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Programs, Models, and Strategies to Support Employment Outcomes of Young Adults on the Autism Spectrum

A Review of the Literature

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Contents

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I. Introduction

The transition from school to employment is challenging for the growing number of young adults on the autism spectrum. Many struggle to engage in competitive integrated employment or in appropriate education or employment training programs that will prepare them for integrated employment. The objective of the Research Support Services for Employment of Young Adults on the Autism Spectrum (REYAAS) project is to examine barriers to and catalysts for improving employment and career development outcomes for young adults on the autism spectrum. This literature review describes the range of programs, models, and strategies that have been implemented to support the transition to competitive integrated employment for young adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities including autism. It also identifies the funding sources supporting this work.

The literature review sought to answer five research questions:

1. What programs, models, and strategies are documented and are currently or were recently used to support employment outcomes for young adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities? What are the common features of those programs, models, and strategies?
2. How are those programs funded?
3. What subset of those programs, models, or strategies serve or served young adults on the autism spectrum? What are the common features of that subset?
4. What features or components of those programs, models, and strategies have been considered contributors to their success?
5. What are some of the common barriers that programs face?

Although we are most interested in learning about programs that can improve employment outcomes for young adults on the autism spectrum, we initially focused on programs that have been delivered to young adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities. We started with this broader population for two reasons. First, some of these programs may serve young adults on the autism spectrum as part of a broader group. Second, other programs may not yet serve young adults on the autism spectrum but may be delivering services to young adults with similar needs. We also wanted to understand which components or features of the programs are most important and what challenges the programs face, as both are important when considering whether and how to expand the programs to serve additional young adults.

A forthcoming literature review will summarize the evidence for the effectiveness and impact of those programs and whether existing evidence is growing, lacking, consistent, or divergent. Together, the two literature reviews will help the U.S. Department of Labor identify promising research opportunities it can pursue through REYAAS. These pursuits intend to ultimately advance the discussion of options to improve employment outcomes for young adults on the autism spectrum.

This report describes the criteria we used to determine which publications to include in the literature review, the literature search strategy we used to identify those publications, and the findings for each of

the five research questions. Appendices A and B provide additional information about the literature search strategy, and Appendix C lists the publications that met the inclusion criteria and are summarized in this report.

II. Inclusion criteria and search strategy

In the first step of our literature review, we searched for publications that met the following criteria:

- Written in English
- Published since 2011
- Describe employment programs, models, or strategies
- Serve a relevant population
- Implemented in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, or Australia

The understanding held by experts and programs of how to support young adults with developmental disabilities has evolved considerably since the late 1990s. Limiting our literature review to more recent publications strengthens the relevance of our findings. When screening publications against this criterion, we noted publications from 2006 to 2010 that met all other inclusion criteria, but did not prioritize these publications for inclusion.

The publications describe programs, models, or strategies that are meant to support employment attainment or retention. The programs supported current or prospective workers with hard or soft skills, addressed common barriers to employment (with a stated goal of increasing employment), or helped employers create more supportive and accommodating workplaces. The programs must have been implemented and have enrolled at least one young adult; we did not include publications suggesting strategies for future or hypothetical programs.

The programs described in the publications serve or target services to people ages 16 to 24 who have intellectual or developmental disabilities. We included programs that serve broader populations as long as we could reasonably assume that a majority of the recipients are ages 16 to 24 and have intellectual or developmental disabilities (for example, a program for people ages 18 to 28 with developmental disabilities).

