



AUTISM WORKS PROGRAM EVALUATION 2010-2011



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Prepared by: Resource Development Associates

Nishi Moonka

Amalia Egri Freedman

Peter Neely



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Autism Works is a program of Community Gatepath funded under contract with the CA Department of Rehabilitation (DOR). The goals of this program are to provide training and placement for sustainable employment for young adults with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis and to build relationships with employers who will provide jobs for those with ASD on into the future. Resource Development Associates (RDA) served as a third-party evaluator for this evaluation.

As the oldest non-sectarian social services organization in the San Francisco Bay Area serving children and adults with disabilities, Gatepath brings experience both in employment services and in working with a neurodiverse population. Autism Works represents a first foray into providing highly targeted vocational services to young adults with ASD.

The program is specifically tailored to find competitive employment for high-functioning youth between the ages of 18 and 25, leading to community-based independence and sustainable employment. Participants must be a consumer of DOR and have the social skills needed for competitive employment, and must receive a referral to the Autism Works program from their counselor. Services include resume creation, interview seminars and job coaching designed to develop the necessary skills to gain and retain employment.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) causes deficits in social functioning that can make living and working independently challenging. Studies indicate that over 90% of those with an ASD diagnosis are unemployed or underemployed. Further, if an adult with autism does not find employment after they complete schooling, they have a 70% chance of not being gainfully employed throughout their life (Rebuck, 2006). Thus there is a need to make the most of the years prior to high school graduation to develop an individual's life skills and prepare them for entering the work force.

The services provided by the Autism Works program are driven by research and best practices in serving this population. The evaluation team used a mixed methods approach combining data analysis and qualitative activities to understand the impact of this program on the target population and the program's achievement of the goals outlined in the DOR contract. The period for this evaluation was April 1, 2010 through September 23, 2011.

Evaluation Methodology

To answer questions about the program's effectiveness in achieving the goals outlined in its contract with the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), the evaluation team analyzed data collected during the life of the program, beginning in April 2010 and continuing through September 23, 2011. While the contract extends through September 30, 2011, it was determined that based on the timeframe required to place participants, only data for participants referred prior to August 1, 2011 would be considered to determine program progress. The mixed-method evaluation utilized the following data sources:

Community Gatepath Data System: Community Gatepath uses the Salesforce web-based Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software system to track client service data and employer contacts data for Autism Works Employment Services Individual Placement programs. All members of the Autism Works team use this web-based system as a tool for both data management and collaboration. The evaluators accessed the system directly to obtain data for analysis.



Key Informant Interviews: The evaluation team conducted seven key informant interviews, ranging from 15 minutes for employers to 30-60 minutes for participants, in order to develop qualitative findings that inform and contextualize analyses of quantitative data. The team conducted three in-depth interviews with participants and their families, and four shorter interviews with employers. Questions focused on direct individual experience with the program, as well as program successes and opportunities for improvement.

Participant Observations: An evaluation team member conducted two 1.5-hour participant observations. The first observation took place at the Autism Works Interview Seminars, offering an opportunity to observe multiple participants and their interaction with Autism Works staff and each other. The second observation took place at a work site, where the team member observed on-the-job performance and interaction between the participant and the Autism Works Job Coach.

Stakeholder Surveys: The evaluation team administered four unique surveys with the following stakeholder groups:

1. Family/Caregiver(s)
2. Employers
3. School Administrators
4. Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) Staff and Administrators

These surveys were administered on-line; took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete, and were designed to measure satisfaction with Autism Works services, and to provide a neutral opportunity for feedback. All surveys were administered in August 2011.

Limitations:

There were some limitations to the evaluation which may impact findings.

1. Social capacity of the participants: All participants enrolled in Autism Works have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis, which can compromise social functioning. This circumstance impacted the qualitative evaluation activities in that a family member or caregiver was present during interviews and the Autism Works Assessment Coordinator assisted in facilitating the participant focus group.
2. The nature of competitive employment: Program participants are being placed in high-turnover entry-level jobs. These are fast-paced environments that require significant interaction with the public and little time for phone or email communication. Observation, interview, and survey protocols were adjusted to meet these environmental requirements.
3. Limited universe of data: The small sample size (21 referred participants) means that while the data is informative, no findings can be considered statistically significant for the target population.
4. Data limitations: Gatepath implemented the Salesforce tool in February 2011. For program data from April 2010 through January 2011, only major milestones such as participant intakes, assessments or applications submitted to employers were entered into the system.

Findings and Recommendations

1. **Onboarding participants effectively and sensitively:** Prior to being offered services, participants must first receive an intake and an assessment. By allowing a family member to attend the first meeting and maintaining staff consistency across both meetings, Autism Works has created a process that reduces anxiety among both family/caregiver(s) and participants.



2. **Building participant satisfaction:** While the family/caregiver(s) survey did not achieve a 90% satisfaction rate, participants uniformly complimented Autism Works services for building their confidence through skill development and employment. Further, information from observations, interviews and the participant focus group indicates that the support staff provide during the early months of a placement give both participants and employers the support necessary to achieve sustainable employment.
 - **Recommendation:** While participants report satisfaction, family/caregiver(s) do not share the same level of enthusiasm, or the same sense of connectedness to the process. Both the literature and program experience suggest that family/caregiver(s) of youth with ASD experience more anxiety about their child's day-to-day activities and about their future than other family/caregiver(s), and may have an inaccurate picture of the benefit of a successful entry level job in preparing their child for long-term employment. The institution of family/caregiver education seminars offers the opportunity to engage family/caregiver(s) and increase their understanding of their child's vocational needs without compromising a placement process that encourages independence for participants.
3. **Reducing social isolation:** Staff observe that many Autism Works participants lack social supports outside their family and struggle with isolation. Participants shared that aside from the interview seminars and ultimately, their workplace interactions, they have few outlets to socialize with their peers, and value these interactions highly.
 - **Recommendation:** Continue to encourage participants to attend interview seminars, both during the job development period and after placement, and explore opportunities to bring participants and potentially other transitional age youth with ASD together socially.
4. **Improving outcomes and achieving expertise over time:** Autism Works gained traction in making successful placements over the course of the contract period. One likely explanation for this improvement is that Autism Works staff are gaining skills and experience and improving in their roles. Another explanation is that there is a more established pipeline of potential employers. Both of these possible explanations reflect positively on the program.
5. **Developing replicable tools to increase participant support:** The literature on serving people with ASD confirms the importance of using prompts such as social stories and visual cues to compensate for individual deficits. Autism Works staff have developed a series of customized tools for participants that help them to navigate the workplace effectively. From checklists that outline the key policies and procedures for each employer, to key chains that serve as cheat sheets to determine who to ask for guidance, to pocket timers to help participants return from breaks on time, program staff have developed customized yet highly replicable tools that make a significant difference in helping participants overcome social deficits and achieve sustainable employment.
6. **Building toward sustainability:** Through collaborative program improvements and development of effective, replicable tools, Autism Works is building towards sustainability. Given Gatepath's intention to continue to serve the DOR caseload, which will continue to include those with ASD, as well as develop similar services on a fee-for-service basis, staff are likely to identify the components that enable replication across geographies and segments of the target population.
 - **Recommendation:** There is a financial component to sustainability that is beyond the scope of this evaluation. As Gatepath explores other funding options, including fee-for-service, an



analysis of the cost of services relative to placements will provide critical insight to long-term sustainability.

- 7. Demonstrating leadership in forecasting the need for future employment services:** By making the JPOM available on its website, Gatepath is demonstrating its position as a leader in serving moderate- to high-functioning youth with ASD. Even if the current school climate does not allow for widespread use of the instrument, it has value to other service providers, and potentially to family/caregiver(s) as well, as a tool for determining an individual's service needs. Further, if a feedback loop can be created such that those who use the JPOM to assess employment readiness provide results back to Gatepath, the JPOM may prove to be a highly effective tool for identifying development areas and future employment needs for ASD youth.

 - **Recommendation:** Continue to build support for and expand use of the JPOM. Analyze usage to determine whether the JPOM can be abbreviated and still remain effective for use in the school setting.
- 8. Collaboratively supporting participants and placements:** The Autism Works staff observed early on that regular in-person encounters with participants enabled better placements, and actively work to schedule intakes and assessments when colleagues can attend. The Job Developer attends weekly interview seminars, which serve as an opportunity to observe multiple participants and gauge the social functioning that is so critical to successful placement. Further, once a placement has occurred, the Job Developer and the Job Coach maintain contact about workplace developments, and work collaboratively to develop both the action plans and tools such as visual supports and social stories that cue participants about what is expected in the workplace. Based on positive feedback from family/caregiver(s), participants and employers regarding the communication provided by program staff, this collaboration is very likely a critical component of program success.
- 9. Building support among employers for hiring people with disabilities:** Employers are not informed of the nature of a hiree's disability. In addition, they are accustomed to a lack of follow-through and "flakiness" from employees in these entry-level positions. Through the intense support provided in the early weeks of employment, Autism Works staff frequently resolves conflicts before they lead to termination. Employers uniformly report that they would hire program participants in the future, and some even state that they have a new appreciation for hiring people with disabilities. In this way, Autism Works is making a tangible and lasting impact on the potential for people with all kinds of disabilities to sustain employment.
- 10. Collecting data efficiently to drive program activities:** Community Gatepath implemented Salesforce in February 2011 out of a need to more effectively track participant and employee contacts and progress. Previously, staff had used Excel tables, which proved inefficient for the purposes of planning ongoing contact with employers. In addition, this method limited the opportunities for collaboration and for effectively accessing data for the purposes of ongoing monitoring and goal-setting. The Salesforce tool is exceptionally easy to access, in terms of entering and sharing data, and encourages real-time collaboration across the program team, which seems to result in more effective services. By being able to access data on a just-in-time basis, Gatepath created capacity to actively monitor performance and measure results for the purposes of ongoing program improvement.
- 11. Maintaining Focus on Participant Needs:** Autism Works represents an ambitious program whose objective is to make a measurable difference in employment and retention of youth with



ASD, as well as to develop relationships with employers who can make a long-term commitment to hiring multiple program participants. The ARRA funding source combined with the emerging research on serving this population created program goals, such as the requirement to recruit employers willing to engage in funded on the job training (OJT) opportunities, that stood in direct conflict with the placement needs of referred DOR participants. Gatepath made a clear decision to place the needs of its participants above its own performance evaluation, opting to miss the OJT goal.

12. Influencing DOR policy in serving youth with ASD: Throughout the program, Autism Works staff documented assessments and placement activities. Staff found that some DOR referrals were not prepared for competitive employment, but may have succeeded with the support offered by group employment (which Gatepath also has the capacity to provide). By providing this feedback to DOR, Autism Works may be helping to expand program criteria and may increase program participation.

- **Recommendation:** The survey conducted with DOR staff, in combination with the results of assessments and placements, indicates a potential disconnect between the caseworkers' expectations for the referred participant and the role played by ASD in limiting employment. To the degree that Gatepath can educate DOR staff regarding their observations about referrals, they may be able to positively impact both the number and appropriateness of referrals as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of employment placements for their caseload.

Conclusion

In its year of operation, Autism Works has hired a team, implemented a set of services according to best practices, developed replicable tools and protocols for serving youth with ASD, established rapport with participants and their families and built placement relationships with over 50 San Mateo County employers. This evaluation demonstrates that Autism Works staff work effectively with a population that is growing, yet whose employment needs are still not well understood. As a result, young people with ASD and limited job prospects are working and employers are learning that people with disabilities can work successfully in their organizations. Evidence from staff and participants suggests that Autism Works is providing the supports and resources necessary to mitigate the risk factors that contribute to long-term unemployment among those with ASD.



Figure 1: Summary of Objectives Achieved

	Achieved	Not Achieved
1. By 08/31/2011, 23 staff will receive at least 20 training hours on securing and maintaining employment for people with autism.	X	
2. By 06/30/2011, establish partnerships with three schools districts to utilize job preparation outcomes matrix in order to better prepare students for employment.	X ¹	
3. By 09/30/2011, conduct assessments, tailored to people with autism, of at least 45 young adults, ages 14-25. (SF)	X	
4. By 03/31/2011, establish partnerships with five new businesses (targeting the biotech industry and companies that can hire at least 10 employees annually). (SF)	X	
5. By 09/30/2011, recruit three businesses for on-the-job training agreements. (SF)		X
6. By 09/30/2011, place 20 young adults with autism, ages 18-25, in community-based jobs. (SF)		X
7. By 09/30/2011, demonstrate sustainability of activities by achieving at least three job placements per month for three consecutive months ² .		X
8. Over 80% of consumers will successfully retain employment for 90+ days. (SF)		X
9. At least 90% of consumers will express satisfaction with services provided.	X	

(SF) Based on Salesforce database.

