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## GUIDE TO EMPLOYMENT FOR TEENS AND ADULTS WITH AUTISM IN B.C.

*Contributed by Louise Broadley, Manager of Autism Information Services,  
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*This guide provides teens and adults with autism, and their families, with details of British Columbia's (B.C.) employment services, both public and privately funded. In addition, there is information on other important services and benefits that young people and their families should know about. In the process of using this guide, it will become evident that there is no clear process as yet to support those with special needs to find employment. While progress is being made, it remains a fragmented system.*

*ACT's goal in compiling this guide is to provide families and adults with ASD with an overview of what is involved. We also hope that members of the autism community will draw the attention of policy makers to the need to enhance services and improve service provider accountability. This is essential to ensure youth and adults with autism have access to employment opportunities that are a good fit for their interests, skills and abilities.*

For the sake of brevity, and to avoid initials, this guide will use autism instead of the term Autism Spectrum Disorder.

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*While there is extensive information in this guide about employment services in B.C., not everything is relevant to every young person with autism; they are very diverse in their needs, interests and abilities. Most of the services described are relevant to a wide range of individuals with developmental disabilities and those without.*

*Each section of this guide outlines a developmental age when a young person would be expected to prepare for employment; however, the age guidelines are flexible. Many young people with autism continue to make significant progress well into their twenties, thirties and beyond. If individuals were not ready for employment in their teens or could not access appropriate support, they and their families should not give up hope.*

*ACT has a team of Information Officers who are available for individualized support. We welcome telephone calls and emails from across B.C. — we are a provincial resource. We do our best to support any query relevant to special needs in general.*

*ACT welcomes suggestions to improve this guide and to hear more from individuals with ASD and their families about their experiences with the search for employment. Please email [info@actcommunity.ca](mailto:info@actcommunity.ca).*



Autism  
Information  
Database

***“Like Google for Autism but Better!”***

**Throughout this guide you will see the Search the AID logo that will connect to employment-related resources: [www.actcommunity.ca/aid-search/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/aid-search/)**

ACT’s Autism Information Database (AID) has over 2000 autism-related information and community resources. It is easy to search using keywords and postal codes, which saves time in finding B.C. resources. There are links to excellent international websites on a wide range of topics relevant to youth and adults with ASD and their families, which community professionals may also find helpful.

ACT’s staff has reviewed each of the 2,000 resources we have included — our focus is on providing practical, useful resources that empower families and communities. Please send your suggestions for the AID to [www.actcommunity.ca/submit-resource/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/submit-resource/)

“We couldn’t be happier that Sean now has steady employment. His life has improved, and he enjoys being a member of a team with his co-workers.”

Catherine

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYMENT FOR COMMUNITY INCLUSION

For most Canadians, having a job gives life a much greater meaning. Without one, we lack an income sufficient to participate fully in our communities and we are much more likely to be socially isolated. This reality is shared by adults with autism — access to meaningful employment is key to community inclusion.

Today’s young adult with autism has grown up in a more inclusive world, attending school alongside classmates with and without disabilities, as well as participating in community programs and activities. Most have expectations similar to those of their peers: to find meaningful work and a partner. In spite of this, the majority of adults with autism are significantly under- or unemployed and too frequently remain isolated in the family home. This puts great stress on parents who are often very concerned with whether the young person will have a secure income to ensure their future wellbeing.

While the majority of adults with autism are very able (if academic potential alone is considered), finding a job is a great challenge; especially difficult is the job search itself. Yet when the right job is found, employers recognize the tremendous dedication that adults with autism bring to their work.

## B.C.’S EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM – AN OVERVIEW

### WorkBC

In 2012, employment services for all British Columbians seeking employment underwent a significant shift. The government greatly reduced the number of contracted agencies by creating a centralized network of WorkBC Employment Service Centres. Each WorkBC site functions independently but they are all required to provide services to those with disabilities, including autism. However, individual sites may or may not have experience or expertise in supporting adults with autism and other neurodevelopmental disabilities.

The issue of experience and training is very important as adults with autism are very complex. Professionals without specialized skill sets frequently misunderstand the needs of adults with autism. Families, who often have endured years of frustration at the lack of knowledge in the school system, are easily exasperated when they experience this in the realm of employment. ACT advises that when approaching a service provider, questions should

be asked about who on staff has training and experience in working with individuals with autism, prior to signing a contract.

Understanding what is available is further complicated for those with disabilities and their families because the information provided by WorkBC sites provides few specifics on how their employment process works for people with developmental disabilities and/or autism. It is also difficult to determine how effective various sites have been in providing services for those with autism. To date, WorkBC sites have not published employment statistics for clients with disabilities.

For details on how to access WorkBC services, see page 15.

## Community Living British Columbia

Community Living British Columbia (CLBC) is responsible for providing services and supports for more than 16,000 adults with a developmental disability, autism and/or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). CLBC is a Crown Corporation, funded through the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation.

Most of the adults funded through CLBC receive services from community living organizations, not-for-profit societies that traditionally offered specialized adult day programs and other community-based activities for individuals with autism who also have a developmental disability. CLBC has replaced the “adult day program” model and now requires community living organizations to find jobs for their clients in private and public workplaces to foster community inclusion. For details of CLBC funded employment programs, including the Community Action Employment Plan and the B.C. Partners in Workforce Innovation Pilot Project, see pages 16-18.

Although CLBC services do not begin until age 19, families are encouraged to apply when their child turns 16 to see whether or not they are eligible. See “Appendix A – Applying for CLBC Services” on page 25 for details on eligibility and the application process.

## Federally-Funded Initiatives

There are two federally funded employment initiatives that began in 2014/2015 targeting people with developmental disabilities and/or autism. See page 18 for more details on Ready, Willing, Able and CommunityWorks.