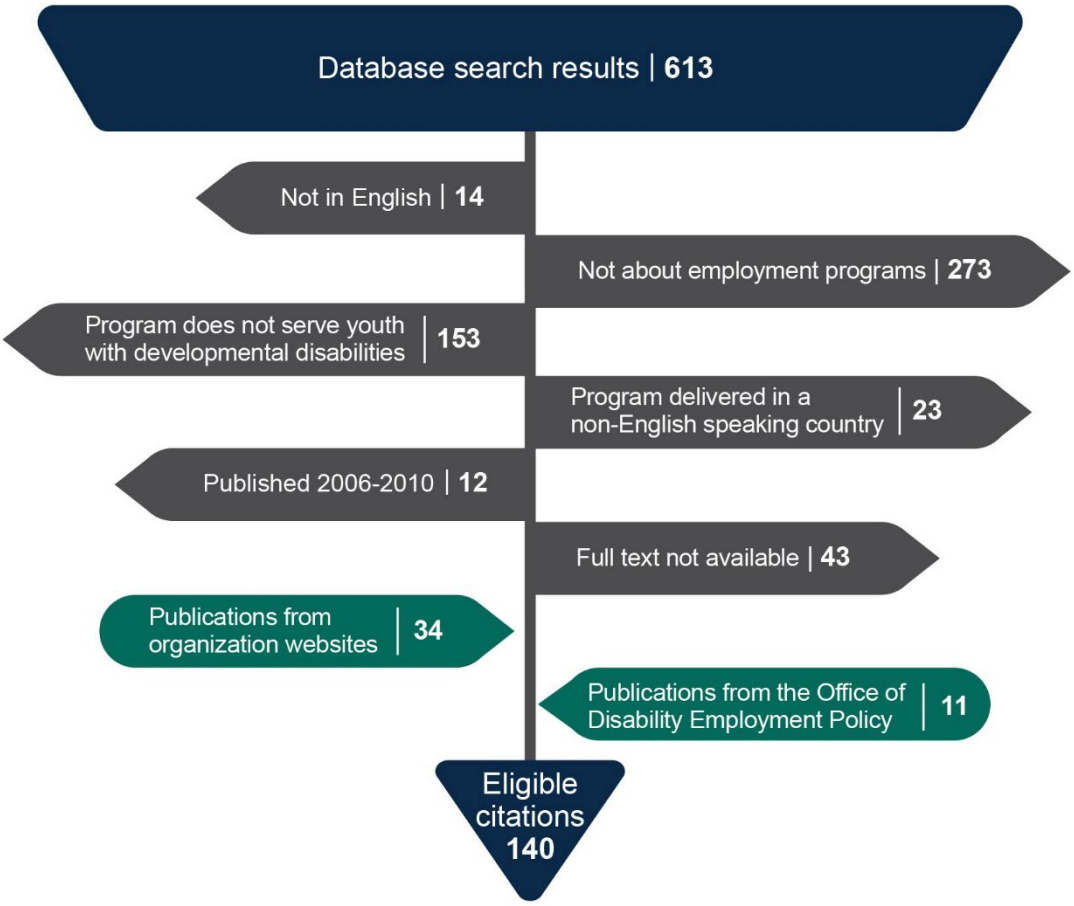
Finally, we included publications about programs implemented in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia. The policy and service contexts in these countries are similar enough to those in the United States that programs, models, and strategies implemented there could be relevant for young adults in the United States.

We searched for literature meeting these criteria within established research databases and on websites of organizations that promote or conduct research on programs and policies related to employment for people with developmental disabilities, particularly for people on the autism spectrum. Appendix A describes how we conducted our database search, including the literature search terms and the databases in which we conducted the search. Appendix B lists the organizational websites in which we searched for additional information.

Our literature search identified 613 publications from a database search. Of these, 95 met the inclusion criteria. We identified an additional 34 publications that met the inclusion criteria from organizational websites and another 11 from sources recommended by staff at the Office of Disability Employment

Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor. Together, 140 publications met the inclusion criteria and are included in this literature review. The 140 publications include 141 program descriptions. Several publications described the same program but as implemented in different locations or times or focused on a different subset of the young adults served. One publication described two different programs (Burgess and Cimera, 2014). Figure 1 presents the number of studies we excluded because of each inclusion criteria.

Figure 1. Count of studies that did and did not meet inclusion criteria



III. Findings

A. What programs, models, and strategies are documented and are currently or were recently used to support employment outcomes for young adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities? What are the common features of those programs and strategies?

We examined whether the programs, models, and strategies used to support employment outcomes included any of the following components: soft skills training, job search assistance or job development, coaching or mentoring, work experience, employer support or training, mental health support, and assistive technology. We originally catalogued whether programs provided "other training," meaning training other than soft skills training. We subsequently broke this category down into job training

(categorized with job search assistance and job development), transition planning support, and occupational training. Many of the programs combined multiple components, such as offering both soft skills training and internships to transition-age young adults. In this section, we describe examples of the most common components (see Table 1).