¹ Autism Works established relationships with 2 school districts and 2 independent schools that have committed to using the JPOM.

² Gatepath has placed over 3 participants per month on average combined from Employment Services and Autism Works participants, all of whom are part of the DOR caseload. Gatepath presents all DOR participants to potential employers without distinguishing between programs; staff work to match employers' needs with the most qualified candidate.



INTRODUCTION

Background

Community Gatepath (Gatepath) is one of the oldest non-sectarian social services organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area, serving children and adults with disabilities in school, the community, home, and the workplace for over 90 years. Gatepath's roots in San Mateo County date to 1920; in 1995 the organization became Poplar ReCare through a merger of two local nonprofits; and in 2001 the organization changed its name to Community Gatepath. It is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Gatepath offers a variety of services to people with disabilities, including early intervention, inclusive preschool, transition for young adults, life skills development, vocational services, day services and disability awareness. Within the vocational services program area, Gatepath also operates an Employment Services program, providing training, placement and coaching services to adults with disabilities, as well as the Transition Program, which serves young adults. Autism Works represents a first foray into providing highly targeted vocational services to young adults with ASD.

Autism Works is a program of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 (ARRA), funded through the California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) to find employment for young adults with autism. The contract period for these funds is March 1, 2010 through September 30, 2011. The program is specifically tailored to find competitive employment for high-functioning youth between the ages of 18 and 25, leading to community-based independence and sustainable employment. Participants must be a consumer of DOR and have the social skills needed for competitive employment, and must receive a referral to the Autism Works program from their counselor. Services include resume creation, interview seminars and job coaching designed to develop the necessary skills to gain and retain employment.

Today, Gatepath operates according to the principles of social entrepreneurship by combining direct service with traditional business models. According to these principles, Gatepath's long-term objective in accepting the ARRA funds to establish the Autism Works program is to develop an effective, sustainable program that complements existing services for those living with ASD and for the other employment services Gatepath provides to those with disabilities.

ASD and Autism Works

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a group of neurological disorders characterized by impairments in social functioning, communication deficits, and repetitive or restricted interests or behaviors (American Psychological Association, 2000). The spectrum includes Autistic Disorder (AD), Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), and Asperger's Disorder (AS). While sharing overlapping diagnostic criteria, the disorders are differentiated by severity, with impairment ranging from AD (most severe) to AS (least severe). Previously believed to be environmentally caused, ASD is now known to have a strong neurodevelopmental component (e.g., Lacroix, Guidetti, Roge, & Reilly, 2009; Niklasson, Rasmussen, O'Skarsdottir, & Gillberg, 2009); and is believed to be present throughout the lifespan (Matson, Mayville, Lott, Bielecki, & Logan, 2003).

The challenging behaviors and social deficits associated with this group of disorders make it difficult for many of those living with ASD to live independently (Matson, Dempsey, & Fodstad, 2009). As a result, family/caregiver(s) of children with an ASD are more likely to be concerned about their children's future,



including opportunities for independence, financial well-being, quality of life, and employment opportunities (Easter Seals' *Living with Autism Study*). When asked to anticipate future service needs, approximately 30% of these family/caregiver(s) anticipated the need for education (34%), employment (32%), and housing (29%) resources for their children as they entered into adulthood (Golden Gate Regional Center *2008 Autism Services Study*, 2009).

In fact, employment-age adults with ASD experience some of the lowest employment rates among those with disabilities. Results from a longitudinal study of social and employment outcomes in 120 individuals with autism indicated that over 90% were unemployed and not living independently (Bellstedt, Gillberg, & Gillberg, 2005). Additionally, Barnard et al. (2001) found that of employment age individuals with ASD, only 6% were employed full-time and 4% were employed part-time. The gap is even more disparate between employment age individuals with ASD and their working age peers without disabilities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).

Further, if an adult with autism does not find employment after they complete schooling, they have a 70% chance of not being gainfully employed throughout their life (Rebuck, 2006). Thus there is a need to make the most of the years prior to high school graduation to develop an individual's life skills and prepare them for entering the work force.

These findings come at a time when the diagnosis of ASD continues to climb. Current projections estimate the total number of people with ASD in California will reach 70,000 by June 2012 (Cavagnaro, 2008). Several reasons have been proposed for the increase in diagnoses, including 1) Expanded diagnostic criteria; 2) more awareness of the disorder; 3) diagnosis at earlier ages; and 4) the recognition that ASD is a lifelong condition. Further, in the last two decades, the State of California has documented a decline in the average age of individuals with ASD, along with a sizeable wave of youth approaching adulthood. These findings are consistent with those reported in the larger ASD literature, and have significant implications for families, educators, service providers and employers, as well as the youth themselves.

Best Practices in ASD Employment Services

A young adult with an ASD diagnosis can prepare for employment with support from his/her family and available service providers. First, there must be an understanding of the skill deficits that may impede the transition to adult employment, and then there must be a concerted effort both to encourage skill acquisition, and to develop employment strategies relative to his/her abilities and needs.

Skill deficits that can limit employment go beyond traditional challenges such as learning the basics of the interview process and practicing being interviewed. For the young person with ASD, the very act of getting to work can be a challenge. It is unlikely that the young person with ASD will drive, thus part of work readiness is determining to what extent the young person will need to develop skills related to using public transportation.

Due to the social-communicative deficits





associated with ASD, traditional job training and coaching methods are often ineffective. Research suggests that individuals with ASD lack a *theory of mind* which is essentially a lack of understanding that others have their own thoughts, feelings, plans, and points of view, such that the individual will have difficulty understanding the expectations of others and an inability to predict what others will say or do in social situations (Jason Wallin, Central Washington University).

Thus, vocational best practices and emerging evidence-based practices for individuals with ASD teach cognitive and behavioral coping techniques, social functioning skills, problem solving and compensatory aids for cognitive impairments (Eric Granholm, PhD, San Diego Health Care System). Collectively referred to as Behavioral Skills Training (BST), this approach involves the systematic application of prompts such as social stories, which are relatively short, straightforward descriptions of social situations that detail what an individual might expect from a given social situation and what may be expected of him or cues, such as visual supports that can be referred to in the moment to support decision-making. Research suggests that these practices can be used to improve employment training and support systems for this population (Lynn K. Koegel, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*).

While best practices in skill building are emerging, because of the diversity of ASD and the wide array of social skills and deficits even among those considered “high functioning”, there is no specific model that will work for all individuals. Successful programs will place emphasis on characteristics of both the individual and the work site and its staff. According to the California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on *Autism’s Task Force on Transitional Services and Supports*, a three-pronged approach is recommended:

1. Identify or solidify vocational passions and interests;
2. Assess for functionality; and
3. Assess job for fit – coach the client or the company if and as needed.

Throughout the employment period, the young person with ASD should work with family and support services to reassess interests and capabilities based on these experiences, and redefine goals as necessary.

Employment Options

Generally, employment services fall into three categories that vary in the amount of support they offer the worker: 1) competitive employment; 2) supported employment; and 3) secured or segregated employment.

Competitive Employment: A full-time or part-time job with market wages and responsibilities is considered competitive. Typically, the employee receives initial support to help him learn or continue to perform the job, but competitive employment does not provide long-term support. Competitive employment is most often associated with less impacted individuals, such as high-functioning young adults with ASD, but may be suitable for lower functioning individuals as a function of the task and the environment in which he will work.

Supported Employment: This category includes a full-time or part-time position in which individuals work in competitive jobs while receiving ongoing support services. The support is provided as long as the person holds the job, although the amount of supervision may be reduced over time as the person becomes able to do the job more independently.



Group Employment: In this employment model, trainees work on-site at a business with a full time job coach. The coach supports them in completing their job duties as well as working towards employment goals that will enable them to be hired in a supported employment position in the future.

Secured or Segregated Employment: In secured or segregated employment, individuals with disabilities work in a self-contained unit and are not integrated with other workers. This type of employment is generally supported by a combination of Federal and/or state funds. While such programs remain available, critics argue that the sheltered workshop system is more often geared toward the fostering of dependence within a tightly supervised, non-therapeutic environment than toward encouraging independence in the community at large.



EVALUATION ACTIVITIES AND METHODS



Evaluation Approach

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess program progress towards reaching stated goals as well as the impact of Autism Works services on participants, families and employers. To this end, the evaluation synthesizes a mix of qualitative and quantitative data and aligns findings with Autism Works goals. Further, this evaluation attempts to assess the implications of the Autism Works program learnings for Community Gatepath, as the organization seeks to continue services past the contract period.

Process Evaluation

To help contextualize the impact of the program, the evaluation documents the unique characteristics of Autism Works participants and the ongoing strengths and challenges related to implementing the program, staff composition and training, and services provided.

Outcome Evaluation

Program impact is evaluated based on available data regarding the provision of services throughout the contract year. Quantitative data from Gatepath's data system were analyzed to capture the provision of services to both participants and employers as well as the success of outreach and assessments in the school environment. These data were triangulated with information gathered through interviews, observations, focus groups, and surveys to determine the overall satisfaction of participant's families and employers, as well as school districts with Autism Works services. Anecdotal stories shared in the course of these activities are included to provide context.

Data Sources

Evaluation activities are aligned with the program implementation plan. The following data collection activities were conducted during the 2010-11 funding year; samples of tolls used in the course of this evaluation are included in Appendices A through C.

- 1. Employer and Participant Data:** Community Gatepath adopted the Salesforce Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software in February 2011 to capture employee and participant data. A hosted, web-based or "cloud" application, Salesforce enables Community Gatepath employees to input and access information both from Community Gatepath offices and remotely. This data includes participant referral date, the date and nature of each service received by participants, service hours, hire date, and case close date, as well as a series of case notes specific to each service encounter. Similar information is captured for prospective and current employers as relationships are developed and job opportunities identified. Prior to February 2011, Gatepath staff used Excel spreadsheets to track employer relations. Community Gatepath Autism Works provided access to their Salesforce data to Resource Development Associates (RDA), the third-party organization conducting the evaluation. The evaluation team used this data to answer questions related to participant retention, overall participation in



interview seminars, business partner contacts, and duration of service per participant. This evaluation is based on data between August 2010 and September 2011; September 23, 2011 is the last time data was pulled from the SalesForce system.

2. **Monthly Conversations with Autism Works Team:** The evaluation team conducted monthly conversations with the Autism Works Program Manager, Job Developer, Intake/Assessment Coordinator and Job Coach to discuss implementation activities, participant retention and progress, and program successes and challenges between August 2010 and September 23, 2011.
3. **Participant Observations:** An evaluation team member conducted two participant observations of 1.5 hours each in June 2011. The first observation took place at the Autism Works Interview Seminars, offering an opportunity to observe multiple participants and their interaction with AW staff and each other. The second observation took place at a work site, where the team member observed on-the-job performance and interaction between the participant and the AW Job Coach. Qualitative findings from these observations were used as a basis for developing the instruments used to conduct key informant interviews, focus groups and surveys as well as to contextualize other findings.
4. **Key Informant Interviews:** The evaluation team conducted seven key informant interviews in July 2011 to develop qualitative findings that inform and contextualize analyses of quantitative data, working with Autism Works staff to identify the potential pool of interviewees and to schedule the interviews. Interviews included:
 - a. Three interviews of 30-60 minutes were conducted in person with **participants and their families**. Interviews were conducted in person in order to accommodate the social communication needs of participants, and included questions about the participant's experience in the program, their attitudes about work, and their satisfaction with services.
 - b. Four 15-minute interviews were conducted via phone with **employers**. Questions focused on direct individual experience with the program, as well as program successes and opportunities for improvement. Questions were limited to accommodate a workplace environment that offers little time for phone or email communication.
5. **Staff Focus Group:** The evaluation team conducted a focus group with all Autism Works staff in July 2011. The focus group lasted approximately one hour, and focused on the type of support staff offer to participants, the training they received and their experience working with participants. The evaluation team also asked questions related to program successes and opportunities for improvement.
6. **Participant Focus Group:** The evaluation team also conducted a focus group with Autism Works participants in July 2011. The focus group lasted approximately one hour, and focused on participants' experience with program services and staff, as well as questions about work preparedness.
7. **Stakeholder Surveys:** Four unique surveys, administered in August 2011, constituted the final qualitative activity in the evaluation. All four surveys were administered online, and were designed to measure satisfaction with Autism Works services, as well as to provide a neutral opportunity for feedback. Participating stakeholders included:
 - a. Family/Caregiver(s) (18 administered; 11 collected);
 - b. Employers (5 administered; 5 collected);
 - c. School Administrators/Educators (11 administered; 5 collected); and
 - d. Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) Staff and Administrators (17 administered; 4 collected).