**CLBC**

604-664-0101 or  
toll-free 1-877-660-2522



COMMUNITY LIVING  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

## PREPARING FOR EMPLOYMENT (AGE 14-18)

### The Family Role

“Long before a student on the ASD spectrum graduates from either high school or college, they need to get work experience. [...] The transition from school to employment should be gradual and not abrupt. Teaching job skills should start before the student graduates. Mother was always pushing me to try new things. If she had not pushed me, I would not have developed.”

Temple Grandin

Families play a crucial role in setting expectations for their children to contribute to the home, school and work world. In a nutshell: it all starts with learning to empty the dishwasher! Indeed, research is now endorsing what many families and community professionals know from experience; gradually taking responsibility for household chores, and high parental expectations, are all predictors of whether a youth with autism will find employment as an adult (Carter, Austin & Trainor, 2012). This has been found to be the case regardless of whether the youth has very high academic ability or is profoundly impacted by his or her autism.

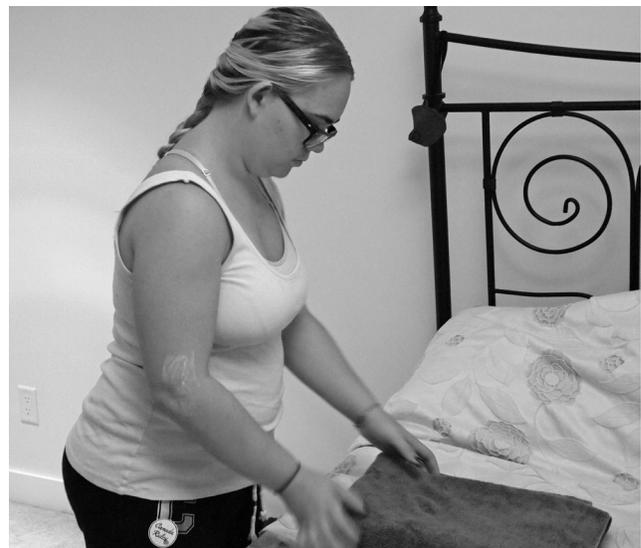
Life skills or daily living skills are also an important precursor to independence. Good hygiene, social skills in a variety of situations, telling time, keeping to a schedule and taking transit are examples of daily living skills that support the transition to employment.

Finding activities that motivate a young person with autism are crucial. Some families have found that starting with a volunteer activity that their son or daughter really enjoys can make the difference in helping him or her overcome the behaviors that have been holding them back.

Many families have found using the techniques of Positive Behavior Support (PBS) to be extremely effective in helping their children develop basic life skills. We are fortunate in B.C. to have many behavior consultants who have been trained in PBS at the University of British Columbia or Capilano University. Contact an ACT Information Officer for more information on finding professionals trained in PBS at [info@actcommunity.ca](mailto:info@actcommunity.ca)

For very able students with autism, it is often social-communication challenges and not their ability to do the job that limits their employment challenges. See page 19.

Engaging in household chores, like folding laundry, is an important step to employment.



## The Role of the School

Planning for transition to adulthood while a youth is still in high school is important to preparing for successful employment. The Government of B.C.’s “Cross Ministry Transition Planning Protocol for Youth with Special Needs” ([www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec\\_needs/adulthood.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec_needs/adulthood.htm)) recommends starting the process at age 14. Parents can request help from their child’s school with this process.

### Individual Education Plan (IEP)

It is often easier for both families and the school team to focus on the academic strengths and weaknesses of students with autism but this can ignore the need to prepare an adolescent for the workplace. Few jobs allow someone to work with complete independence—collaborating with co-workers is an important skill.

There should be regular IEP meetings for all students with autism in the B.C. public school system, whether they are following a regular academic program or a modified program. To find out more about the differences between a regular or adapted program (where the student receives a Dogwood Certificate) and a modified program (where they receive an Evergreen or School Leaving Certificate), see Chapter 7 of ACT’s *Autism Manual for B.C.: The B.C. Education System: An Introduction for Parents of Students with ASD* – page 14 (AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/9/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/9/)).



It is during the IEP process that parents can ask to have additional employment-related goals added and ensure that the IEP tracks who is responsible for what – including timelines!

While still in school, whenever possible, students should join school clubs, sports teams or work on class projects with peers to acquire transferable employment skills. Acquiring these skills is frequently very

Drama activities like those offered by the Mosaic Learning Society in Victoria have been shown to be very helpful in increasing self-confidence among youth with autism.

Parents play a vital role in encouraging their son or daughter to engage in school-based activities. It is equally important to ensure that school professionals integrate work experience goals into the IEP, starting in Grade 10. The AID includes links to great resources including:

The High School Years:  
IEP Meeting Planning  
([www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2595/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2595/))

Autism Speaks IEP Guide  
([www.actcommunity.ca/resource/490/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/490/))



“For my sons, the opportunities provided by the Mosaic Learning Society have been life changing.”

Mary Ellen

challenging for students with autism, regardless of their academic ability. After school programs from drama to judo can be important to building self-confidence.

### Work Experience – Start the Process Early!

Most B.C. school districts have a range of work experience programs for students with special needs. These unpaid work placements facilitated by the school or school district provide opportunities for a student to sample

“Riley loves his work placement. He enjoys the structure and the feeling of accomplishment. It’s a fitness centre and he thinks it’s cool.”

Anne



different types of employment. They range from shelving goods at a grocery store to working in an animal shelter, most offering basic, entry-level work experience. These are the kinds of jobs most young people try their hands at as they dip their toes into the employment world; they are also very helpful for young people with autism.