Table 1. Employment and training components programs use to support employment outcomes for young adults with developmental disabilities

Component	Number of publications describing component	Description	Examples of programs that primarily use this component
Soft skills training	61	Training on social cognitive and social communication skills including problem solving and self-regulation	• Aspirations social and vocational skills program Assistive Soft Skills and Employment Training (ASSET) program • College to Career Program • CommunityWorks Canada (Canada) • EmploymentWorks Canada (Canada) • Project TEAM (Teens making Environment and Activity Modifications) • Project Triumph • Social Thinking curriculum
Job search assistance, job development, or job training	55	Support identifying and applying to jobs, including developing resumes and practicing interviews Creation or identification of job opportunities with employers Training on workplace skills that are not occupation-specific	• Autism Career Connections • JobTIPS • Marino Campus • Peer-mediated literacy-based behavioral intervention • Portland Prep • Tech Kids Unlimited • Video modeling • Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services
Coaching or mentoring	60	Individualized support from job coaches, life coaches, and peer or community mentors to encourage or prepare for work	• Life Management Assistance Program (LifeMAP) • Men's Shed (Australia) • NEXT Gen Connect • Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) and "Whose Future Is It?" (WF) • Vid-Coach • Virtual Reality Social Cognition Training (VR-SCT) intervention

Component	Number of publications describing component	Description	Examples of programs that primarily use this component
Work experience	53	Exposure to integrated or non-integrated work settings through paid and unpaid internships, volunteer work, and short-term job placements	• Discover Learn Work Career Training Services (DLW) • E-IDEAS (Empowerment of youth with Intellectual Disabilities through Education and training for Acquiring Employment Skills) (Ireland) • Kids Café 2019 • The Learning Academy • Project T.E.A.M. (Transitional Education Adjustment Model) • Project SEARCH • Spectrum Works' internship and structured learning experience job training and employment programs • TECH-Prep
Transition planning support	16	Development and execution of plans to support transition from high school to adulthood, often engaging families, and considering needs related to independent living and life skills training, employment, and supports for postsecondary education	• Bearcat B.E.S.T. (Building Excellence through Skills Training) • Better OutcOmes & Successful Transitions for Autism (BOOST-A) (Australia) • CrossingPoints Transition Program • EmploymentWorks Canada (Canada) • Family-centered transition planning intervention • Kids Café 2019 • The Learning Academy • Maximizing Adolescent Post-Secondary Success (MAPSS) • Massachusetts Partnership for Transition to Employment • Surviving and Thriving in the Real World • Transition to Employment • Transition to Life • Transition Options for Postsecondary Settings (TOPS)
Employer support or training [a]	7	Training, knowledge, or other supports provided to employers to improve their ability or willingness to employ young adults with disabilities	• Autism Career Connections • Project SEARCH Autism Enhancement (PSAE) • EmploymentWorks Canada

Component	Number of publications describing component	Description	Examples of programs that primarily use this component
Mental health support	5	Mental health services such as stress management or mental regulation; Individual Placement and Support (IPS) programs that provide employment services to people with mental health difficulties	• IPS model
Occupational training	5	Training that prepares people for jobs in various fields by teaching occupation-specific skills	• Marino Campus • Portland Prep • Tech Kids Unlimited
Assistive technology [a]	4	Use of devices and tools that help people complete tasks they would have difficulty completing without assistance, such as text-to-voice devices	• Bearcat B.E.S.T. • Project SEARCH • VR services

Note: This table displays counts of publications that described a program delivering each service component. Some of these programs delivered multiple service components and are thus counted in multiple rows. Some programs, such as Project SEARCH and video modeling, are described in multiple publications and are counted multiple times as separate publications. The rows are sorted by publication count.

[a] These were not the primary services but were in addition to the main services. No programs in the literature primarily used this component.

Three types of programs incorporated several components and were described in 10 or more publications: Project SEARCH, Vocational Rehabilitation services, and transition programs.