Limitations

- 1. Social capacity of the participants:** Interviews and focus groups with participants were essential to assessing the effectiveness of the Autism Works program model. However, data collection with individuals with a disability that is characterized by impairment of social functioning and communication proved challenging. Participants displayed a wide array of verbal functioning; some had significant difficulty staying on topic and following a conversation. To account for these difficulties, family members of participants attended key informant interviews with participants to elaborate on participants' experience and provide context. The participant focus group was conducted with the program's highest-functioning participants with facilitation support from Autism Works program staff.
- 2. The nature of competitive employment for the target population:** Most participants, lacking previous work experience, are being placed in entry-level jobs in fast food, retail and movie theaters. Managers in the target companies are expected to be "on the floor," actively working to meet customer and employee needs, and typically lack access to email or telephone during business hours. For the interviews, the evaluation team crafted a brief ten-minute interview to better meet their needs, but scheduling and conducting the interviews remained challenging. For the survey, employers were each called two times, at different times of day, and were given the opportunity to complete the survey over the phone with the assistance of a facilitator. Two of the respondents chose to complete the survey over the phone.
- 3. Reduced universe:** The stated goal of the Autism Works program was to place 20 young people with ASD over the course of the contract year. Thus the universe of available data is extremely small, making larger programmatic conclusions difficult.
- 4. Data limitations:** Every attempt has been made to represent Autism Works accurately. However, prior to the February 2011 migration to Salesforce, Gatepath staff used Excel spreadsheets to track employer relations. While major milestones such as intakes, notification of job availability and interviews were ported to the new system, records of every contact were not available prior to February 2011. Thus, variation in data, incomplete records, and participant attrition may have caused some elements to be over- or understated. The evaluation team worked closely with Autism Works staff to ensure appropriate documentation, reporting, and analysis of data.



PROCESS EVALUATION

This section of the evaluation examines Autism Works program inputs, including program structure, staff training, the outreach and client recruitment process, the stresses and circumstances of families at enrollment, and the array of services provided.

Program Overview

As described in the previous section, the ARRA-funded Autism Works program works directly with DOR to identify participants. In order for participants to receive a referral to the Autism Works program, they must:

1. Be 18-25 years of age;
2. Have an ASD diagnosis; and
3. Be enrolled as a current DOR consumer.



Services are offered to any participant meeting the above criteria who also has sufficient functional skills for competitive employment. Services include resume creation, interview seminars and job coaching designed to develop the necessary skills to gain and retain employment. In addition, Autism Works staff develop placement opportunities through direct outreach to local employers, and provide significant post-placement support to employers to ensure a smooth transition.

The Autism works team includes a set of functionally defined staff including a Program Manager, Intake/Assessment Coordinator, Job Developer and Job Coach. This team works together to provide a service model informed by current literature related to ASD and employment services for those living with the disability to achieve sustainable employment. It is a flexible, needs-based delivery model that depends on a high degree of team collaboration, providing both work and social skills development and individualized placement services for participants.

In addition, the program works directly with schools. The Intake/Assessment Coordinator has conducted assessments of school-aged youth with ASD and has developed a tool that can be used by educators to gauge an individual's readiness for post-graduation employment opportunities.

Program Resources

Are resources adequate to achieve program objectives?

Throughout the program, Gatepath has maintained the ability to adjust the program to address the needs of its participants, in no small part due to the nature of DOR funding. When it became obvious



that social functioning deficits would be effectively addressed in a group format, Autism Works staff developed an Interview Seminar to impart job readiness information while giving participants the opportunity to practice social skills. When a participant needs additional support to resolve challenges in a new placement, Autism Works retains the discretion to use the contract funding to provide an appropriate level of job coaching. In addition, resources were sufficient to exceed the number of hours of training required.

However, referrals and the level of client functioning proved a challenge to program implementation. Referrals from DOR were fewer than anticipated, as discussed below, and the DOR contract limited the services to be delivered to competitive employment. When assessments demonstrated that referred participants were not suitable for competitive employment, and would instead benefit from higher intensity services, Autism Works lacked the flexibility to deliver those services according to their contract. In these cases, Autism Works staff worked with DOR and Golden Gate Regional Center (GGRC) to refer those participants to other Gatepath programs, such as group employment, that better met their needs. While the services these participants received could not be counted against the Autism Works program goals, Gatepath ensured that the individuals received services that could move them to employment in the most appropriate and sustainable manner.

Implementation Timeline

Did the project roll out adhere to the anticipated timeline? How were challenges addressed?

While funding was not a barrier to implementation, the low number of participant referrals, particularly in the early stages of the program, created a challenge. The first referral made to the program occurred on August 3, 2010, five months after the contract period began. By January 1, 2011, DOR had made just five referrals to the program. While referral rates increased over the contract period, the initial dearth in referrals limited initial program implementation according to the projected timeline. Gatepath initially explored expanding program services to the neighboring San Francisco County, and reached out to DOR counselors in the San Francisco office. No referrals resulted from that outreach.

In addition, Gatepath faced delays in hiring staff. After a lengthy screening process eliminated a candidate from consideration, the current Program Manager was hired to lead the program in August 2010, five months after the start of the contract period. Additional hiring was delayed by efforts to come to consensus about the ideal team configuration. The Intake/Assessment Coordinator was hired in November 2010, and the program was fully staffed by February 1, 2011. These early-stage staffing challenges contributed to delays in implementation. Shortly thereafter, the Job Coach left the program in mid-April and the current Job Coach joined the team in May 2011.

Given the delay in receiving referrals, the program staff were able to overcome hiring delays to meet the needs of its participants. Gatepath also operates an Employment Services and Transitions program for adults with disabilities, which provided support to the Autism Works program in the time between the first referral and the onboarding of a full team. The first referral received an intake within a month of being referred, and the Intake/Assessment Coordinator was in place by the time the uptick in referrals occurred. Existing Employment Services Job Developers were able to initiate placement for the earliest referrals.



Staff Training and Experience

Are staff being trained?

Twenty-three staff will receive at least 20 training hours on securing and maintaining employment for people with autism.

Community Gatepath staff had received 22 trainings at the time of this report. The first 3-hour training session, in November 2011, was an introduction to autism, given during an in-service day by Pacific Autism Center for Education. The remaining trainings, developed by Integrated Behavioral Systems on subjects such as Assessment and Job Development, were delivered via webinar. Trainings were provided to all Autism Works staff, regardless of role on the team, in order to facilitate collaboration, as well as to Employment Services and Transitions program staff. Typically one-hour sessions, each training was offered twice in a group setting to accommodate staff schedules. In addition, each webinar was recorded so that employees who were unable to attend could review the material at another time.

While there were fluctuations in staff during the program year, the web-based trainings were attended by a total of 42 Community Gatepath staff; 7 from Autism Works, 21 from Employment Services and 9 from Transitions. The three main Autism Works staff members received 24 hours of training each. As of September 19, 2011, 574 total hours of staff training had been completed by relevant Gatepath staff.

Closely aligned to best practices, the trainings focus on methods for conducting accurate assessments, identifying suitable jobs, and providing effective coaching, with titles including: Understanding Autism in the Workplace; The Initial Interview; Workplace Supports (four segments); Job Development; Assessment; Social Communications (four segments); and The Career Portfolio.

In addition to helping staff to determine the best employment match for program participants, staff learned to use social stories and other non-verbal prompting methods and materials to help participants learn to interview and to work effectively in their new placements. Social communication is an area of struggle for many participants and the trainings provide guidance in working with participants to overcome this limitation. Staff members felt that the trainings helped them “to teach people to be self-sufficient when we are not there.”

This investment in training appears to yield results. Families uniformly stated that the staff were “knowledgeable” and succeeded in forming effective relationships with participants.

Referral and Intake

Are participants being referred and enrolled?

The first referral to Autism Works came from DOR on August 3, 2010. By January 1, 2011, five referrals had been made to the program. There was an average of 1.75 participants added to the program each month over the course of a twelve-month period. In October of 2010, there were no referrals made into the program. In March 2011, there were four referrals made – the greatest number over the course of the contract period.



Of the 21 referrals received prior to August 1, 2011, three were not appropriate candidates for competitive employment and did not remain in the program. At the same time, some family/caregiver(s) reported that the DOR had originally referred their children to other vocational programs, which were, as one family/caregiver stated “not intensive enough” and ultimately did not place their children in jobs. These family/caregiver(s) heard about Community Gatepath by word of mouth and requested a referral. This illustrates the difficulty of adequately assessing the level of social functioning of those with ASD, and the challenges involved in linking them with suitable support.

Program staff suspect that one reason for the low rate of referrals may be that, while there are many young adults with ASD who are suitable for competitive employment, these young people may not be on the DOR caseload; these individuals may be in college, may be limited from employment due to their Social Security Income/ Social Security Disability Income (SSI/SSDI), or may not consider the type of entry-level employment for which they are eligible to be an attractive option.

According to staff, family/caregiver(s) of many of the participants highly value academics and may not realize the degree to which their children need the social exposure that comes from entry level jobs in order to develop the “soft skills” necessary to retain employment in any kind of job. Stated one staff member, “A good portion of the caseload doesn’t need the money and doesn’t have the motivation” for the types of jobs that are available to them when they graduate from high school. Another responded that even if the job does not seem to offer the possibility of a career, “traveling by transit and being out in the community helps them gain confidence and grow socially,” which prepares them for future employment.

Program staff also found that the criteria for program participation are too narrow and that many potential participants may not be suitable for competitive employment. Expanding the eligibility criteria to participants over age twenty-five could lead to more referrals, as could creating a group employment component to accommodate a wider range of participants.

Service Provision

Have assessment tools been developed?

Are participants receiving assessment and job readiness services?



Conduct assessments, tailored to people with autism, of at least 45 young adults, ages 14-25.

Participants begin service with Autism Works through an initial referral from DOR. After the DOR counselor contacts the program, staff creates a record of the participant in Salesforce and contacts the family to schedule an intake. Program staff then meet the participant and their family/caregiver(s) at the initial intake meeting.

Referred participants receive both intake and assessment services from the Intake/Assessment



Coordinator prior to the initiation of placement activities. From there, the participant will have the option to attend Interview Seminars while Autism Works staff search for a placement. Job coaching begins immediately upon placement, and is delivered as needed for up to 90 days. Actual job coaching services varied by participant, some participants and/or employers refused job coaching, and the level of job coaching required was determined at the individual participant level.

Intake

The intake is a brief meeting, held at a Community Gatepath office and attended by both the participant and a family member or primary caregiver. The meeting orients participants to the program and sets the norms for a working relationship between family/caregiver(s), participants and program staff. During this meeting, the Intake/Assessment Coordinator also gathers general information that will assist in job placement, including job preferences and employment experience. Whenever possible, other Autism Works staff attend Intake meetings to begin to get to know the participant. Family and participants state that staff put them at ease during the intake meeting, “we walked in and I knew we were in the right place,” stated one parent, “they let him speak, and didn’t cut him off.”

Assessment

After the initial intake, the participant receives a social skills assessment in which the Intake/Assessment Coordinator and the participant meet alone, without the family/caregiver(s) present.

This meeting is usually conducted in a social setting such as a coffee shop, restaurant or college campus so that the Intake/Assessment Coordinator can assess the participant’s ability to cope with distractions and stimuli. The Intake/Assessment Coordinator uses a formal assessment tool to gather information about the participant’s motivation to work, knowledge of soft skills, long-term goals and interpersonal skills. Following the assessment, he prepares a report addressing the potential for matching the participant with a suitable job, and updates the participant’s Salesforce entry with information regarding his/her skills. The assessment report is then used internally as a benchmark for tracking progress in acquisition of social and job skills.

Staff found that creating an assessment that is brief enough for the participant yet informative enough for staff was a challenge. Staff stated that getting to know the participant as early as possible is vital to the job placement process. Understanding a participant’s strengths and limitations through direct observation and interaction assists the staff in making an appropriate placement. This practice is consistent with those considered best in the field.

Participants stated that the assessment was “cool and comfortable.” One said that having met the Intake/Assessment Coordinator before the assessment helped him “stay relaxed.”

“The participant’s mother said how happy she is with our interview group! The participant has never had success with social groups until ours – he loves it, his confidence is going up. She said that it is the best program she’s seen!”

– Intake/Assessment Coordinator, case note

In total, 22 participant assessments were conducted over the course of the contract period.

Interview Seminars

After the assessment, the participant is invited to attend interview seminars, weekly 1.5-hour meetings with Autism Works staff to help participants practice the social skills necessary for an interview and for work. Seminars typically have a theme that allows for interactive instruction and skill cultivation with direct



interaction between participants and program staff. In addition, each seminar offers the opportunity to practice social skills, as well as interviewing and working on resumes. The curriculum is informed by the “theory of mind”, a concept that asserts that people with ASD do not have a developed understanding that other people see the world differently than they do. The Interview Seminar provides the opportunity to teach participants what others might intuit.