Work experience can start as early as Grade 10, but this may vary depending on the district. In the Vancouver School District, for example, students in modified programs are offered three different supported work placements each year starting in Grade 10

through to Grade 12. Many parents find it helpful to begin the work placement planning process in Grade 9. Parents can share information on their child’s areas of interest. Placement also depends on the availability of employers willing to host a student, as school districts rely on the same pool of employers for all students. Finding new work sites is a way in which parents can assist the school districts and is greatly appreciated.

### Transition Fairs

Transition Fairs are held annually in school districts across B.C. to help provide information for families and students with special needs as they plan for graduation. It is very helpful for families to begin attending these fairs when their son or daughter enters secondary school as they offer opportunities to speak informally with representatives from a range of private, not-for-profit and government agencies providing services for adults.

The Government of B.C. publishes the Cross Ministry Transition Planning Protocol for Youth with Special Needs to help facilitate a successful transition for youth and their families. The guide was published in 2009 and although some of the processes have changed, the Roles and Tasks Timeline on page 13 is a helpful planning tool for families. Find it in the ACT Information Database: [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/362/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/362/).



## Community Programs Focused on Job Skills

There are a number of agencies that offer fee-based programs for youth to work on employment skills. These include:

- Learning about employment opportunities after high school
- Support in developing a resume
- How to conduct a job search
- Interview preparation
- Social skills for the workplace

Programs may be offered through the school year and during the summer months. For example, the Head Start Program at PosAbilities offers youth ages 14-18 the opportunity to explore employment opportunities after high school. See AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2130/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2130/).

Many agencies offering youth programming are also contracted by the B.C. government to provide employment services for adults with disabilities. See page 11 for details.

The Canucks Autism Network (CAN) offers several activity-based and social skills programs for youth with autism for the cost of an annual membership of \$25. AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2019/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2019/).



## Volunteer work

Don't despair if paid work is not available immediately. Focus on volunteer opportunities that mirror the workplace by encouraging a regular schedule, independent responsibilities and working with others.



Start with a centralized resource such as [govolunteer](http://govolunteer.ca), which connects non-profit organizations with prospective volunteers. Opportunities listed on the website ([govolunteer.ca](http://govolunteer.ca)) indicate what type of applicant is most suitable for the position (e.g., “interest in caring for animals”).

“Seeing Adam being productive as a volunteer boosted my confidence that one day he would be able to find a job - and now he has one. It is only a few hours a week but it is a start and he is very proud of having a job.”

Deborah

Volunteering offers an opportunity for the organization and the youth or adult to get to know each other without the expectations associated with paid work and can sometimes lead to paid employment. It gives both the youth with autism and their potential employer time to gauge interest, ability and fit for the position.

### CommunityWorks

CommunityWorks is an innovative peer mentorship program that offers adolescents and young adults with autism the opportunity to gain work experience. The Canucks Autism Network ([www.canucksautism.ca](http://www.canucksautism.ca)) has been selected to implement the CommunityWorks program in B.C. (See page 18 for details.)

### Paid Employment

Finding paid employment while still in high school is challenging for most young people. There is the traditional route of responding to job ads, but people often find work through family and social networks. If the business does not have experience working with an individual with autism, families may consider finding additional supports, such as hiring a job coach to help bridge the knowledge gap. However, approaching the work experience team at the school district is the best place to start.

## TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD (AGE 16-19+)

### B.C. Government Supports for Adults with Autism

In B.C. a person becomes an adult at 19 and no longer qualifies for services from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), including the Autism Funding Program. All children who have been receiving Autism Funding have a MCFD Child and Youth with Special Needs (CYSN) worker. The family should contact their CYSN worker to request a meeting to review the steps for transitioning to adulthood, including applying for Person with Disability Benefits and services from Community Living BC. See Appendix A for details.

AID Resource – to locate your nearest CYSN office, see [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1996/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1996/).

#### **APPLY FOR A SOCIAL INSURANCE NUMBER**

A Social Insurance Number (SIN) is needed to apply for government programs and for employment. It is best to apply before age 16. They are issued by Service Canada: [www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/sin/apply/how.shtml](http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/sin/apply/how.shtml)

## Persons with Disabilities Benefit (PWD)

When a youth with autism turns 18, they may be eligible to receive Person with Disabilities (PWD) benefits. Applicants do not have to have an intellectual disability to qualify for PWD benefits. This provides individuals with a monthly income as well as a range of health services and an annual low cost transit pass. For an individual to start receiving benefits after their 18th birthday, families should apply for this benefit when their child is age 17 ½. The monthly benefit for a single person is \$906. Unlike other social benefits, individuals receiving PWD are not expected to be looking for work, but may earn up to an additional \$9600 per year before monies are deducted. For details on the two application streams for PWD for adults with autism see Appendix B – Applying for PWD Benefits.

### HOW IS DISABILITY DEFINED?

The Government of B.C. defines disability as a condition that must be severe and expected to last for at least two years. The disability must directly and significantly restrict an individual's ability to perform daily living activities.

## NAVIGATING THE EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM (AGE 18+)

With the right supports, people with autism are capable of finding satisfying and stable employment that pays a fair wage. The B.C. employment system has made some progress in helping adults with autism and other neurodevelopmental disabilities find work, but there are ongoing challenges. In particular, there are limited supports available to adults with autism who do not qualify for CLBC services because their IQ/academic abilities are in the average range.

This section of the guide outlines steps for navigating the employment system in B.C. including types of employment, available employment supports and how to access services.

### Types of Employment

#### Competitive Employment

Any position, full- or part-time, in an integrated workplace that pays minimum wage or better is considered competitive employment. The work and pay rate are comparable to those of a non-disabled worker. Employers are required to provide workplace accommodations for employees, when requested. Accommodations for a person with autism are relatively low-cost (e.g., headphones to shut out distracting environmental noises).