- **Project SEARCH,** a job search program for students with developmental disabilities that often takes place their final year of high school, is being implemented in hundreds of sites throughout the United States (Müller et al., 2018). Students are often placed in a rotation of about three internships and spend the nine-month school year on-site gaining work experience at various workplaces such as hospitals, hotels, or museums. The model was developed at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center in 1996 and has since been implemented and adapted across many sites. As examples of how the model has been adapted, some sites offer classroom training, enroll recent graduates in addition to current students, or specifically only enroll people with intellectual disabilities or on the autism spectrum (Christensen et al., 2015; Eckart, 2018; Gormley, 2015; Ham et al., 2014; Hernandez, 2019; Jones, 2019; Lerman, 2018; Muller and VanGilder, 2014; Next for AUTISM, n.d.a, n.d.c; Schall et al., 2015; Schall et al., 2020; Simpson 2014; Smith, 2019; Strater et al., 2019; Wehman et al., 2013, 2014b, 2017, 2020).
- **Vocational Rehabilitation services** typically focus on job search assistance and job development but use a wide variety of approaches to help clients achieve employment and success. These can include assessments of support needs, coaching or counseling, training, rehabilitation engineering, assistive technology, on-the-job supports, opportunities for supported employment, and assistance in helping people find competitive employment (Burgess and Cimera, 2014; Cimera et al., 2015; Ditchman et al., 2018; Kaya et al., 2016, 2018; Migliore et al., 2012, 2014; Rast et al., 2020; Roux et al., 2021; Sung et al., 2015; Wehman et al., 2014a).

- **Transition programs** prepared young adults for employment, postsecondary education, and independence. These programs often helped families plan for options after high school and were offered by universities, local governments, or businesses. Some programs charged tuition and offered certificates for completion; for example, Saint Vincent College offered Bearcat B.E.S.T. - Building Excellence through Skills Training, a three-year program to increase students' independence and prepare them for competitive integrated employment (Kanfush, 2020; Kanfush and D'Aloiso, 2019). Other programs provided trainings in soft skills or life skills that young adults need to live independently. For example, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center's program, Surviving and Thriving in the Real World, focused on morning routines, kitchen safety, laundry, and money management (Duncan et al., 2018).

Many programs provided soft skills training to prepare young adults for employment. Soft skills training for this population often focused on social cognitive and social communication skills including problem solving and self-regulation. These programs often delivered training over the course of several weeks in group sessions through semi-structured curricula on topics such as social communication skills, problem solving, and professional behavior. For example, Michigan State University's Assistive Soft Skills and Employment Training (ASSET) program included eight weeks of training delivered through lessons, role-play, and video modeling and feedback and focused on communication, attitude and enthusiasm, teamwork, networking, problem solving and critical thinking, and professionalism (Connor et al., 2020). Similarly, Kansas State Department of Education's Social Thinking program taught students social communication skills appropriate for workplace settings through verbal interactions and peer modeling (Clavenna-Deane et al., 2020).

Several programs provided job training and feedback through video modeling or similar techniques to help transition-age young adults acquire job skills. Video modeling, handheld prompts or audio cues, and video feedback can instruct people how to complete a task or remind them of the next step to take. Programs delivered this training and feedback either before or during employment. Programs delivered before employment focused on work attainment either through improving interviewing skills or through teaching specific vocational skills in a training setting. For example, the JobTIPS program provided multimedia training through videos, quizzes, visual reminders, and worksheets on finding and keeping a job; topics included an overview of interviews, responding to questions, and greetings and handshakes (Strickland et al., 2013). Participants in the Vid-Coach video modeling program participated in mock interviews and received video modeling and prompts through an iPhone app, and participants in the Marino Campus program practiced interviewing using digital avatars (Hayes et al., 2015; Preston, 2016). Other programs used technology to teach vocational skills to students in training. For example, one program recorded participants while they worked at unpaid training sites and provided video feedback on target behaviors such as decision making, social interactions, and hygiene at the end of each workday (Mackey and Nelson, 2015). Many video model demonstrations taught job skills such as customer interactions or vocational tasks such as cleaning and restocking (Babb et al., 2019; Bross et al., 2019; Burke et al., 2013; Kellems and Morningstar, 2012; Palmen and Didden, 2012; Stauch and Plavnick, 2020).

Coaching and mentoring were common primary or supplemental components. Coaching and mentoring can incorporate a variety of approaches including helping people find and apply for jobs, providing individual instruction or on-the-job supports, pairing with a peer mentor, or using life coaching to help achieve personal or professional goals. Many programs provided coaching as an additional support to their primary services. For example, Project SEARCH paired classroom instruction with on-

site job experiences and offered students feedback from teachers, job coaches, and employers. A few programs focused primarily on coaching and mentoring to build employment skills. In particular, NEXT for AUTISM's NEXT Gen Connect program connected aspiring young professionals on the autism spectrum with established peers to build networks and skills for securing employment (Next for AUTISM, n.d.b). The Asperger/Autism Network (AANE)'s Life Management Assistance Program (LifeMAP) provided life coaching to participants in New England states; modules focused on employment topics such as networking, interviews, and dressing for the workplace (AANE, n.d). Men's Shed, a program in Australia, connected young adults with intellectual disabilities with older male mentors to help them make social connections and build employment skills (Milbourn et al., 2020).