As with the assessment, other program staff frequently attend the seminars. The Autism Works Job Developer found that this opportunity to observe the participants relating together in an interactive setting expanded her understanding of the participants’ strengths and deficits, and enabled her to identify more successful placements. This realization was confirmed after a participant who had refused to attend the seminars terminated a placement, “I didn’t see her deficits in a social setting, so I didn’t understand how they would impact her placement success.”

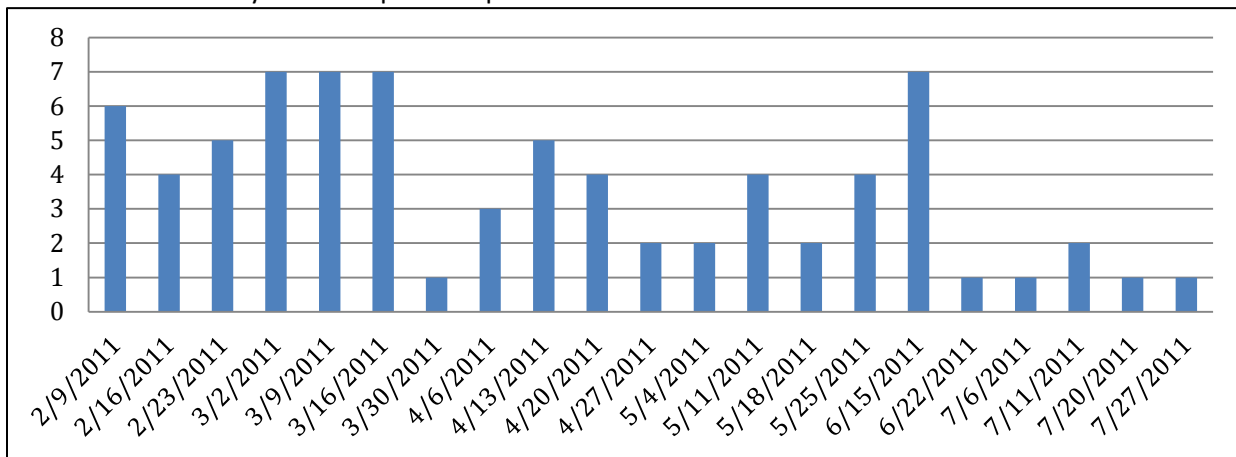


Figure 2: Interview Seminar Participation Count per Session

Beginning with the first interview seminar session, held on February 9, 2011, participation fluctuated between one and seven participants per session, as illustrated in Figure 2. This fluctuation is mainly due to the number of participants in active job search at any time, but may also be influenced by the optional nature of the activity, compounded by the hesitation around social situations that is common among those with ASD.

Ninety percent of family/caregiver(s) offered that the most significant benefit of the Community Gatepath-Autism Works Program is the interaction between program staff and participants; 70% reported that the most significant benefit is the interview seminar portion of the program.

Participants reported that they value learning how to dress, prepare for an interview and make eye contact with interviewers, in addition to practicing typical interview questions. One participant reported that seminars “made getting a job easier” and that “the training really helped me to do a good job at the

“We are having HR representatives come in and interview the Autism Works participants. I was hoping [your child] could come, because I think it would be good practice for [him/her]. I also wanted to talk to you or [your child] about the type of job [he/she] is looking for. We have not had good luck finding many positions in clothing stores and I wanted to talk about other possibilities. Please give me a call when you have an opportunity.”

Autism Works Staff/Parent correspondence



interview.” Another participant said that hearing from participants who already had jobs made him feel “very confident that people like me can get a job.”

The session began with an icebreaker game, “Have You Ever” in which participants gave each other high fives if they had ever engaged in a given social activity. After the icebreaker, participants introduced themselves to the group and told each other about the kinds of work they were interested in. That day, participants who had begun working came to speak about their experience. Program staff interviewed each working participant about their job. *What do you like about your job? What was your first day like? Do you like your boss and co-workers? What do you do when you have a question? How do you spend your paycheck?*

At the end of each interview, participants were encouraged to ask questions. Facilitators called on participants, and gently redirected the conversation when needed. Afterward, facilitators called on volunteers to participate in a mock interview in the center of the circle of chairs. Participants were shy and reluctant to volunteer for the role-play. Program staff gently coached and prompted role-playing applicants to tell employers about their strengths and interests.

-Notes from Interview Seminar Observation

Staff noted that Autism Works participants can be extremely isolated. Once they graduate from high school, there are few regular opportunities to engage in social interaction, and their disability serves to discourage placing themselves in situations where they may be more aware of their limitations. The interview seminar provides a safe place to practice social skills. Participants seem to concur, reporting that they enjoy the seminars: “Time flies, I have such a good time” stated one participant, another noted that they “get to meet up and get to know each other and socialize.”

One family member felt that her child could continue to benefit socially from the seminars after he had been placed in a job. She wished that the program would encourage her child to continue to attend the seminar. Soon after, Autism Works extended an invitation to those already placed in employment.

Job Placement

Throughout the placement period, the Job Developer works with participants to write their resume, apply for jobs and prepare for interviews, and accompanies participants on job interviews. Because the most appropriate

placement is typically an entry-level part-time job with a high-volume employer, the application process can be daunting for participants and support is crucial.

Applications are typically submitted online and require that the participant enter a resume and take a personality test. These applications can take an hour to complete and present challenges unique to those living with ASD. For instance, the personality test may ask four highly nuanced versions of the same question. For one participant, these may seem like the same question and they might skip some, for another, the questions might seem very different and the answers may be so varied that it affects the final score. Either of these instances can disqualify a candidate, and repeated low-scoring applications can result in a participant being banned from re-applying for a period of time. While applicants can request accommodations, such measures do not apply to the application itself, which must be submitted and scored for the candidate to move to an interview.

The intensive support required during the application process has caused some frustration for program staff. Because participants often do not know how to respond appropriately to job application



There was no manager on duty when “J” reported for his first day of work at the local movie theater. The Job Coach was at the theater waiting for him. J’s breathing was heavy and his face was flushed. The Job Coach showed him how to sign in on a temporary timecard, how to find the break room and where to leave his personal belongings.

The Job Coach found a manager on another floor who assigned J to a team. As each movie ended, the team entered the theater to clean it before the next show. The Job Coach stood in the hallway between the theaters, watching from a distance. After a few minutes, J found the Job Coach in the crowded, dimly-lit hallway. “I don’t know where they are,” said J. “Okay, let’s look at the schedule,” said the Job Coach, pulling his copy of the theater schedule from his pocket. He checked his watch and showed J the schedule. “It’s 1:45 right now, so the movie in Theater 9 is about to end. So you should be over there.”

J walked briskly in direction of Theater 9 to rejoin his group. Before J’s break, the Job Coach sat down with him on a bench outside the theater. He reminded J of the code to the break room and suggested that he write it on the back of his badge. The Job Coach showed J how to clock out, gave him some suggestions about where to find lunch and reviewed workplace policies so that J knew not to check his cell phone in the public areas of the theater.

-Notes from participant observation

questions and generally do not follow through on resume completion, staff may complete job applications on behalf of the participant, which can be time consuming.

To streamline the process, program staff have learned to look for job listings where there is a confirmed vacancy. Additionally, staff discussed the methods for encouraging participants to complete their own applications.

Family/caregiver(s) appreciate staff “doing the leg work” and making many calls to employers. Staff “showed my son in a positive light to employers,” stated one family member. Another parent shared that the program assisted her son in getting a job by accompanying him to his interview and helping him with difficult questions; “I would have been worried, but I knew someone was going to be there for him.”

One parent of a low functioning participant reported, “for [my child], the challenge is getting people to see his ability and getting past their initial first impression.” Although her son had not been placed in a job, she was still impressed by the program. Autism Works was “trying hard to get him a job” and “thinking outside the box about jobs.” Another family member reported being impressed with the speed with which her child was placed in a job, “they called him every day and investigated jobs and got him one in two or three weeks... You knew they were on it, and it was impressive,” she said.

In order to make a successful placement, staff says, “You have to figure out what the participant is capable of and what the employer may be

looking for.” So far, the program has successfully done both. One employer stated that they appreciated that program staff were thoughtful about their placement recommendations, “They are pretty clear if a candidate can make it here. They always send us an appropriate candidate.” Another employer said that participants are “good workers, we hire and keep them because they do really well. When the coach isn’t here, they still work hard.” Employers state that they have been satisfied with the participants placed in their worksites.



Job Coaching

Once the participant has been placed on the job, the Job Coach accompanies them to the job site, working intensely with the participant for the first few weeks of placement and maintaining regular communication with the employer to manage any problems as they arise. During the first week of employment, participants are provided full time support.

Beyond the first week, the level of workplace support varies by individual and by employment site. One employer, a fast food restaurant, will not allow a non-employee behind the counter. In this instance, staff provided limited coaching, visiting the job site after work and providing job coaching outside of the work environment. The Autism Works Job Coach tailors on-site coaching for each situation, but generally the Job Coach is there to explain and review job duties and suggest strategies for task completion and time management.

Throughout this period, the Job Developer maintains regular contact with the employer to identify any issues with the participant's work. Both the Job Coach and the Job Developer enter notes regarding their interactions into SalesForce, and the program team works collaboratively to address any challenges. In addition, the Autism Works team works closely with caregivers to support the participant's success, providing information regarding appropriate clothing, bringing a watch and lunch to work, and managing transportation. After three months of job coaching and successful job retention, the participant completes the program. Participants do not "graduate" from the program; Autism Works retains the flexibility to re-open a case after 90 days if the participant requires further coaching to keep their job or learn new job duties.

Participants report that the workplace is often busy and stressful, and they are often not sure who to ask when they have a question. One participant observed that now that she was participating in a social environment, she needed to learn how to manage anger and anxiety more effectively.

Staff report that some participants struggle with understanding and following the work schedule. "The actual job is not usually the issue, but the time management is," stated one member of the Autism Works team. Staff report that participants have missed days, arrived at the wrong time or taken lunch breaks that exceed the allowable timeframe out of a lack of understanding. In these cases, staff contact employers directly to explain the misunderstanding and work with participants to make sure they understand the schedule in the future.

"[The participant] asked if talking about a particular political issue with his coworkers would be appropriate. Participant stated that he/she has been getting to know his/her coworkers and at one point a female one who was leaving gave him/her a hug and informed me that it 'rocked.'

– Job Coach, case note

Use of social stories and visual supports are critical to participant's success. Some strategies have included pocket-size cheat sheets listing who to go to for help, stopwatches to help participants manage their break time and decision trees to help with day to day procedures. Often, the Autism Works team shares these supports with the participant's caregivers so they can be reviewed and practiced at home.

For a participant working in multiple departments at a large department store, managing disparate tasks and coworker interaction is challenging. For this participant, the Job Developer created a keychain that the participant can refer to for guidance to help him decide what to do and how to ask for help.



Participants are generally receptive and appreciative of job coaching. Participants said that the Job Coach is “someone to talk to and help you” and can “show you new things” and “is working with us to do the right things to keep the job.” While job coaching involves direct and repeated instruction, participants are receptive to the experience. One participant explained that the coach “doesn’t hound me.”

Staff report that three months is usually enough time for participants to learn their jobs. However, one participant who had been at his job for several months stated that he was fearful of learning additional job duties without the Job Coach. He wishes the Job Coach would be there to help him learn additional new job duties, especially duties involving multiple steps. Other participants stated that they wanted the Job Coach to help them learn new duties at work such as cash register and box office responsibilities that would allow them to advance. Another participant reported feeling “lonely without him.” Participants value visits from the Job Coach and perceive job coaching as a helpful activity to increase their vocational skills.

Employers new to the program reported initially being unsure about job coaching, “For me in the beginning it was a surprise. I didn’t understand the process.” But after experiencing the coaching directly, employers respond positively when asked to consider on-site job coaching. One hundred percent of employers indicated satisfaction with their communication with Community Gatepath and their communication with the Job Coach.

Employers reported that fellow employees were also unsure about how a Job Coach will fit in the workplace, “Associates are curious, they ask questions, they want to know how we are going to manage someone with disabilities.” However, staff reported that fellow employees are generally supportive and respectful. Once employers began work with the Job Coach, the employer reported that job coaching is “not a bother at all” and is in fact, “very helpful.” One employer reported that “the Job Coach is very, very good” while another observed “I see improvements because of the Job Coach.”

Program staff report that having multiple participants in a single work location facilitates coaching, allowing them to work with new participants intensely and check on more established participants throughout the day. Having a shared work site makes it easy for participants to ask questions and for managers to check in with the Job Coach.