### DISCLOSING A DISABILITY

Choosing to disclose a disability to a prospective employer is a personal choice. It may not seem relevant to the position, particularly when no request for accommodation is needed for the job. An individual may choose to disclose a disability after they are hired. The BC Human Rights Code protects B.C. residents against discrimination in the workplace based on a disability. See [www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/00\\_96210\\_01](http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/00_96210_01).

Note that specialized services available through WorkBC and especially CLBC require disclosure of a diagnosis.

## Social Enterprise

Starting up or joining a social enterprise is another employment option for adults with autism. A social enterprise is a non-profit organization that generates income while promoting positive social, cultural and/or environmental outcomes. A number of community living agencies operate social enterprises that support full- and part-time employment for individuals with intellectual disability and/or autism.

There are financial supports available to social enterprises such as the Enterprising Non-Profits BC. These grants are available through Social Enterprise Canada, see [www.socialenterprisecanada.ca/en/communities/bc](http://www.socialenterprisecanada.ca/en/communities/bc).

## Co-operatives

Another less traditional option for employment is co-operatives, which are owned and operated by their members. COCO Café (and catering) in Nanaimo, B.C. is a great example of a successful co-operative, founded by a group of families of adults with developmental disabilities to create a viable business that provides employment opportunities for their children. See [cedaropportunities.coop/](http://cedaropportunities.coop/) for more information.

## Self-employment

Self-employment is not for everyone, but can be a consideration for individuals who have an idea for a new service or product and the needed capital and human resources for a business start-up.

The Launching Pad is an excellent resource which guides individuals with disabilities through the process of self-employment, starting with the business idea through to business planning, legal requirements and financial management. See [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2461/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2461/) for more information. Another helpful resource focused on legal requirements for business start-ups can be found through Small Business BC's website: <http://smallbusinessbc.ca/article/how-start-your-business-your-legal-requirements/>

## Defining Employment Supports

All employment service providers offer some level of support to assist eligible adults with autism in finding work. Supports vary widely across service providers, but will fall somewhere within the categories of supported and customized employment.

See page 30 for a glossary of employment terms.

## Supported employment

Supported employment offers a range of services to assist individuals with autism in finding available competitive, inclusive employment. Services include pre-employment skills training, resume building, job hunting and interview skills. Employment service providers may supplement employment services with other supports such as life skills training (e.g., using transit) when needed.

## Models of Employment Support

There is a wide variation in how service providers approach supported and customized employment. The terms may be used interchangeably, with some providers offering supported employment that includes more individualized support, discovery and job carving, while another provider uses a modified version of customized support which takes considerably less time. It is important to ask each service provider about their employment support models with the knowledge that many employ a blended approach.

## Customized Employment

Customized employment is an individualized approach to job planning and development offered by WorkBC and CLBC service providers. Rather than following the traditional employment model of the job seeker aligning their skill set with the position being sought, customized employment starts with the person, assesses their strengths and then matches them with the needs of the employer (Griffin et al, 2008). This approach is mutually beneficial to the employer and employee, leading to better employment outcomes including higher levels of job satisfaction and employer support for the staff. It is also good for the employer's bottom line as individuals with disabilities are very frequently loyal, productive and satisfied employees (Rethinking Disability, 2013).

Customized employment is recommended for adults with autism who struggle with traditional group-based training (e.g., pre-employment classes on interview skills). A customized approach may include working with the employer to modify an existing job description to focus on the strengths of the prospective employee. This may involve reassigning tasks to other employees. This is sometimes called task reassignment or job carving.

Customized employment uses a phased approach whereby an individual works directly with a job coach to discover their own strengths, interests and abilities. It can be time-consuming, taking upwards of 48 weeks to roll out, depending on the service provider. Family participation is expected during the early phase of the customized approach, especially for younger adults still living at home.

The table below provides an outline of the four phases and deliverables for a customized employment program. The timeline will vary depending on the provider. An individual can start the process at any of the four phases, depending on how prepared the person is for the workplace. Note that there is significant overlap between the phases as an individual will likely be looking for work while receiving job coaching.

#### **SAMPLE CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT MODEL\***

##### **Phase 1 – Discovery (up to 12 weeks)**

- Completes a vocational profile that outlines strengths and weaknesses of the individual
- Finishes with an employment planning meeting which includes parents

##### **Phase 2 – Job Searching (12 weeks+)**

- Establishing connections with businesses and potential employers.

##### **Phase 3 – Job Coaching (12 weeks)**

- Job preparedness training
- Task analysis (breaking down the job into individual steps)
- Task reassignment and/or job carving (taking existing duties and adapting to individual needs and ability)
- Support for client, supervisor and coworkers

##### **Phase 4 – Job Maintenance (up to 48 weeks)**

- Supporting the employee and employer in the workplace
- Addressing challenges on the job site.

*\* An individual may enter any phase of customized employment.*

## Employment Services

WorkBC and CLBC are the two primary government-funded agencies that support individuals with autism looking for a job. Both organizations contract with a number of other organizations to provide supported and customized employment supports.

### WorkBC

WorkBC sites are intended to be a one-stop shop for all British Columbians looking for employment. Each WorkBC site is operated by one main contractor who subcontracts other organizations that specialize in a particular facet of employment service. For example, the Open Door Group is the lead WorkBC organization representing Downtown Eastside Vancouver. Open Door contracts with Immigrant Services Society (ISS) for immigrant families and clients with English as a second language and with the Neil Squire Society for individuals with physical disabilities.

All WorkBC sites must offer services for people with disabilities. However, staff experience with autism varies greatly across their sites. There may only

be one case manager for the organization with specialized knowledge of disabilities, but limited experience of autism.

### *How to Access WorkBC Services*

To find the nearest WorkBC office, residents can use the postal code search tool on the WorkBC website ([www.workbc.ca](http://www.workbc.ca)). New clients are invited to attend an orientation session to learn about their services; it is acceptable for an adult with autism to bring a support person to this session.