Many approaches combined work experience, which usually consisted of a paid or unpaid internship, with other supports. Work experience could also involve a short-term placement to gain exposure to work settings and could take place in an integrated or non-integrated setting. For example, similar to Project SEARCH, through Project T.E.A.M. (Transitional Education Adjustment Model) students worked at a mock store that replicated a neighborhood CVS (Stokley, 2016). Some programs had two phases, starting with soft skills training before offering students work experience. The University of Wisconsin-Madison's TECH-Prep program offered soft skills training to young adults followed by paid internships focused on coding and programming (Rockett, 2021). Spectrum Works' 12-month program offered soft skills training and then internships in competitive employment settings, which could turn into permanent jobs (Spectrum Works, n.d.a). While apprenticeship programs are a means of combining work experience and training, we did not identify any apprenticeship programs.

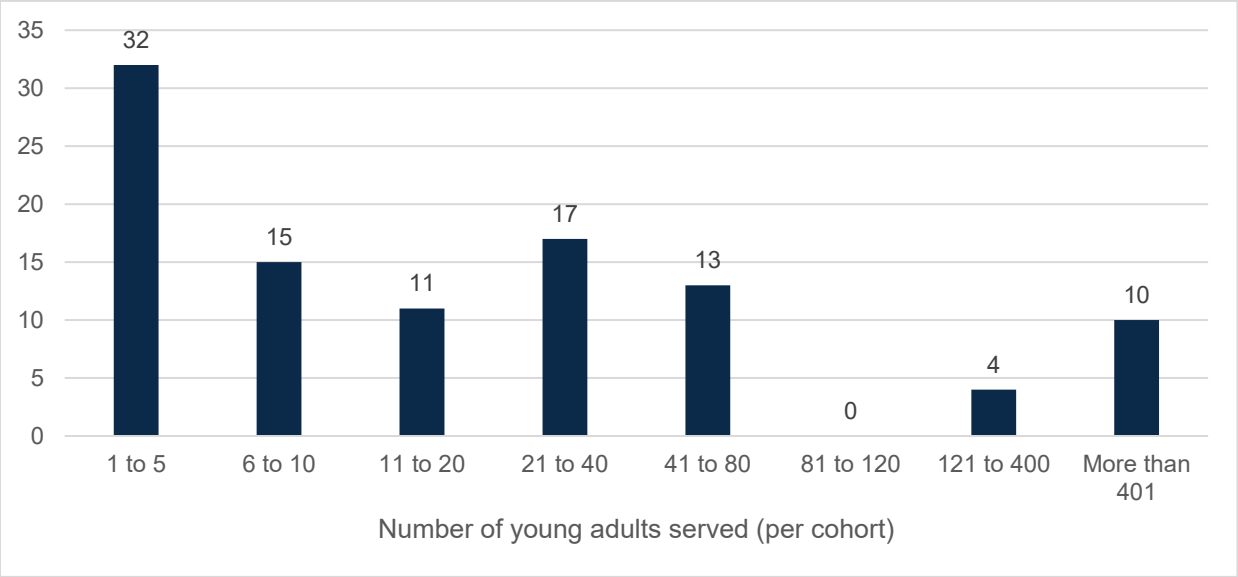
Several programs combined work experience and transition planning for postsecondary students. For example, through the University of Alabama's CrossingPoints Transition Program, students received vocational training from job coaches at their internships (Robinson, 2019). The Ohio State University's Transition Options for Postsecondary Settings (TOPS) program helped students prepare for careers by participating in a series of internships while also receiving academic guidance. Students also engaged in volunteering and self-advocacy, including learning about their own and other disabilities and self-advocacy skills to increase self-determination (Green et al., 2017). Another unnamed program offered by a public university was integrated into its postsecondary education program and provided life skills instruction, unpaid internships, and paid employment along with a job coach and peer mentor (Ryan et al., 2019).