One third of family members/caregiver(s) believe that more job training and more intensive on-the-job coaching would improve the Community Gatepath Autism Works program. This speaks to the value of on-site job coaching in long-term job retention.



Family Engagement

Have family members been engaged?

Family engagement is a critical element of the Autism Works model. In addition to including family members/caregiver(s) in the intake meeting, the Job Developer engages family members/caregiver(s) at multiple points in the process. When an interview is obtained for a participant, or when a new employer comes into the program, the Job Developer will call a participant's family members/caregiver(s) to ascertain level of interest in the nature of the work and the suitability of the workplace environment. According to the Job Developer, "I give parents a detailed breakdown of what the job is, the name of the manager, etc., so that the parents know exactly what their child is doing."

Upon placement and initiation of job coaching, the team will coordinate with family/caregiver(s) to resolve any workplace issues. According to the Autism Works Job Developer, "I work with parents to help troubleshoot and encourage them to work with participants at home to try and correct behavior. Parents work on reinforcing the positive behaviors and reinforce the skills needed on the job."

Staff and family/caregiver(s) said that that they worked well together. One case note entered by the Job Coach illustrates the impact of coaching. The case note reads: "Coached A. today. Worked all day in concessions and did well. Noticed he does not bring lunch nor eat lunch while at work. Will call his mom today." The communication with his mother ensured that A. learned to bring money or a packed lunch every day in order to keep up his energy and ability to focus during his 8-hour shift. In many instances, communication with family goes beyond traditional job success to address issues of social etiquette and self-care. Families stated that they appreciated how frequently Autism Works staff communicate with them. One parent said "They call him, which is perfect because he is an adult. Then they call me to let me know what they told him so that I can prepare him."

"Hi [Participant and Parent],

We are so excited for this opportunity and really want you to feel comfortable and confident! You're going to do GREAT! I know you spoke to the Assessment Coordinator already with the details, but here it is again so you're both prepared: Dress VERY nice - think of what you would wear to a wedding (dress pants, button down shirt, sports jacket/suit). Always better to be over dressed, than under dressed. Please bring 2-3 letters of reference on why you'd be a good fit for the position.

– Job Developer/Parent Correspondence

Despite positive family/caregiver engagement by Autism Works Staff, family/caregiver(s) were less enthusiastic about staff's success in "helping me to understand my child's vocational needs" (41% agreement with the statement), and to the statement, "Staff help me to understand my child's potential for job placement" (40% approval). This speaks to the need to more clearly articulate a participant's potential for vocational placement to family/caregiver(s), and is addressed further in the recommendations section of this report.

Yet overall, family members expressed satisfaction with Autism Works. Families appreciated the program staff's ability to develop relationships with participants. "They work with him, they call him, they got to know him and reach out to him and get him to like them so that he could relax and open



up,” said one family member. Another family member felt that the program had effectively reached her son, “[my child] is happy learning things and doesn’t stress out.” One parent said that the program has worked “as a step to widen his social world.” The program has been “helpful... we couldn’t have done it without them,” said another. One parent said, “This is the best program we have had since he was three... I want to thank them.”

Employer Relations

Have relationships been established with employers?

Establish partnerships with five new businesses that can hire at least ten employees annually.

Recruit three businesses for On the Job Training (OJT) agreements.

“Community Gatepath works well for the company I work for, it’s not really [a] heavily detail-oriented environment, so it is good for Gatepath employees. I could see it could be more stressful or difficult in other environments. I see why we are a good fit for them. I think they enjoy it. They seem like they are having a good time.”

– Employer respondent

The Community Gatepath Autism Works program initiated 3,279 individual outreach events, including emails, phone calls, interviews, and applications, to 458 unique business contacts over the contract period. These efforts resulted in securing hiring relationships with eight unique businesses for 16 participants. The number of individual contacts to businesses over the course of seven months is illustrated in Figure 3 below³. Of this group, 51 employers directly engaged with Autism Works participants in interviews, applications, or participant hiring.

These numbers demonstrate the intense level of effort required to develop a competitive employment placement for individuals with disabilities. But further, there is evidence of employer satisfaction in the successive placements among existing employers. Although the numbers are too low to be statistically significant, it appears that Gatepath has succeeded in building sustainable hiring relationships with local businesses that will continue to employ people with disabilities based on their positive experiences with their first hire.

Qualitative input supports this conclusion. Employers engaging with Autism Works were uniformly positive about the relationship. When surveyed, 100% of employers agreed that the Autism Works program “recommends good candidates for employment,” and indicated that they would hire another

³ While changes in staffing of the Job Developer role affected the employer outreach numbers, the Salesforce implementation also had a significant impact. Using Salesforce functionality, Gatepath was able to more effectively capture and monitor communication events, enabling more timely follow up.



Community Gatepath employee in the future, and would also recommend that other employers work with Community Gatepath for placement services.

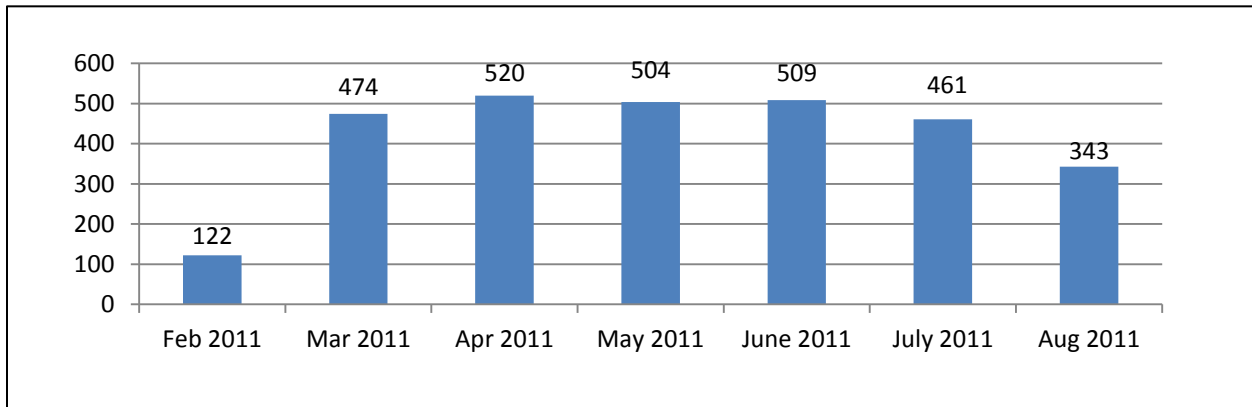


Figure 3: Number of Business Contacts Per Month – February 1, 2011 through August 30, 2011

Outreach to biotechnology companies was a specific goal of the DOR contract; however, success was limited by the low number of referrals qualified for this level of employment. Gatepath initially envisioned Autism Works as a means to establish rooted institutional vocational options for participants, but staff indicated that the majority of referred participants had no previous employment experience or little education beyond high school. This limitation necessitated reaching out almost exclusively to

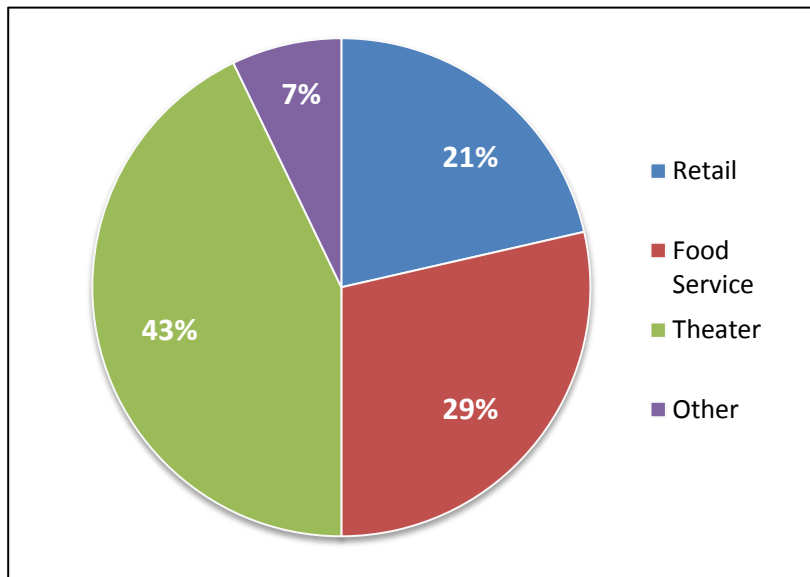


Figure 4: Proportion of Job Placement by Industry – August 1, 2011 through September 23, 2011

service-sector employers, as illustrated in Figure 4 to the left (n=14). One participant has been employed at Genentech, a biotechnology company, however this participant is working in the employee cafeteria. Staff see this initial inroad as a step towards establishing relationships with the company – and ultimately the industry – for future placements.

While the majority of employers do not know that participants have an ASD diagnosis, they do know that participants have a disability. “I am a big believer in giving people the opportunity to work,” stated one employer, a sentiment echoed by all employers who responded to the survey. This employer added that he feels good about offering job opportunities to people with disabilities.

While employers believed in the mission of the program, they also report positively on the program staff’s receptiveness to their need, and the program’s ability to place employees.



“I would like to see Autism Works carve out some jobs with different employers. Both of my clients are working part-time at a movie theater.”

– DOR respondent

Employers also valued the support and staff training that Job Coaches provide. In entry-level employment, high turnover is the norm. Employers become accustomed to tardiness and no-shows, and may quickly fire employees who do not meet job requirements in terms of time management. Regular contact with the Job Developer provides an avenue for resolution that they might not otherwise use “Once we

provide the information, the coach reinforces it to make things happen,” stated one employer. “He [the Job Coach] is great. He sticks around so that if I need to talk to an employee about something, he is there to explain it” said another employer. One employer stated that the program has led to “learning for both of us. Employees learn the new job and we learn how to make things clear for them.” Having Autism Works staff in the workplace supports employers in managing participants, teaching them how to supervise employees with disabilities.

Employers felt that the in-person communication with the Job Coach was very effective, “they come by and say ‘Hey, what’s up?’ and that works.” In general, employers stated that they enjoyed working with program staff, that they were “outgoing and very nice.” As one employer said, “we have a good relationship.”

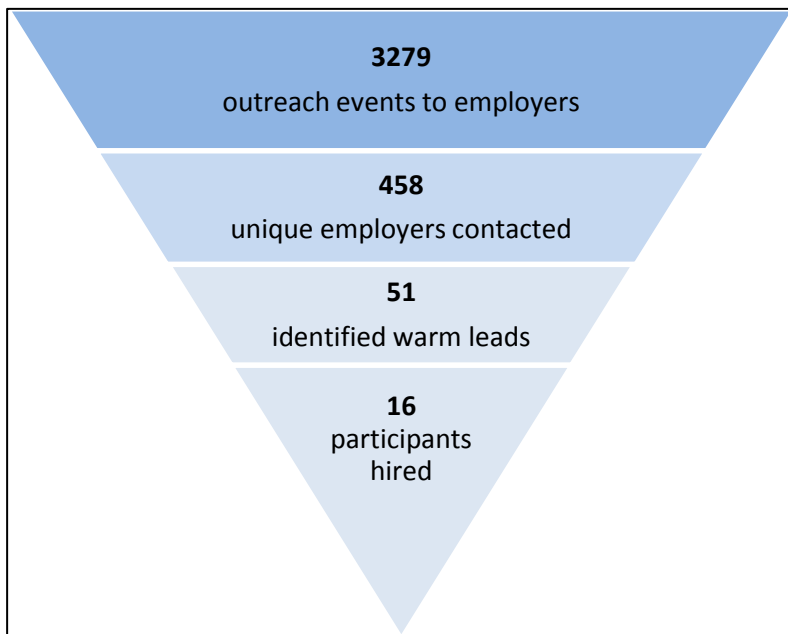


Figure 5: Relationship of Employer Outreach to Placement – August 1, 2011 through September 23, 2011

The Autism Works contract also included a goal related to the On the Job Training (OJT) program funds that were part of the ARRA funding released to DOR. Initially it was thought that DOR referrals could participate in this program, in which an employer is paid to train the referred employee. This program enables employers to hire people with disabilities who might need additional training into positions requiring highly specialized skills where the presence of a job coach would be inappropriate. However, these positions typically require previous work experience than was true of those referred by DOR. The Program Manager attempted to develop an OJT agreement with

the San Mateo Library system, but when the initiative met resistance due to Civil Service concerns, it was abandoned. Autism Works staff quickly realized that pursuit of this employment mechanism would compromise resources needed to place existing participants, and stopped pursuing this goal.