Next, a meeting is set up with a case manager to discuss employment supports. The case manager may complete an assessment tool called the Disability Related Employment Needs Assessment (DRENA) to ascertain employment needs related to the disability.

### *Disability-Related Employment Needs Assessment*

The Disability-Related Employment Needs Assessment (DRENA) helps case managers identify additional services, supports and accommodations that affect a client’s job readiness.

The form can take anywhere from two to four hours to complete. The case manager assesses the client in the following areas:

- Considerations & Supports (e.g., personal/professional supports, medications)
- Physical & Sensory Impacts
- Cognitive & Mental Health Impacts
- General Impacts (e.g., personal appearance)

A recording of a free webinar outlining the DRENA is available at the BC Centre for Employment Excellence ([www.cfeebc.org/have-your-say-disability-related-employment-needs-assessments-drena-an-overview-and-training/](http://www.cfeebc.org/have-your-say-disability-related-employment-needs-assessments-drena-an-overview-and-training/))

Clients are assigned to one of four Client Tiers, which reflect employment readiness and service needs. Adults with autism are generally assigned to Tier 2, 3 or 4, depending on need, with Tier 4 representing the highest level of service.

Services that can arise from the DRENA process include:

- Discovery & Customized Employment Development Services
- Employment Readiness Workshops
- Placement Support – Job Development Services
- Placement Support – Unpaid Work Experience
- Job Coaching Services

“Job coaching was the biggest help, as Joshua was able to get the one-on-one learning that he required ... Joshua is so eager to go to work and he enjoys the employer, the people and being productive.”

Cindy

### **THE AUTISM SPEAKS EMPLOYMENT TOOLKIT**

This is an excellent guide to use in designing a practical plan for job hunting. The document outlines strategies for networking, creating contact lists, writing resumes, cover letters and preparing for interviews. (The funding and benefit information in the guide is for US residents). See AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/740/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/740/).



Clients can also be referred for specialized assessments in the areas of:

- Speech and language
- Learning disability
- Psychological/vocational needs

It is important to inquire into all of the above listed services, as the case manager may not recognize the value of these assessments to the applicant with autism and offer them proactively.

#### **A NOTE ON QUALIFICATIONS OF EMPLOYMENT SPECIALISTS**

Employment services for adults with intellectual disability and/or autism are becoming more competitive. Some organizations are a better fit than others for individuals with autism — a great deal depends on staff training and experience, which varies significantly. As yet, employment specialists, job coaches, case managers and other staff who support people with special needs to find employment do not have a professional association or college to set standards and regulate education, skills and experience. It is important to ask about qualifications as well as the experience of the provider in supporting adults with autism to find jobs.

Douglas College now offers a certificate program, the Employment Specialist Series ([www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2462/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2462/)), for practitioners working in the field of supporting individuals with multiple barriers to find work.

For a perspective on how adults with disabilities experience job coaches, see <http://selfadvocatenet.com/how-i-feel-about-job-coaches>.

The CLBC Community Action Employment Plan sets a target to increase employment of individuals served by CLBC. For details, see: [www.communitylivingbc.ca/individuals-families/support-for-adults/employment-initiative/community-action-employment-plan/](http://www.communitylivingbc.ca/individuals-families/support-for-adults/employment-initiative/community-action-employment-plan/).

### Community Living BC (CLBC)

If an individual receives CLBC services, they may request support in finding employment. CLBC purchases services from organizations experienced in providing both supported and customized employment support to adults with intellectual disability and autism. Individuals will work with a CLBC staff member — a “facilitator” — to determine what kind of support is needed.

In 2013, CLBC launched the “Community Action Employment Plan.” The purpose of the plan is to increase employment opportunities for adults with intellectual disabilities and/or autism and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Since the plan’s launch, CLBC has reported an increase in clients reporting an income; as yet, there is no specific data on how many clients with autism have found work.

## Employment Service Providers

Many of the same agencies contracted to provide supported and customized employment supports through WorkBC and CLBC also offer fee-based employment services for adults with autism. For example, PosAbilities has a fee-based, per-hour service for job coaching as well as an innovative service that charges clients a “finder’s fee” only after they have secured employment. See AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1411/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1411/).

### *Agencies Working with Adults with Autism with Technical Skills*

Over the past several years, a number of agencies have been established to provide employment placement services for adults with autism who have special technical skills. These companies focus on matching the right person with prospective employers and provide significant individualized support.

### *Specialisterne*

Specialisterne began in Denmark and now has locations around the world, including Canada. It focuses on identifying people with autism who can work in the technology sector; Specialisterne is also expanding to fill positions for general office duties. See AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1828/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1828/).

### *Focus Professional Services*

Focus Professional Services is based in B.C. and matches adults with autism with employers who are looking for consultants for technology positions. See AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2464/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2464/).



## Other Employment Initiatives

### B.C. Partners in Workforce Innovation Pilot Project

This project has a dual objective of supporting the workforce needs of businesses in B.C. and improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Led by the B.C. Centre for Employment Excellence ([www.cfeebc.org](http://www.cfeebc.org)), this three-year pilot project is funded by the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation's Research and Innovation Fund. CLBC is a partner in this initiative.

### Community Works

With \$11.4 million in federal funding over a four-year period (2015-2018), Autism Speaks Canada and the Sinneave Family Foundation (Alberta) aim to increase employment opportunities through a pre-vocational program for youth and young adults with autism. This program will also have a strong clinical piece including teaching new skills to help students address behaviors that will get in the way of them finding work. This community-based program offered in five regions across Canada—Pacific, Prairies, Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic—aims to increase employment readiness through the matching of young people with peer mentors and supported volunteer placements. The Canucks Autism Network (CAN) has been selected to implement the B.C. program. For more on CAN, see AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1353/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1353/). For more information on the national initiative, see [www.theabilityhub.org/news/communityworks-canada-program-kick](http://www.theabilityhub.org/news/communityworks-canada-program-kick) and [www.autismspeaks.ca/community-services/community-works/](http://www.autismspeaks.ca/community-services/community-works/).

