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## Vocational Support Approaches in Autism Spectrum Disorder

### What is this research about?

Many people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are unemployed, or only employed in part-time work due to a range of difficulties. These difficulties include barriers within the hiring process, a lack of accommodation in the workplace, and challenging physical and social environments. There are some organizations that help individuals with ASD find work, often called vocational support programs. The authors conducted a review of the literature to identify what is known about employment supports for people with ASD.

### What did the researchers do?

The researchers conducted a literature review using a systematic approach that pools studies to form a conceptual understanding of the issue. The review included both quantitative and qualitative data, and studies that had a vocation-related intervention and evaluation data were originally included. The authors then narrowed their search to studies that used an ASD intervention and where the participants were 18 years or older.

### What did the researchers find?

There were only 10 articles that met the criteria for inclusion, and they were categorized into 2 themes: (1) supported employment comprising community placement and job coaching, and (2) technology-related applications including media and online use. Supported employment is the process of enabling

### What you need to know:

Vocation is an important measure of wellbeing. Individuals with ASD are underemployed and face barriers in the hiring process and certain physical and social environments. Local community placements with job coaching and the use of videos and other technology aids lead to a higher likelihood of getting employment, staying in a job and higher salaries.

a person with a disability to secure and maintain paid work in a regular work environment and it often involves formal training for employment, tailoring job searches and support in the workplace. The authors found that earlier and long lasting supported employment interventions were generally helpful. With these supports, people were more likely to get a job, had higher salaries, more diverse types of jobs, and were employed longer than those without the support. Notably, the literature shows that it is more effective for people with ASD to work in jobs alongside other typical employees, rather than only with coworkers with disabilities.

In successful work settings, job coaching was a common and important component of employment support. Job coaches help individuals find a job, assist them in applying and interviewing, liaise with the individual and their colleagues, and deal with situations that may arise. Two studies examined technology and media-based support tools. These included videotaped demonstrations of workplace skills and using a personal digital assistant (PDA)



device to deliver prompts to complete work tasks. Both support tools improved the performance of participants at work.

## How can you use this research?

The authors indicate that further research is needed to ensure stable, welcoming vocational communities for individuals with ASD. This review may serve as a backdrop for vocational scholarship in ASD.

## About the Researchers

David Nicholas (PhD, RSW) is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary, Canada.

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Lonnie Zwaigenbaum (MD) is the Co-director of the Autism Research Centre at Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital and an Associate Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Alberta, Canada.

Margaret Clarke (MD) is a Professor in the Faculty of Medicine, Departments of Pediatrics and Psychiatry at the University of Calgary and holds a cross-appointment in the Department of Child Studies at Mount Royal University. In addition, she is currently the Senior Vice-President of Policy and Programs at The Sinneave Family Foundation.

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## Keywords

Autism Spectrum Disorder, Disability, Job Coaching, Supported Employment, Vocational Support, Vocational Training

This research summary was written by Jordan Cleland and Jonathan Lai for the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research. This research summary, along with other summaries, can be found on our [blog](#) and at [asdmentalhealth.ca/research-summaries](http://asdmentalhealth.ca/research-summaries)

## About the Chair

The Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research is dedicated to studying ways to improve the mental health and well-being of people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and their families in Canada.

The Chair is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research in partnership with Autism Speaks Canada, the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance, Health Canada, NeuroDevNet and the Sinneave Family Foundation. Additional support was provided by York University.

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