Relationship between Outreach and Placements

As described above, outreach was conducted to 458 unique employers over the course of the contract period. Outreach events included emails, phone calls, submission of applications, and participant interviews. In total, the Autism Works Job Developer conducted over 3,000 unique outreach events to over 458 unique employers, leading to 51 direct job opportunities. Sixteen participant placements resulted from this outreach effort during the time of this evaluation.

According to the Job Developer, no potential employers refused the request to hire Autism Works participants. The biggest barriers to employment were the capacities of the participants, and the seasonality and general availability of job openings. Although all employers said ‘yes’ to placement, many did not have job openings. For instance, movie theaters – which have proven to be a good fit for many participants – generally hire seasonally. In this case, the date of referral could affect the potential for placement.

The relationship between outreach effort and rate of participant job placement is illustrated in Figure 5, on the previous page. Although there is a relationship between months in which more businesses were contacted and months in which more participants were placed, it is not possible to demonstrate a causal linkage with the data available.

School-based Activities

Have relationships been established with school districts?

Conduct assessments, tailored to people with autism, of at least 45 young adults, ages 14-25.

The original scope of work for the Autism Works contract included a requirement that Gatepath establish relationships with school districts in order to conduct assessments to:

1. Determine whether the needs of 14-18 year olds differ from those of the older Transitional Age Youth (TAY) population; and
2. Develop a Job Preparation Opportunity Matrix (JPOM) that could be used by schools in order to better prepare students with ASD for employment.

Gatepath initially proposed these activities out of concern that schools and service providers are unprepared to handle the “tidal wave” of youth with ASD who will be moving into adulthood. According to California Department of Developmental Services (DDS), more than 4,000 teenagers with autism will reach adulthood by 2013, and by 2018 DDS will be serving more than 19,000 adults with ASD.

Relationships were established with two San Mateo County school districts, Sequoia and San Mateo Union. In addition, Autism Works program staff engaged with Stanbridge Academy, a K-12 independent school serving students with mild-to-moderate learning differences, and Cañada College, a junior college with a transition-to-adulthood program.

Autism Works staff had conducted 23 assessments with students when DOR informed staff that such assessments could not continue because the students were not enrolled as DOR consumers. However, Autism Works continued to develop the JPOM, which is discussed in the Outcome Evaluation section of the report.



OUTCOME EVALUATION

Purpose and Limitations

The purpose of this analysis is to compare program performance against the outcome measures set by DOR upon award of the Autism Works contract. This contract is based entirely on a proposal written by Community Gatepath as part of the ARRA Permanent Job Creation Initiative, which values maintaining employment gains equally with job creation. However, due to the urgency of the ARRA initiative in the context of the national economic crisis, the Request for Proposals (RFP) for this award did not provide details regarding the nature of the DOR case load or the requirements around enrollment. Thus, Gatepath proposed a set of activities and timeline that would prove more ambitious than the caseload could support. Where this circumstance affects achievement against goals, it is noted as background.

Additionally, results are usually not statistically significant due to limitations of the data available, but are provided nonetheless as a comparative context for the analysis.

Program Impact

The following section of the evaluation examines the impact Autism Works services have on their participants, and to a lesser degree, on the employers with whom they make placements. Findings are organized by the goals contained in the Autism Works contract and progress towards objectives documented based on the evaluation data sources. A table summarizing Autism Works' progress towards meeting objectives as defined in the Autism Works implementation plan is included at the end of this section.

Impact of Autism Works Services

Have Autism Works staff provided appropriate services to program participants?

The Community Gatepath Autism Works program aligns to the scope outlined in the contract; specifically to provide vocational services to a high-functioning ASD youth aged 18 to 25. The program is specifically tailored to find competitive employment for this population. Because of Community Gatepath's extensive experience with job placement services, the adjustment of the program to this specific population fits within the organization's institutional experience. In terms of the appropriateness of services, participants receive a high level of staff attention directly geared towards developing social skills and skills necessary for employment. Services received by each participant include a one-hour intake meeting, one-hour assessment interview, and 1.5 hours per week of job readiness training in the Interview Seminars. Staff accompany participants to each interview (if needed), and all participants are given one week of full time on-site job training, which ranges between 1.25 and nine hours per day depending on the nature of

"I visited *the participant* today and reviewed the visual aid (what to do when I need help). We talked of examples which were less serious and he/she could ask a co-worker for help. I'll add these to the visual aid. He/she seemed to understand when and why he/she should talk to her manager for the examples given... I asked *the participant* to go over the visual aid several times in the next few days and I would be calling next week to talk about it."

– Job Coach, case note



the job and the needs of the participant, for an average of 3.1 hours of job training per day, for one week, for each participant hired.

Beyond the above, participants receive tools developed by Autism Works staff that they can use while on the job to reinforce learning. Additionally, family/caregiver(s) of participants are contacted prior to an interview, and over the course of employment, in order to keep track of progress. Family/caregiver(s) are also engaged in the event of job issues, such as returning late from break, in order to enable participants to reinforce learning opportunities while at home.

Given the specific, and extremely diverse needs of the target population, appropriateness of service is challenging to determine. But among DOR staff and administrators surveyed, only 2 out of 4 (50%) respondents agreed with the statement "Community Gatepath's employment services meet the needs of my client(s)"; whereas, 100% of respondents indicated that the Autism Works program *does* meet the needs of their clients. Further, 100% of DOR respondents indicated satisfaction with the job placement outcomes of their clients working with the Community Gatepath Autism Works program.

Among family/caregiver(s), nine out of 11, or 82% indicated that their child(ren) are satisfied with the Autism Works program; the same proportion indicated that they would recommend the program to another family member/caregiver. Further, one third of family members/caregiver(s) believe that more job training and more intensive on-site job coaching would improve the Autism Works Program, indicating that these services are working well, but may have greater impact in higher dosage.

Have parents gained greater awareness of their children's vocational needs?

Family/caregiver(s) are engaged regularly over the course of the program to help support their children, reinforce learning and provide Autism Works staff with insight on their children's needs.

Family/caregiver(s) were asked directly about their understanding of their children's vocational needs and potential for job placement. Of family/caregiver(s) responding to the web-based survey, eighty-two percent (82%) offered that Community Gatepath staff is knowledgeable about the vocational options suited to ASD. Of this group, over half indicated that this is "very true" of staff. Yet, when responding to the statement "staff help me to understand my child's vocational needs," family/caregiver(s) were less enthusiastic; 59% agreed with the statement. To the statement, "Staff help me to understand my child's potential for job placement," there was 60% approval. This speaks to the need to more clearly articulate a participant's potential for vocational placement to family/caregiver(s).

There is some evidence of a disconnect between family/caregiver(s) expectations and hopes for their child and a child's actual readiness for work, which may affect family/caregiver perception of the value of entry-level work for their children. Staff observed that some family/caregiver(s) preferred that their children focus on academics rather than work. "A lot of it has to do with the expectations of the parents. Some don't value... an entry level job." In addition, Staff noted that family/caregiver(s) of children with ASD may protect and shelter their children more than they might without the disability, rather than pushing them to engage. One staff member noted, "Sometimes parents think that their children are too intelligent to do these types of things. So they wind up at home doing nothing." The Autism Works team went on to say that conveying the value of social engagement in an entry level environment to family/caregiver(s) can be a challenge.



Are participants being successfully placed in employment?

Over 80% of consumers will successfully retain employment for 90-plus days.

Figure 6 depicts the total number of DOR referrals made to the Community Gatepath Autism Works program per month, relative to the number of successful Autism Works job placements per month. The program averaged 1.1 placements per month over the course of the contract period, from March 1,

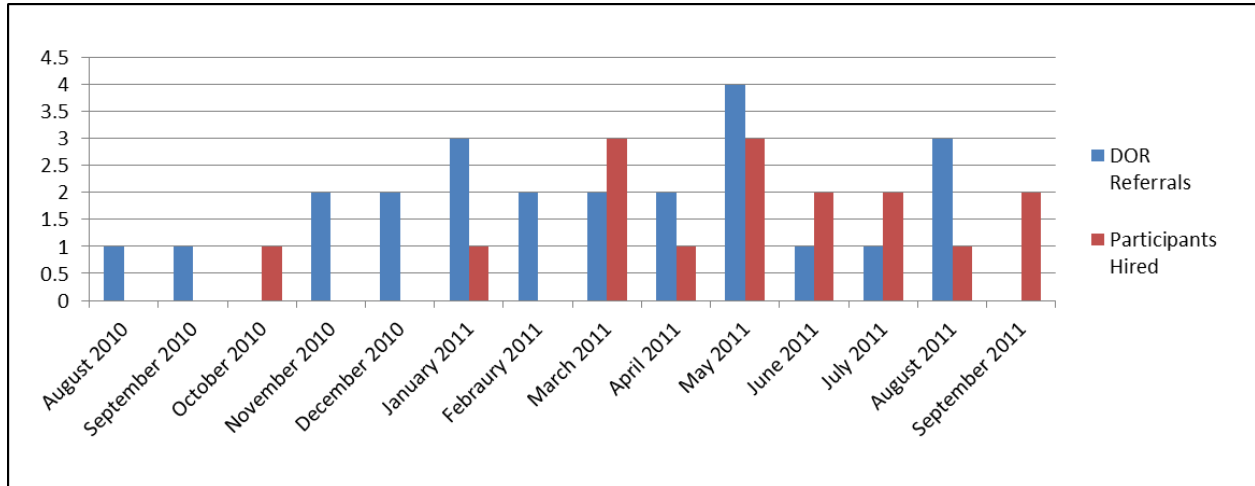


Figure 6: Autism Works Participant Retention over Time -- August 1, 2011 through September 23, 2011

2011 through September 30, 2011. As illustrated, Gatepath has consistently placed over 3 participants per month combined from Employment Services and Autism Works participants, all of whom are part of the DOR caseload. Gatepath presents all DOR participants to potential employers without distinguishing between programs; the Autism Works job developer works to match employers’ needs with the most qualified candidate available. The limited number of referrals specific to Autism Works combined with the skill sets of participants requires a level of flexibility in source of placement in order to ensure a sustainable relationship with the employer.

“As we talked about, you’ve had your job at McDonalds for over 3 months. That is wonderful and a great accomplishment! It is the first step towards your future beyond high school. The staff really enjoyed working with you and we wish you the best at your current job and in the future. Community Gatepath would be pleased to work with you again, if the need arises. Take care and congratulations again! “

– Program Manager, participant email

Although not all participants were placed in employment due to a number of factors, including unsuitability for traditional employment, many participants did find at least one job over the course of their participation. In total, 21 participants were referred to and assessed by the Autism Works program in the course of the contract period. Of this group:

- A total of 15 participants were placed in community jobs;
- Eight of the 15 have held their jobs for 90 days or longer resulting in case closure with DOR;
- Three participants are currently employed but have not yet reached the 90-day mark;
- Four of the participants hired are no longer



- working due to being laid off or because the job was not a good fit;
- Three participants were determined unsuitable for competitive employment; and
- Three participants are still in Job Development.

Among the participants hired through the program, the average length of time from DOR referral date to initial job placement was 97 days (with a maximum of 261 days, and a minimum of 26 days). Of those still awaiting placement, DOR is authorizing services to enable Gatepath staff to continue to search for positions for them beyond the contract.

Factoring out those referred but who were assessed and found not ready for employment, eight out of 18, or 44% of participants successfully retained employment for over 90 days. This outcome must be considered in the context of the number and type of referrals: the initial lag in referrals, the uptick in placements in line with referrals, and the higher rate of placement (in line with the volume of referrals) for DOR participants referred to Employment Services. While the number of long-term placements goal was not met, program performance in the second half of the contract period demonstrates a higher rate of successful placements over time.

Is there a correlation between family caregiver involvement and job placement?

While family/caregiver involvement is considered crucial to successful placement, and family/caregiver engagement is well documented in the program case notes as well as through qualitative evaluation activities, the data is inadequate to demonstrate a causal relationship between engagement and placement. However, Autism Works program staff do input case notes, that with a greater number of placements, would allow for a comparison between the number and type of contacts and the speed to and success of job placements.

Have schools adopted the JPOM?

“I am new to [the district] which means that I cannot ensure that I will fully implement the JPOM this year due to ‘learning the ropes’. But I do see the JPOM being a successful document to aid my pacing and focus as I deliver services this year.”

– Educator respondent

Gatepath initially proposed the development of the Job Preparation Outcome Matrix (JPOM) to create a tool that schools and service providers can use to understand the skills that individual students need to be ready for employment. It also provides a foundation for determining the potential employability of students, whether a student would be more suited to competitive or group employment, and whether independent living services should be sought. The tool is focused on assessing those who need employment immediately upon leaving the school system, most of whom will be seeking employment for the first time.