### Ready Willing & Able

**READY  
WILLING  
& ABLE**

Funded by the federal government, The Canadian Association of Community Living and the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance (CASDA) have partnered to increase employment opportunities across Canada for people with intellectual disabilities and autism. This initiative strives to:

- Raise awareness with employers to hire people with intellectual disability and autism.
- Increase understanding of the value of hiring these individuals.
- Enhance the capacity of community employment supports through the engagement of small-, medium- and large-scale employers.

A list of employment partners for B.C. is available from Ready Willing and Able. See AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/743/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/743/).

## Social Communication Skills in the Workplace

Most people starting a new job learn quickly about the complexities of workplace culture. The workplace is rife with many unwritten social and communication rules which can be hard to figure out, but over time most new workers learn to modify their behavior in order to “fit in.”

Adults with autism are tremendously challenged when it comes to social relational interactions with work colleagues (Nicholas, 2014). Not making eye contact or being “too honest” in their communications can result in colleagues excluding a co-worker with autism, because they may appear to be unfriendly or uncooperative. This is especially the case if the person with autism has chosen not to disclose his or her diagnosis.

Like it or not, actions have consequences, especially in the workplace. Michelle Garcia Winner and Pamela Crooke write about social behavior in the workplace in an excellent guidebook, *Social Thinking at Work: Why Should I Care?* This book uses “The Social Behavior Map,” an innovative and practical tool, to illustrate how an individual’s behavior may be perceived by others.

The table below outlines “A Social Behavior Map” to teach an individual how others may view their actions. Many adults with autism report to ACT that they have found this very helpful as they were unaware of these issues. The Social Thinking website has many helpful free resources. See AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/715/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/715/)

### A Social Behavior Map

Your Expected Behavior	Perceived Intentions	How the interpreted intentions make other people feel	How others react to their related feelings	How the reactions make you feel
Seek advice from supervisors who are knowledgeable	Demonstrating respect for supervisor’s knowledge	Respected	Seek you out to further share and discuss ideas	Proud
Do all idea development in isolation, not consulting others who may have relevant knowledge	Avoid wanting to be a member of a team	Insulted	Avoid asking you to be on the team or work in groups	Hurt

The Social Behavior Map (excerpt from pages 164-5) from *Social Thinking at Work – Why Should I Care? A Guidebook for Understanding and Navigating the Social Complexities of the Workplace*, by Michelle Garcia Winner & Pamela Crooke. Reproduced with permission.

Another excellent approach to helping motivated young adults negotiate the workplace is the PEERS program. See *The Science of Making Friends, Helping Socially Challenged Teens and Young Adults*, by Elizabeth Laugeson, AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2210/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2210/).

For a list of B.C.-based providers who have gone through PEERS certification, see AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2607/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2607/).

## POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING (AGE 18+)

Post-secondary education and/or training are popular choices for individuals with autism. An educational setting continues to offer a structured, stable learning environment and more opportunity to develop new employment skills. Skills-based college programs, pre-employment and vocational training programs can be an effective bridge to help a young adult with autism transition from high school to adult life.

There are two distinct learning streams for B.C. high school graduates depending on whether they have graduated with a Dogwood or Evergreen/School Leaving Certificate. (The Dogwood Certificate is required for application to any mainstream college or university program.)

Prior to applying for a college or university program, it is important to consider the youth's ability to work in a less structured and supported school environment. All too often, students attending mainstream post-secondary programs struggle more with campus life and daily living activities than they do with the academic work itself. Students who have completed a Dogwood Certificate may also consider attending vocational and pre-employment training designed for graduates with a School Leaving Certificate, as these programs help prepare adults with autism for the workplace.

Since graduating, Courtenay has been working in a pre-school: "The kids don't judge me, and they need me as much as I need them."



## Pre-employment and Vocational Training

College training programs offer support, structure and training focused on a variety of employment skills. A number of programs provide specific vocational training (e.g., food services, child care) or career exploration (e.g., resume building, interview practice). These programs can vary and it is recommended to review what is offered by each program. The two programs highlighted below illustrate what is offered in B.C. Colleges.

### Pre-employment at Northern Lights College

This 18-week pre-employment program offers students aged 17 years or older with a minimum working literacy level of Grade 5 the skills to start an entry-level position in a number of fields (see AID resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2627/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2627/)).

### Vocational Training at Vancouver Community College

The Food Services Careers vocational program is specifically designed to train students with intellectual disability to work in kitchen preparation. This full-time, 38-week program combines 12 weeks of supervised community work experience with college instruction suitable to the student's ability and interest. See AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1097/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1097/).

Applicants go through a series of interviews and assessments to determine their suitability. There are a number of expectations for attending vocational training including:

- Ability to take transit.
- Maintaining appropriate hygiene.
- Appropriate behavior in a classroom/group setting.

Graduating from this program does not guarantee employment, but VCC tries to support their graduates to secure ongoing employment through the many relationships they have developed with employers. As they near the end of the program, students, particularly those with autism, are often anxious about what comes next. Developing a job search plan early in the process may alleviate some of these concerns.

The AID lists several colleges offering pre-employment and vocational training; search for “pre-employment” in the AID search bar on the home page of ACT's website [www.actcommunity.ca](http://www.actcommunity.ca).

**AUTHORS WITH AUTISM**

Students with autism at the University of Victoria have been engaged in an exciting initiative to take leadership in advocating for themselves. The Authors with Autism group, founded by and for students with autism, holds regular peer-support meetings and public events and publishes a journal. Many group members are involved in planning programs for students with disabilities on campus.

