahsouthey.com

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