Some programs offered occupational training that prepared participants for jobs in various fields such as programming or technology, assembly, or food service. For example, Portland Prep offered a 10-week summer program in which transition-age young adults with various educational backgrounds and disabilities learned to develop apps and program games. The Dan Marino Foundation offered a 10-month course of vocational training in hospitality, retail, or information technology classes paired with soft skills training and internships (Preston, 2016). None of the programs that offered occupational training were career and technical education programs.

The remaining publications described various other programs, models, and strategies that often involved customizing the programs for individual young adult participants, and thus services varied across participants. These included job training programs offered in non-integrated school settings and statewide initiatives. Few publications described approaches that incorporated employer support or training as a secondary support. The IPS model incorporated mental health support, and many Vocational Rehabilitation services focused on job search assistance and job development.

Most programs served fewer than 20 young adults per cohort. While Vocational Rehabilitation services support thousands of young adults in each state, large programs were uncommon. Thirty-two programs served five or fewer young adults, as shown in Figure 2. Project SEARCH and Project T.E.A.M. were two of the larger programs, with some sites enrolling more than 50 young adults.

Figure 2. Count of programs by number of young adults served

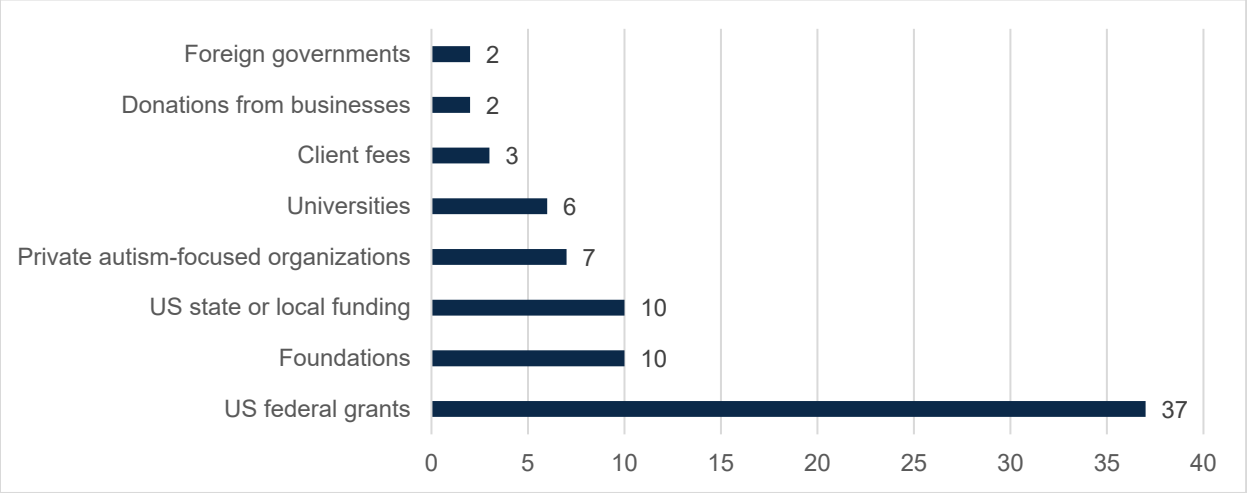


Note: Descriptions for 102 of 141 programs included information about the number of young adults served. Some program descriptions reported enrollment per class or cohort and others reported total enrollment over several years. We list enrollment per cohort in Figure 2 whenever that was provided or we were able to estimate it. However, Figure 2 also counts some programs based on their total enrollment when we did not have enough information to estimate enrollment per cohort.

B. How are those programs funded?

Fewer than half of the publications (70) in the literature review specify how the programs are funded. Some specify the funding source for the publications describing the program, but it is not clear if that same funding source supported implementation of the program. If the publications described a pilot program that seemed to have been developed and implemented for a research study and the publication described the funding source for the research, then we assumed that was also the funding source for the program. Among those 70 programs for which we know the source of funding, most are supported through grants from various U.S. federal offices. Figure 3 displays the range of funding sources and the number of programs funded through each source.

Figure 3. Programs' funding sources



Note: Six programs combined funding from multiple sources.

The extent to which the programs are funded through federal grants suggests the federal government serves an important role in determining the types of programs that are implemented. Table 2 specifies the federal offices that supported the programs through grants.