See AID Resource  
[www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2020/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2020/).



Autism  
Information  
Database

## College and University Programs

Students attending mainstream academic and skill-based programs are expected to complete the coursework by attending class, handing in assignments on time, writing exams and working on school projects with their classmates.

All colleges and university campuses in B.C. have disability advisors who can support students who identify as having a disability. It is important to know that documentation of disability is required for support. An IEP does not count as proof of diagnosis!

For individuals with autism, the typical supports include extended time for exam writing, alternate formats for print materials, and peer tutoring. Students can also take a reduced course load and still count as full-time students, which is important in order for them to qualify for financial aid and scholarships.

It is recommended upon acceptance to meet and discuss necessary accommodations with the disability advisor. Not all disability advisors will have an understanding of autism. As autism is an invisible disability, the advisor may not think to offer a peer mentor to help a student with autism with time management, note-taking and preparing for exams, everyday skills to help the student be successful. If a student is over 19, parents will likely not be included in these discussions unless the student requests it. Preparing the students to ask for these supports may be a good strategy.



UVic Student Patrick Dwyer, an active member of Authors with Autism, working with children as part of his co-op placement in an anti-bullying initiative involving school outreach. Thanks to UVic Photo Service.

## Funding Opportunities for Post-Secondary Education

Depending on their age of entry to post-secondary education, individuals may qualify for funding through various government agencies including:

### Opportunities Fund

The Opportunities Fund (OPPS Fund) program is a federal program that makes funds available to organizations that support persons with disabilities to prepare for and find employment or self-employment. There are a number of activities eligible for funding including:

- Employment skills training.
- Needed workplace accommodations.
- Wage subsidies to potential employers hiring a person with a disability.

Individuals interested in the OPPS Fund must be referred by a WorkBC Case Manager. See page 14 for more information on WorkBC. The BC Centre for Ability administers the OPPS Fund for Greater Vancouver, Fraser Valley and Vancouver Island. See [www.oppsfund.ca](http://www.oppsfund.ca). Individuals outside this area will work directly with Service Canada.

### CLBC–BCGEU Scholarship Fund

Recipients eligible for CLBC services may apply for up to \$2,500 in funding per applicant from the BC Government Employees Union (BCGEU) for the following:

- Employment skills training.
- Training courses offered by accredited B.C. institutions.
- Associated costs for attending post-secondary education or training.

\$20,000 will be available annually up until 2018, with equal distribution to CLBC's three regions: North/Interior, Fraser and Vancouver Coastal/Vancouver Island. CLBC will post the application date on their website. See AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1779/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1779/).

### Provincial and Federal Grants for Students with Permanent Disabilities

Students attending a designated post-secondary institution who are able to provide documentation of a permanent disability may be eligible for provincial and federal grants for tuition, services and equipment. See AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2599/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/2599/).

## CONCLUSION

Navigating B.C.'s employment system requires fortitude and grit to find the right supports and programs that result in meaningful, competitive employment for adults with autism.

As programs and resources are continually evolving, ACT will add new resources to the AID as they become available and revise this chapter as necessary.

Please send feedback on this guide, as well as any new information, to ACT at [info@actcommunity.ca](mailto:info@actcommunity.ca).

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## APPENDIX A – APPLYING FOR CLBC SERVICES

### CLBC’s Eligibility Criteria

To qualify for CLBC services, applicants must meet these eligibility criteria:

- Significantly impaired intellectual functioning.
- Intellectual disability assessed prior to turning age 18.
- Significantly impaired adaptive functioning.

Families are usually required to provide a copy of their child’s most recent psycho-educational assessment. The documentation requirements include providing a written assessment by an appropriate professional (e.g., psychologist), which must state that the child meets the “Diagnostic Criteria for Mental Retardation” as stated in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV-TR. A more recent assessment may be required if the assessment was completed when the child was very young.

Parents should request that their child’s high school complete a psycho-educational assessment. Ideally this process should start when the youth is 15, because there can be long waiting lists for access to a school psychologist. Families may also want to seek a private assessment. They can be costly, but the fee may be partially covered if a parent has extended benefits.

CLBC will send the application, including consent forms, to the families via mail or email. See AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/549/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/549/).

## Personalized Supports Initiative

The Personalized Supports Initiative (PSI) is a CLBC program for individuals with autism or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) with significant limitations in adaptive functioning. Unlike the mainstream CLBC program, PSI does not require that the applicant has an intellectual disability (the majority of individuals with autism do not have an intellectual disability), but they must have acute challenges in how they function in at least two of the following areas:

- Communication.
- Self-care.
- Home living.
- Social/interpersonal skills.
- Use of community resources.
- Self-direction.
- Functional academic skills.
- Leisure.
- Health.
- Safety.

A “qualified practitioner” (e.g., registered psychologist) must complete a CLBC Assessment Summary form using one of the following assessment tools:

- Scales of Independent Behaviour – Revised.
- Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales.
- Adaptive Behaviour Assessment System (ABAS).

For details, see AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1695/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1695/).

To be eligible for PSI, an individual’s adaptive functioning must score at least 3 Standard Deviations below the mean. This means that only 1% of this population group would qualify. It is strongly recommended that families find a qualified practitioner experienced in conducting assessments for CLBC eligibility criteria. Contact ACT for more information. ACT has Information Officers who can provide individualized support. Email [info@actcommunity.ca](mailto:info@actcommunity.ca).

## APPENDIX B – APPLYING FOR PWD BENEFITS

### Standard Application for PWD Benefits for Those Without a Developmental Disability

For more information on the Person with Disabilities Benefit, call the Ministry of Social Development and Innovation: 1-866-866-0800.

