**Title:** Manualized SUCCESS Vocational Intervention and Broader Life Impacts on Autistic Transition Age Youth

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**Introduction:** Prevalence rates of autism have increased significantly every year since 1994, showing the need for support to be higher than ever. Rates among autistic children increased by 30% from 2018 to 2020 according to the U.S Center for Disease Control’s Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network (Center for Disease Control, 2024). It is imperative that autistic TAY be supported to enhance the existing disparity in post-secondary outcomes. Research data shows poor postsecondary employment and education outcomes, especially within the first 2 years after high school (Shattuck et al., 2012). Vocational training supports such as job training, social skills development, as well as communication and emotional skills provide enhanced outcomes for competitive employment as opposed to autistic TAY who do not receive these supports (Kaya et al., 2016). Supported, Comprehensive Cognitive Enhancement, and Social Skills (SUCCESS) curriculum is a manualized vocational soft skills training curriculum designed to support autistic transition aged youth in their journey into adulthood2 (Baker-Ericzén, et al., 2018). This study is an initial, open trial of the SUCCESS curriculum embedded into a vocational training program within a community setting.

**Methods:** The SUCCESS curriculum was administered to 21 autistic TAY in conjunction with a vocational training program located in San Diego County. Participants attended two, 90-minute instructional sessions per week. The program is facilitated using didactic, experiential, cooperative, and kinesthetic learning methods. Skills developed through this curriculum aim to enhance social, cognitive, behavioral, and self-determination skills (often referred to as “soft skills”). Pre and post self-report measures examining functioning and mental health factors were included to examine the broader impacts of the vocational soft skills training. Measures were: General Self Efficacy (GSE), Adaptive Functioning Scale, Patient Health Questionnaire for Depression (PHQ) and General Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7). Participants' ages range from 18-27 (*M*= 21), male= 18, female= 1, Nonbinary/Other= 2. 85.71% identified as white, 42.86% unknown/ not reported, 33.33% Hispanic/ Latino, 9.52% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 14.29% as Asian, and 4.76% African American. 20 Participants identified as living with parents or guardians.

**Results:** Paired sample T-tests were utilized to compare pre and post-intervention scores and effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d. Initial improvements in the adaptive functioning scale, general self-efficacy, and mental health from pre-to-post SUCCESS intervention was found. Specific items within the Adaptive functioning scale such as “*I woke up on my own with an alarm*” (p = .082, d = -.525), “*I scheduled activities or appointments by myself without reminders from others*”(p = .235, d = -.347), and “*I requested time off or informed my supervisor when I would miss or be late to work without reminders from others*” (p = .391, d = -.247) had small to medium effect sizes for overall totals, although were not significant. Participants’ self-reported overall scores on General Self-Efficacy Strategies did not differ significantly from baseline to post SUCCESS intervention, although there was a small effect size improvement for the overall total score (p = .415, d = - 0.210). Personal Health Questionnaire data showed a medium effect size of a decrease in Depressive symptoms (p = .109, d = .426) as well as decreased Anxiety symptoms (p = .245, d = .487). Improvements such as these can lead to gainful and fulfilling employment, independent living, and the ability to manage stressful events. Efficacy of this intervention shows preliminary extended impacts on autistic TAY.

**Discussion:** This study provides evidence that SUCCESS vocational soft skills intervention may positively impact broader areas of life for autistic transition aged youth. Vocational soft skills can improve vocational outcomes, and also adaptive functioning necessary for independent living, self-efficacy and emotional well-being. Future research should continue to examine both immediate outcomes and more distal outcomes related to independence and emotional well-being in larger community samples of autistic TAY to solidify these findings.

**References:**

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