Table 2. Federal offices that supported programs through grants

Federal grant source	Number of programs
Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities	7
Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services	2
Center for Mental Health Services	1
Corporation for National and Community Service	1
Department of Education (unspecified office or grant program)	3
Institute of Education Sciences	3
Maternal and Child Health Bureau	6
National Center for Medical Rehabilitation Research	1
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development	1
National Institute of Mental Health	4
National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke	1
National Institutes of Health (unspecified office or center)	2
National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) (previously National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research)	10
National Science Foundation	3

Note: Some programs were funded through multiple federal grant sources and are counted multiple times. An audio cuing program was jointly funded by the Maternal and Child Bureau and the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Project TEAM was funded through grants from NIDILRR, the National Center for Medical Rehabilitation Research, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, and the National Institutes of Health. A study involving several self-determination curricula was funded through grants from NIDILRR and the Institute of Education Sciences. Supported Employment and Supported Education for Emerging Adults was funded by grants from NIDILRR and the Center for Mental Health Services. Project SEARCH received funding from a federal disability agency, but the publication did not specify which.

C. What subset of those programs, models, or strategies serve or served young adults on the autism spectrum? What are the common features of that subset?

Most programs identified in the literature review served young adults on the autism spectrum. We categorized each description of a program according to whether it served young adults on the autism spectrum, including those diagnosed with Asperger's or Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), and whether it also served young adults with other developmental disabilities, intellectual disabilities, or disabilities that belong to other categories. Eleven programs provided enough information to confirm that they met the inclusion criteria for the literature review, but insufficient information to accurately describe their participants. None of the programs included young adults without a disability diagnosis or suspected disability. Table 3 shows the distribution of young adults served across the programs. Of these programs, 72 were limited to autism (including Asperger's and PDD-NOS), 21 specifically included autism as well as other conditions (whether development disabilities, both intellectual and development disabilities, or a wider range of disabilities), and 48 did not specifically include autism.

Table 3. Disabilities of young adults served by programs, as described in the literature

Diagnosis	Number of programs
Developmental disabilities	**78**
Autism, Asperger's, or PDD-NOS only	72
Specifically including autism	2
Intellectual disabilities	**17**
Intellectual and developmental disabilities	**17**
Specifically including autism	5
Range of disability diagnoses	**18**
Including developmental disabilities	12
Specifically including autism	10
Including intellectual disabilities	1
Including intellectual and developmental disabilities	5
Specifically including autism	4
Not defined	**11**

We found few systematic differences between the programs that served young adults on the autism spectrum and those that did not. The programs that served young adults on the autism spectrum used similar approaches and served similar numbers of young adults as other programs (see Table 4). More than half of the programs serving young adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities that did not specifically include autism provided work experiences, while only about a quarter of those programs that *only* served young adults on the spectrum provided work experiences. There is no difference in the size of the programs that served young adults on the autism spectrum compared to those that served young adults with other intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Table 4. Distribution of characteristics of program recipients

Characteristic	Only those on the autism spectrum	Specifically including those on the autism spectrum	Not specifically including those on the autism spectrum
Number of programs	**72**	**21**	**48**
Program component			
Soft skills training	34	7	20
Job search assistance, job development, or job training	27	11	17
Coaching or mentoring	28	12	20
Work experience	18	11	23
Transition planning support	11	0	5
Employer support or training	2	1	1
Mental health support	3	1	1
Occupational training	2	0	3
Assistive technology	2	1	1
Program size (number of people served)			
1–5	17	7	8
6-10	11	1	3
11–20	4	1	6
21–40	11	1	5
41-80	4	5	4
81-120	0	0	0
121-400	1	2	1
401 or more	6	1	3
Not reported	18	4	17

