

ISSUE 9 - OCTOBER 2013

Autism World



Magazine



**GIRLS ON THE
SPECTRUM**

***TELL YOUR
STORY***

**ANXIETY:
FEED YOUR BRAIN**

***A MATTER
OF LUCK?***

Future employment: part I



Malcolm Mayfield
Managing Director
Autism STAR Pty. Ltd

In an article posted on the News Medical website on 5 September 2013, [two key findings](#) were explored regarding research being conducted in the US:

young adults with autism spectrum disorders have worse employment outcomes in the first few years after high school than do peers who have [other types of disabilities](#); and

young adults on the autism spectrum were less likely to have ever lived independently since leaving high school, compared to their [peers with other disabilities](#).

These findings echo similar conclusions being drawn by autism-focused research and support organisations around the world and serves to feed the societal belief that a diagnosis of autism, Asperger Syndrome or any other autism spectrum condition equates to a bleak future for the individual.

Problem-focused research is only good for one thing, and that is identifying and defining the problem. For success to be achieved in any endeavor, the focus needs to be on strategies for success.

When such research is produced, the first step in solving the problem needs to be finding the causes of the problem.

The above research does not explore this area. The second step is to modify the causes to create successful outcomes for the individual.

So what could be the causes behind poor employment and independent living outcomes for autistic individuals?

Top of the list would have to be **overwhelm**. It is well known that autistic individuals experience sensory and information overwhelm which leads to a protective drive to withdraw and to self-protect. The ultimate level of self-protection is the autistic meltdown.

Most people, autistic and neurotypical alike, have experienced overwhelm in their lives. The difference between failure and success is in how that overwhelm is managed in the experience of the individual in successfully managing their overwhelm state.

The second cause would be **fear** of getting it wrong. I know from personal experience that I used to avoid doing an action until I believed that I could do it 'perfectly'. This meant that I procrastinated excessively. My only saving grace was my fear of being reprimanded for not doing my job which in turned overwhelmed my procrastination. While the strategy worked, I could have in hindsight chosen more supportive ways in which to motivate myself.

The third cause is **belief**. If you believe that you cannot get a job, then you lose a key motivational source in getting and keeping a job; yourself. Worse still, if society believes that autistic individuals cannot get a job, then your chances of gaining employment as an autistic individual become significantly less when compared to other people's chances.

Belief and perception play a significant part in the way we make decisions both as individuals and as part of larger groups. If there is a perception that having an autism spectrum condition means having a bleak employment future, then a limiting belief will form to support that perception.

This leads to another cause based on belief, and that word is "**autism**".

As soon as autism, or a derivative of this word is mentioned, the mind of the listener seems to switch to the negative. As a society we have been programmed to think of autism as a "can't do" condition and therefore the word immediately creates a negative perception.

This perception is propagated by a media and society that feeds off negative emotions and seemingly avoids solution-based thinking.

***we have been
programmed to
think of autism as a
"can't do"***

Another cause, which is a byproduct the other four listed above, is a **lack of experience and training**. Overwhelm, fear, self-belief and societal perception can and does affect the way in which autistic individuals learn and in which they are trained.

I have listed five potential causes to the problem identified in the above research. This is not an exhaustive list of causes and is not intended to be. Future articles will identify and address many more areas which add to this scenario.

Next month: This series will focus on the first cause of overwhelm and will provide strategies for managing the overwhelm state for greater success.



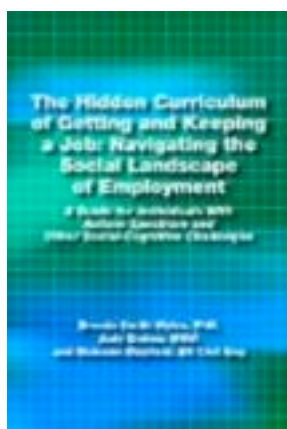
Malcolm Mayfield
Managing Director
Autism STAR Pty. Ltd.
www.autism-star.com
 Adelaide, Australia



ⁱ www.news-medical.net/news/20130905/Young-adults-with-ASDs-have-worse-outcomes-of-employment-and-independent-living.aspx
 (note that this article was repeated from the Drexel Now article posted 4 September 2013 (www.drexel.edu/now/news-media/releases/archive/2013/September/Autism-Spectrum-Young-Adult-Transition-Studies/))

ⁱⁱ [www.jaacap.com/article/S0890-8567\(13\)00377-8/abstract](http://www.jaacap.com/article/S0890-8567(13)00377-8/abstract)

ⁱⁱⁱ aut.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/08/30/1362361313481860



**Malcolm Mayfield is co-author of
 “The Hidden Curriculum of Getting
 and Keeping a Job: Navigating the
 Social Landscape of Employment.”**

***Click on book
 picture to order***