Step 1: Complete the online “Self-Serve Assessment and Application – Part 1” ([www.iaselfserve.gov.bc.ca](http://www.iaselfserve.gov.bc.ca)). There are 90+ questions to answer regarding living arrangements, income and disability status. The application form can be saved for up to five days, if it cannot be completed in one sitting. As this application is for all individuals applying for PWD, several questions will not be relevant to the applicant’s situation, especially in the case of a youth under age 18. The application lists a number of documents (e.g., bank statement) to have handy in order to answer the questions.

Step 2: A Ministry representative will contact the applicant (or parent, if the applicant is a minor) within two to four weeks after Part 1 of the application is submitted. Applicants are then asked to visit a Ministry office, with required ID, to sign the application for disability assistance and to pick up the PWD Designation Application, the second part of the application process.

Step 3: Complete the PWD Designation Application. This is a lengthy form with three separate sections: Applicant, Physician and Assessor Report. Each section asks additional questions about the disability with respect to the impact on the individual’s ability to perform daily living activities. The website has a sample blank application form ([www.eia.gov.bc.ca/forms/pdf/HR2883.pdf](http://www.eia.gov.bc.ca/forms/pdf/HR2883.pdf)) for review. Note: a self-advocate is not required to complete the Applicant section regarding their disability. If it is not completed, the Ministry will assess the application based on the reports provided by the physician and assessor.

When the application is approved, the applicant will be contacted by a Ministry representative to review other available benefits.

## Youth with a Developmental Disability

A more simplified process to apply for PWD benefits is available for youth with a developmental disability.

Step 1: The youth can start the process in one of three ways:

- Referral by the applicant's MCFD CYSN worker.
- Referral by the applicant's CLBC Facilitator.
- Completion of the online Self-Serve Assessment and Application ([www.iaselfserve.gov.bc.ca/HomePage.aspx](http://www.iaselfserve.gov.bc.ca/HomePage.aspx)). See Step 1 of the Standard Application above for more information.

Step 2: A Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation (MSDSI) representative will telephone upon receipt of the application and will mail an additional form for completion. Additional documentation required includes photocopies of:

- The psycho-educational assessment confirming an intellectual disability (See "Appendix A: CLBC Individuals with Developmental Disability" for more information on assessments).
- Banking information.
- Personal identification (e.g., birth certificate, B.C. ID, passport).
- B.C. Care Card.

Step 3: Benefit Decision – The MSDSI will mail the family a letter outlining their decision. If the application is submitted at age 17½, the first benefit payment should begin when the youth turns age 18. Until the age of 19, a youth can receive both Autism Funding and PWD.

## APPENDIX C – DISABILITY TAX CREDIT & REGISTERED DISABILITY SAVINGS PLAN

### Disability Tax Credit

The Disability Tax Credit (DTC) is a tax credit used to reduce the amount of federal income tax payable. The DTC defines disability as a person with a severe and prolonged (12 months or longer) impairment in physical or mental function.

To qualify, the applicant will be assessed in two areas:

1. The impairment must be prolonged.
2. The effects of the impairment “markedly restrict” the applicant’s ability in a basic activity of daily living.

Only specific qualified practitioners may complete the area of the application that pertains to the disability. For example, a medical doctor or psychologist is permitted to complete the section on “Mental functions necessary for everyday life.” Many children with autism qualify for the DTC based on the criteria outlined in this section. For details, see [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/649/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/649/).

When a youth turns 18, they must apply again for the DTC. If they are living with parents and the youth does not earn enough to use the credit, it can be transferred to the primary caregiver.

### Registered Disability Savings Plan

The Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) is designed specifically for people with disabilities as a long-term savings plan. There is more information available on setting up an RDSP in Chapter 10 of the *Autism Manual for B.C.*: “Estate Planning for Families who have Children with Special Needs in B.C.” See AID Resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/12/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/12/). This chapter was written by Blair Dwyer, an eminent tax lawyer with a special interest in families who have children with special needs. Mr. Dwyer has also presented on this topic for ACT. A free online video is available; see AID resource [www.actcommunity.ca/resource/527/](http://www.actcommunity.ca/resource/527/).

## APPENDIX D – SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GLOSSARY

Case manager	Someone who supports people to find employment by identifying an individual's skills, strengths and employment goals and then connecting them to the specific resources and services needed to meet those goals.
Customized employment	Customized employment is an individual approach to job planning and development. It involves assessing an individual's strengths and matching them to the needs of an employer.
Job carving	Modifying an existing job or developing new job tasks that fit with an individual's unique skills, abilities and strengths. Also called task reassignment.
Employment specialist	Employment specialists help match individuals with suitable positions, identifying the necessary supports and services needed for the individual to be successful
Job coach	A job coach supports an individual to learn the necessary job tasks specified by an employer. Job coaches also provide support in learning about workplace communication and important social skills on the job site.
Job developer	Job developers promote applicants to a prospective employer as well as connecting with the employment community to identify potential job leads.
Natural supports	Natural supports in the workplace can be informal (social connections with co-workers) and formal (meeting with a supervisor). These are intended to help an individual with autism become integrated into the workplace. Generally, this support requires more intensive efforts initially, before the job coach leaves.
Supported employment	Supported employment encompasses a range of services designed to assist individuals with disabilities to find available, competitive and inclusive employment. This can include, pre-employment skills training, resume building, job hunting, and interview skills.
Task analysis	The process of breaking a skill down into smaller, more manageable components:  Step 1. Identifying the target skill. Step 2. Identifying the prerequisite skills of the learner and the materials needed to teach the task. Step 3. Breaking the skill into components. Step 4. Confirming that the task is completely analyzed. Step 5. Determining how the skill will be taught. Step 6. Implementing intervention and monitoring progress.
Work accommodations	Work accommodations are ways in which employers can modify a job, the work environment or the way a job is done so that a person with a disability is ensured equal access.