Delays in program implementation resulted in completion of the JPOM in the summer months, when schools are not in session. While participating schools – including two school districts, a junior college with an adult transition program, and an independent K-12 school serving children with low to moderate disabilities – provided input into the tool design, the tool has not yet been implemented. When

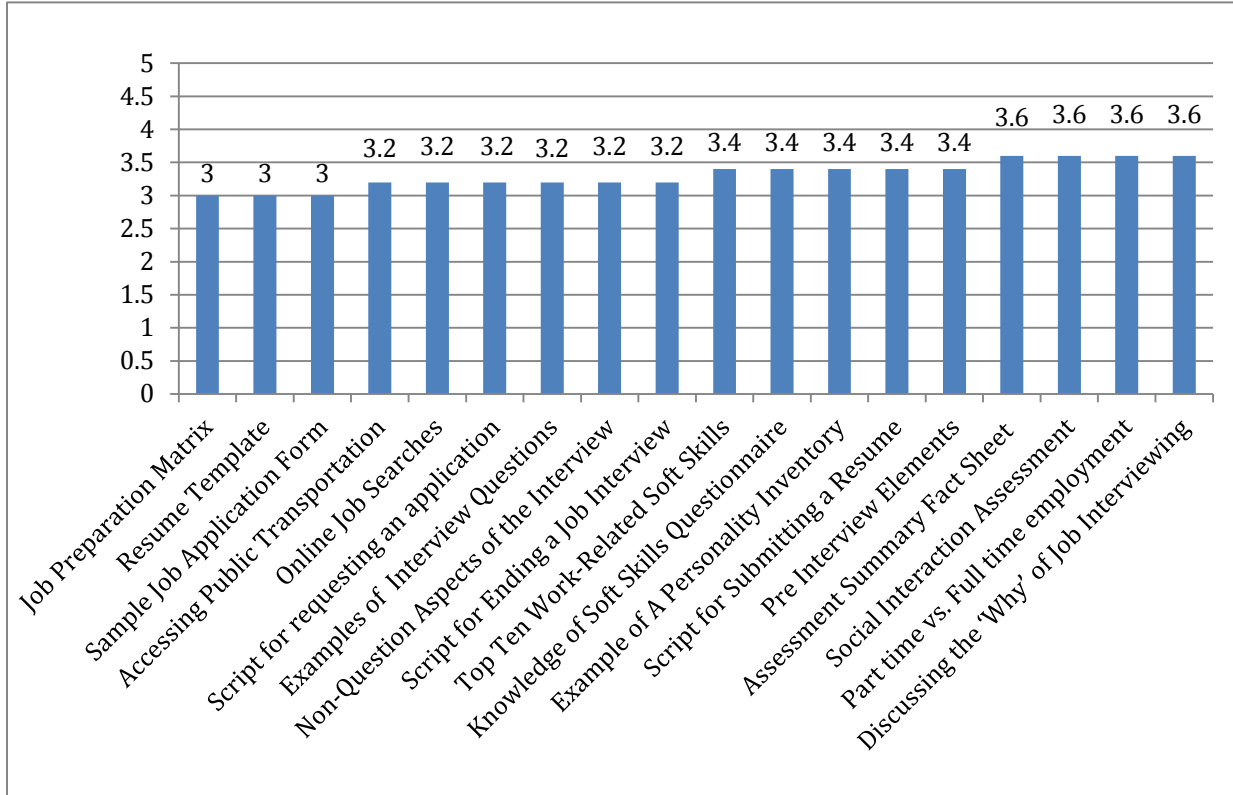


Figure 7: “How likely are you to use each of the following components of the JPOM”?

educators were asked if they were likely to use the JPOM in the coming school year two respondents indicated that it would be likely, one respondent indicated it would be somewhat likely, and one respondent offered that it would be somewhat unlikely. Because the JPOM is not yet in use, it is difficult to ascertain if this hesitation is the result of the tool or the result of a lack of flexibility in the classroom setting to do post-education job planning with students. Resource specialists are often eliminated when school budgets are cut, and schools are under tremendous pressure to focus on the state curriculum, which leaves little room for non-academic activities.

Survey respondents were also asked to rate the likelihood of use for each component, which is illustrated in Figure 7 above (n=5). While respondents indicated moderate to positive interest in all aspects of the JPOM, four components emerged in the top of the range: 1) The Assessment Summary Fact Sheet (which helps determine an appropriate work environment for an individual); 2) the Social Interaction Assessment; 3) the Part Time v. Full Time Employment measure; and 4) the “Why” of Job Interviewing. It is possible that the need expressed by educators for these particular components may be a starting point for broader use of the JPOM in the school setting.



Needs of the Target Population

How do the needs of 14-18 year olds differ from the older TAY population?

Through its work with school-age youth, Gatepath was able to compare the needs of the current population receiving employment services and those who will be entering the workforce in the coming years. Gatepath staff who conducted assessments with program participants also conducted assessments in the school setting, using a similar set of assessment criteria. While Gatepath found no significant difference in neurodiversity that might indicate a need for adjustments in services, it was observed that the participant population (18-25) provided more thorough responses to questions about knowledge of pre-employment factors such as how to search for a job, the components of a resume and how to apply and interview for a job, than did the student population. One potential explanation offered was that the younger group has not received vocational education. Gatepath staff believes that earlier exposure to vocational education, especially related to pre-employment, would be beneficial to students with ASD.

Progress in Achieving Outcomes

Placement of Referrals

Did the program receive at least 20 referrals?

Were they placed in adequate numbers?

Place 20 young adults with autism, ages 18-25, in community-based jobs.

Demonstrate sustainability of activities by achieving at least three job placements per month for three consecutive months.

Autism Works received 21 referrals over the course of the evaluation period. However, of those referred, 3 participants were determined not yet ready for competitive employment. Of the remaining 18 referrals, 15 participants were employed. This total of 15 participants placed out of 18 potentially eligible participants represents an 83% success rate.

At program start, it was expected that 75-80% of referred participants would be employable; therefore, given more referrals, it is likely that placements would reach the goal. Given the challenges presented by both the timing and makeup of referrals, this is a significant stride towards creating a sustainable program model.

In terms of placements, the Autism Works program averaged 1.2 placements per month over the course of the contract period. With an average referral rate of 1.6 per month, Autism Works demonstrates the ability to consistently place participants. Further, among Employment Services participants, 15 participants were successfully placed in employment between August 1, 2010 and September 30, 2011. In total, including both Autism Works and Employment Services participants, there were 30 successful placements made by Community Gatepath over the course of the contract period.



Stakeholder Satisfaction

Are participants and families satisfied with Autism Works Services?

At least 90% of consumers will express satisfaction with the services provided.

Nine out of the 11, or 82% of the family/caregiver(s) **who** responded to the question indicated that they are satisfied with their overall experience with Autism Works. Five out of the six, or 83% of the educators who responded to the question indicated satisfaction with their overall experience with Community Gatepath.

These results are impacted by the limited universe from which to draw the analysis, and do not reflect the overall positive feedback received throughout the qualitative activities conducted over the course of this evaluation.

Participants report high levels of satisfaction with the program in both the focus group and key informant interview settings. The program “helps me be able to work and feel like I am part of the adult world” said one participant. The biggest benefit to the program, participants report, is their jobs. Participants take personal responsibility to “make sure the fries taste good,” “that the theater is clean” and that they “help customers,” and express satisfaction with the experience of working. “Without this job, I would feel like nothing,” stated one participant, but with it, “I feel positive, optimistic, appreciated and liked.” Participants stated that having a job made them feel more confident.

Staff noted that after working for some time, participants become independent, confident, and visibly happy. “There is a huge advantage to getting these entry level jobs. They learn how to make friends, manage money and learn the social side of life. It gives them a lot of life skills and tools,” say staff members.

Participants sat in the Community Gatepath office to talk about their jobs. Participants told of busy days at the theater, exchanged notes about coworkers they enjoy, and rolled their eyes about strange customer requests. J, who had appeared panic-stricken on his first day of work two weeks earlier, now appeared nonchalant and confident as he boasted about his job duties to his fellow participants.

-Participant Focus Group notes

As has been discussed elsewhere, for many participants, a job creates an opportunity to be social that they do not get otherwise. Young people with ASD often “miss out on social development because they have been made fun of” in school, stated one staff member. Participation in Autism Works and in the workplace allows participants to interact and be social with other young people. Participants reported that they enjoy their coworkers and “being with other young people.”

Staff see the value as well: “Their life has improved because their circle has been expanded. Work puts these individuals in an environment where they learn a lot about social skills and they make progress.” Staff expressed the belief that the confidence and social skills that participants gain can be transferred to other areas of their lives.

Are employers satisfied with Autism Works Services?



All four employers (100%) who responded to the question indicate satisfaction with their overall experience with Autism Works, as well as with their communication with Autism Works and with the Job Coach specifically. Among employers, the satisfaction goal has been surpassed.

Has Community Gatepath become a leader in employment?

Has Community Gatepath developed a comprehensive, replicable model?

It seems clear that Community Gatepath is making strides towards defining themselves as a leader in placement services for those with an ASD diagnosis through the Autism Works program. Overcoming initial implementation challenges, Autism Works improved their program outcomes significantly beginning in January 2011, when the project became fully staffed. Program staff work collaboratively to place participants, and express confidence in the rapport they create with participants and employers. Further, Autism Works staff have expressed the desire to expand life skill and social groups programs, as well as family/caregiver education offerings, which speaks to their understanding of the participant's needs and their capacity to become a leader in ASD employment services.

As to the question of whether Autism Work is a replicable program model, there is insufficient data to make a determination. Autism Works follows best practices in configuring services and staffing and employer feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Significant strides have been made in terms of developing employer relations, determining how to effectively interact with family/caregiver(s), engaging participants while instilling social and professional skills, and ensuring participants receive tailored on-site job coaching. Feedback that can improve program outcomes without substantially changing the allocation of resources is quickly accommodated. For instance, the program added interview seminars when a need for that programmatic element was determined, and based on positive results, this portion of the curriculum is being institutionalized across Gatepath employment offerings, demonstrating both the effectiveness and the potential for replicating this component of the program. Additional elements, such as the creation of visual supports, social story tools, and the employment checklist, have been replicated across Gatepath employment programs and could be applied to programs serving new geographies.



FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In its year of operation, Autism Works has hired a team, implemented a set of services according to best practices, developed replicable tools and protocols for serving youth with ASD, established rapport with participants and their families and built placement relationships with over 50 San Mateo County employers. This evaluation demonstrates that Autism Works staff work effectively with a population that is growing, yet whose needs are still not adequately met or fully understood. As a result, young people with limited job prospects are working and employers are learning that people with disabilities can work successfully in their organizations. Evidence from staff and participants suggests that Autism Works is providing the supports and resources necessary to mitigate the risk factors that contribute to long-term unemployment among those with ASD.

Onboarding participants effectively and sensitively

Prior to being offered services, participants must first receive an intake and an assessment. By allowing a family member to attend the first meeting and maintaining staff consistency across both meetings, Autism Works has created a process that reduces anxiety among both family/caregiver(s) and participants.

Engendering participant satisfaction

While the family/caregiver survey did not achieve a 90% satisfaction rate, participants uniformly complimented Autism Works services for building their confidence through skill development and employment. Reports indicate that the support that staff provide during the early months of a placement give both participants and employers the support necessary to achieve sustainable employment.

- **Recommendation:** While participants report satisfaction, family/caregiver(s) do not share the same level of enthusiasm, or the same sense of connectedness to the process. Both the literature and program experience suggest that family/caregiver(s) of youth with ASD experience more anxiety about their child's day-to-day activities and about their future than other family/caregiver(s), and may have an inaccurate picture of the benefit of a successful entry level job in preparing their child for long-term employment. The institution of family/caregiver education seminars offers the opportunity to engage family/caregiver(s) and increase their understanding of their child's vocational needs without compromising a placement process that encourages independence for participants.

Reducing social isolation

Staff observe that many Autism Works participants lack social supports outside their family and struggle with isolation. Participants shared that aside from the interview seminars and ultimately, their workplace interactions, they have few outlets to socialize with their peers, and value these interactions highly.

- **Recommendation:** Continue to encourage participants to attend interview seminars, both during the job development period and after placement, and explore opportunities to bring participants and potentially other transitional age youth with ASD together socially.



Improving outcomes and achieving expertise over time

While the evaluation period was relatively brief and implementation was more extended than expected, Autism Works gained traction in making successful placements over the course of the contract period. One likely explanation for this improvement is that Autism Works staff are gaining skills and experience and improving in their roles. Another explanation is that there is a more established pipeline of potential employers. Both of these possible explanations reflect positively on the program.

Developing replicable tools to increase participant support

The literature on serving people with ASD confirms the importance of using prompts such as social stories and visual cues to compensate for individual deficits. Autism Works staff have developed a series of customized tools for participants that help them to navigate the workplace effectively. From checklists that outline the key policies and procedures for each employer, to key chains that serve as cheat sheets to determine who to ask for guidance, to pocket timers to help participants return from breaks on time, program staff have developed customized yet highly replicable tools that make a significant difference in helping participants overcome social deficits and achieve sustainable employment.

Building toward sustainability

Through collaborative program improvements and development of effective, replicable tools, Autism Works is building towards sustainability. Given Gatepath's intention to continue to serve the DOR caseload, which will continue to include those with ASD, as well as develop similar services on a fee-for-service basis, staff are likely to identify the components that enable replication across geographies and segments of the target population.

- **Recommendation:** There is a financial component to sustainability that is beyond the scope of this evaluation. As Gatepath explores other funding options, including fee-for-service, an analysis of the cost of services relative to placements will provide critical insight to long-term sustainability.

Demonstrating leadership in forecasting the need for future employment services

By making the JPOM available on its website, Gatepath is demonstrating its position as a leader in serving moderate- to high-functioning youth with ASD. Even if the current school climate does not allow for widespread use of the instrument, it has value to other service providers, and potentially to family/caregiver(s) as well, as a tool for determining an individual's service needs. Further, if a feedback loop can be created such that those who use the JPOM to assess employment readiness provide results back to Gatepath, the JPOM may prove to be a highly effective tool for identifying development areas and future employment needs for ASD youth.

- **Recommendation:** Continue to build support for and expand use of the JPOM. Analyze usage to determine whether the JPOM can be abbreviated and still remain effective for use in the school setting.

Collaboratively supporting participants and placements

The Autism Works staff observed early on that regular, brief in-person encounters with participants enabled better placements, and actively work to schedule intakes and assessments when colleagues can attend. The Job Developer attends weekly interview seminars, which serve as a highly efficient



opportunity to observe multiple participants and gauge the social functioning that is so critical to successful placement. Further, once a placement has occurred, the Job Developer and the Job Coach maintain contact about workplace developments, and work collaboratively to develop both the action plans and tools such as visual supports and social stories that cue participants about what is expected in the workplace. This collaboration is very likely a critical component of program success.

Building support among employers for hiring people with disabilities

Employers are not informed of the nature of a hiree's disability. In addition, they are accustomed to a lack of follow-through and "flakiness" from employees in these entry-level positions. Through the intense support provided in the early weeks of employment, Autism Works staff frequently resolves conflicts before they lead to termination. Employers uniformly report that they would hire program participants in the future, and some even state that they have a new appreciation for hiring people with disabilities. In this way, Autism Works is making a tangible and lasting impact on the potential for people with all kinds of disabilities to sustain employment.

Collecting data efficiently for program improvement

Community Gatepath implemented SalesForce in the Autism Works program in February 2011 out of a need to more effectively track employer contacts and progress. Previously, staff had used Excel tables, which proved inefficient for the purposes of planning ongoing contact with employers. In addition, this method limited the opportunities for collaboration and for effectively accessing data for the purposes of ongoing monitoring and goal-setting. The SalesForce tool is exceptionally easy to access, in terms of entering and sharing data, and encourages real-time collaboration across the program team, which seems to result in more effective services. By being able to access data on a just-in-time basis, Gatepath created capacity to actively monitor performance and measure results for the purposes of ongoing program improvement.

Maintaining Focus on Participant Needs

Autism Works represents an ambitious program whose objective is to make a measurable difference in employment and retention of youth with ASD, as well as to develop businesses who can make a long-term commitment to hiring multiple program participants. The ARRA funding source combined with the emerging research on serving this population created program goals, such as the OJT requirement, that stood in direct conflict with the placement needs of referred DOR participants. Gatepath made a clear decision to place the needs of its participants above its own performance evaluation, opting to miss the OJT goal. This demonstrates an understanding of the decisions that lead to longterm program sustainability.

Influencing DOR policy in serving youth with ASD

Throughout the program, Autism Works staff documented assessments and placement activities. Staff found that some DOR referrals were not prepared for competitive employment, but may have succeeded with the support offered by group employment (which Gatepath also has the capacity to provide). By providing this feedback to DOR, Autism Works may be helping to expand program criteria and may increase program participation.

- **Recommendation:** The survey conducted with DOR staff, in combination with the results of assessments and placements, indicates a potential disconnect between the case workers' expectations for the referred participant and the role played by ASD in limiting employment. To the degree that Gatepath can educate DOR staff regarding their observations about



referrals, they may be able to positively impact both the number and appropriateness of referrals as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of employment placements for their caseload.



The following table summarizes Autism Works progress towards achieving program objectives, as outlined in the DOR scope of services.

	Achieved	Not Achieved
1. By 08/31/2011, 23 staff will receive at least 20 training hours on securing and maintaining employment for people with autism.	X	
2. By 06/30/2011, establish partnerships with three schools districts to utilize job preparation outcomes matrix in order to better prepare students for employment.	X ⁴	
3. By 09/30/2011, conduct assessments, tailored to people with autism, of at least 45 young adults, ages 14-25. (SF)	X	
4. By 03/31/2011, establish partnerships with five new businesses (targeting the biotech industry and companies that can hire at least 10 employees annually). (SF)	X	
5. By 09/30/2011, recruit three businesses for on-the-job training agreements. (SF)		X
6. By 09/30/2011, place 20 young adults with autism, ages 18-25, in community-based jobs. (SF)		X
7. By 09/30/2011, demonstrate sustainability of activities by achieving at least three job placements per month for three consecutive months ⁵ .		X
8. Over 80% of consumers will successfully retain employment for 90+ days. (SF)		X
9. At least 90% of consumers will express satisfaction with services provided.	X	

Figure 8: Summary of Objectives Achieved

SF: Based on Salesforce Data.

⁴ Autism Works established relationships with 2 school districts and 2 independent schools that have committed to using the JPOM.

⁵ Gatepath has placed over 3 participants per month on average combined from Employment Services and Autism Works participants, all of whom are part of the DOR caseload. Gatepath presents all DOR participants to potential employers without distinguishing between programs; staff work to match employers' needs with the most qualified candidate.



APPENDIX A: EXAMPLE SITE OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

**COMMUNITY GATEPATH
AUTISM WORKS PROGRAM EVALUATION
JOB COACH OBSERVATION FORM**

DATE: _____ LENGTH OF VISIT: _____

Evaluation Team Member conducting the visit: _____

1. Where did the visit take place?

2. How long has Participant been employed at this site? ____ weeks

3. How long has the Participant been enrolled in the Autism Works program? _____ weeks

4. Were others (employer, colleagues) present during the visit? Yes No

Explain: _____

5. Which of the following did the job coach work on with the Participant?

	Time management
	Taking direction
	Task completion
	General social interaction/interpersonal skills colleagues/public
	Asking for help/guidance



	Managing conflict with colleagues
	Managing conflict with the public
	Appropriate work behavior
	Other (describe)

6. Which of the following did the job coach work on with the Employer or the Participant's colleagues?

	Giving precise direction regarding task requirements
	Giving direction regarding time management and/or deadlines
	Managing conflict with colleagues
	Managing conflict with the public
	Managing shyness/hesitancy on the part of Participant
	Assisting in resolving specific work challenges
	Adjusting communication/body language expectations
	Providing regular feedback
	Setting expectations with other employees
	Setting general expectations with Participant
	Other (describe)



7. If the Job Coach reviewed job responsibilities or discussed goals with Participant, rate the extent to which the Participant was involved with identifying next steps or solutions?

- Participant was greatly involved in discussion
- Participant was somewhat involved in discussion
- Participant was only slightly involved; Job Coach directed most of discussion
- Job Coach directed discussion and identified strengths, needs and goals without Participant input

8. If the Job Coach discussed job responsibilities or other job-related topics with the Participant and the Employer, rate the extent to which the Employer was involved with identifying next steps or solutions?

- Employer was greatly involved in discussion
- Employer was somewhat involved in discussion
- Employer was only slightly involved; Job Coach directed most of discussion
- Job Coach directed discussion and identified strengths, needs and goals without Employer input

9. Was information presented in a way that Participant understood? Yes No

10. Did Participant exhibit difficulty understanding what Job Coach was saying? Yes No

Explain: _____

11. How would you characterize the interaction between Job Coach and Participant? Describe how Job Coach used positive methods to build trust and assist Participant:



12. Which of the following describes the style of the Job Coach during this visit?

	Job Coach Qualities	Comments
	Organized	
	Not organized	
	On time	
	Not on time	
	Supportive	
	Critical	
	Warm	
	Understanding	
	Rude	
	Informed	
	Rigid	
	Calm	
	Respectful	
	Good listener	
	Overly directive or pushy	
	Encouraged Participant to do things for him/herself	
	Culturally and linguistically met client's needs	
	Problems with match of culture or language with client's needs	

13. Did Job Coach leave tools or written materials with Participant? Yes No

Describe: _____

Additional Comments:



APPENDIX B: EXAMPLE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

COMMUNITY GATEPATH AUTISM WORKS PROGRAM EVALUATION EMPLOYER INTERVIEW

Community Gatepath provides staffing services to employers. Community Gatepath recently received a grant to study their ongoing staffing services. They want to know how employers think they are doing and what they could do better. Today I am calling to learn how the program is working for you as an employer. Your response is confidential.

1. How did you hear about Community Gatepath Employment Services?
2. Why did you choose to participate in the Community Gatepath?
 - What are the benefits of working with employees with disabilities through Community Gatepath?
3. What are the challenges of supervising and working with Employment Services participants?
4. Has having an Employment Services participant changed the work environment in anyway? How so?
5. Has your thoughts about hiring people with disabilities changed since participating in the program? How so?
6. Do you think that Community Gatepath understands your needs as a manager? Why or why not?
7. What has it been like working with the program?
 - Was AW staff able to meet your needs on the job site?
 - Has having a job coach had an impact on the work environment? How so?
 - How does the job coach assess employees?
8. How has communication with job coach or job development been?
 - Do you feel like you have had enough contact?
 - Could the program communicate with you differently? How so?
9. Overall, how satisfied are you with the program? (1-10) 8.
10. What do you like best about the program?
11. What recommendations do you have for how it could be improved?
Not really.



12. Do you have any other feedback or comments that you would like to share?



APPENDIX C: EXAMPLE FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

AUTISM WORKS PROGRAM EVALUATION

STAFF MEMBER FOCUS GROUP

Thank you for participating. We would like to know about your experience with Autism Works. This will help us to create an evaluation that will help our understanding of employment services for young people with autism. Everything you say is confidential, your name or identifying information will not be included in any reports. We ask that you be as honest as possible in your responses. Does anyone have any questions before we start? We do not have much time and a lot to cover. I would like to start with introductions.

OPENING

1. Could we go in a circle and have each of you tell us your name, what you do for Autism Works and a few sentences about what it has been like working with young people with autism?
2. What have been easiest aspects of your job?
3. What have been the most challenging aspects of your job and how did you address those challenges?

TRAINING

4. What kind of training has helped you to work with this population?
 - How well did the training prepare you for working with clients who have ASD?
 - What were the top 1 to 3 takeaways that you learned from the trainings?
 - What other trainings would help you to work with this population?

DOR AND REFERRALS

5. What has the relationship with DOR been like so far?
 - How has the DOR referral process been?
 - Do you think that referrals could be handled in a different way?

INTAKE

6. How effective is the intake process?
 - How does the intake prepare participants and staff to work together?

ASSESSMENT

7. How effective is the assessment process?
 - How does the assessment prepare for job placement?
 - How does it compare to other assessments within Community Gatepath?

PLACEMENT

8. What have been your biggest successes in placing program participants in jobs?



- What have been the biggest challenges or barriers?
- Knowing what you know now, are there things that you would do differently?

RETENTION

9. What are the challenges of keeping participants in their jobs?
 - Why do participants lose jobs?
 - What has helped participants to keep jobs?
 - What kinds of job coaching have worked so far?

EMPLOYERS RELATIONSHIP

10. What strategies have worked to build relationships with employers? Can you give some examples of successes?
 - What have been some of the barriers to establishing successful relationships?
 - How have you addressed those barriers?
 - How well do you think the program understands employer's needs?
 - Do you think that the program helps employers to understand the needs of employees with ASD? How so?

PARENTS

11. To what extent do you think parents understand their child's vocational needs?
12. How has the program benefited parents and families?

OTHER

13. How has the program most greatly benefited participants?
14. How has the program benefited Community Gatepath as an organization?
15. How could the program be improved?
 - If you were to do this all over again, what would you do differently?