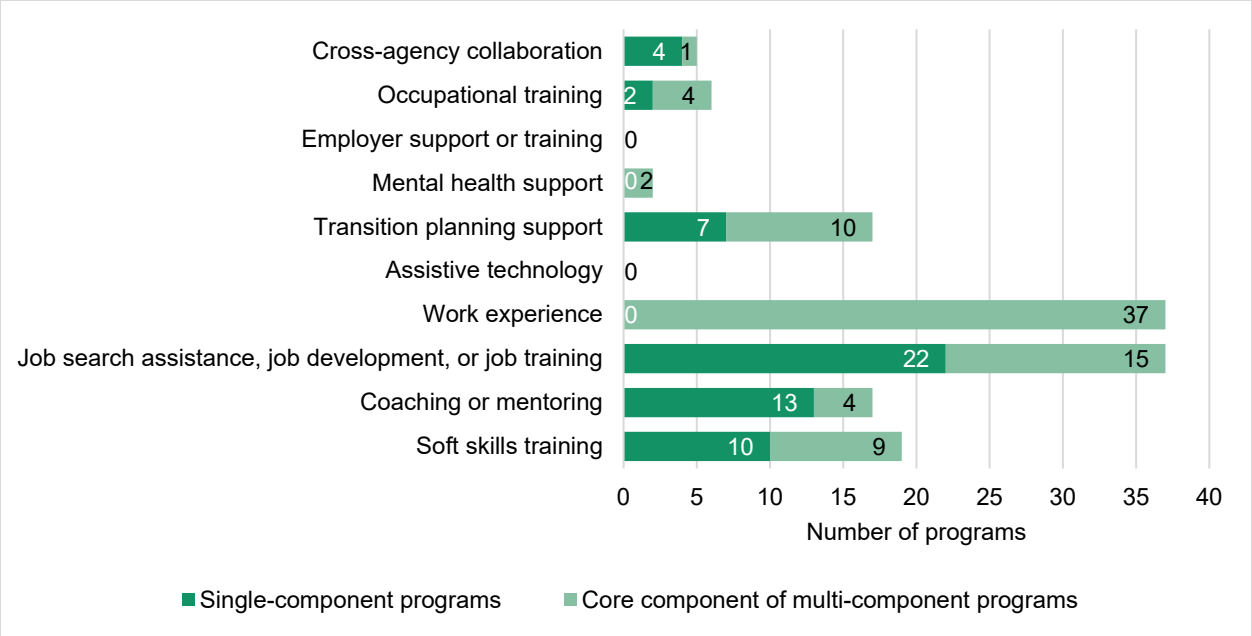
Note: Programs are counted as only serving young adults on the autism spectrum if all recipients were on the autism spectrum. Programs are counted as specifically including those on the autism spectrum if at least some of the recipients were on the autism spectrum but some were not. Programs are counted as not specifically including those on the autism spectrum if they served young adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities but either did not serve any young adults on the autism spectrum or we cannot confirm that they served any young adults on the autism spectrum; this includes the 11 programs for which the recipients were too vaguely defined to classify.

D. What features or components of those programs, models, and strategies have been considered contributors to their success?

Although a related literature review examines which interventions were effective in improving employment outcomes and identify any program components that are common across effective interventions, we sought to understand which features or components are most important to each intervention. The publications rarely state explicitly which component the authors or program developers thought was most important and would lead to its success. Instead, our best mechanism to infer what component they thought was most important is to identify the core component within each program. This

is easy to do when the programs only deliver a single service. For those programs with multiple components, we cataloged the component that seemed central to the theory of change based on its emphasis within the program description and the amount of time the program dedicated to delivering that service compared to others. Figure 4 shows the frequency with which each component was delivered as the sole component of a program or as the central component of a multi-component program.

Figure 4. Programs' central components



The Center on Secondary Education for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (CSESA) program is, by definition, a multi-component intervention and is not captured in Figure 4. CSESA's core feature is delivering multiple components (including social skills training, mentoring, and transition support) (Odom et al., 2014). Hence, we could not classify any of the services as more central to its success than another.

Work experience, either paid or unpaid, emerged as a widely used and widely prioritized service component. Many work experiences also offered opportunities to develop soft skills, and some were paired with coaching or other strategies. Job search assistance, job development, or job training was an equally common component. The many programs providing virtual or video-based training on specific work tasks were classified as having job training as their primary component. IPS was the only program developed around mental health supports (though it was described in two publications), and no programs emphasized assistive technology nor supports or training for employers as the focal component to improve outcomes for young adults with developmental disabilities.

E. What are some of the common barriers that programs face?

The programs summarized in the literature faced numerous barriers to delivering their services that make it difficult to sustain or scale the programs. Descriptions of 53 of the programs included obstacles to delivering services to additional young adults through larger or additional cohorts. The programs faced challenges related to cost and staffing, training, establishing partnerships, and recruiting young adults.

Additionally, many of the programs identified features of their services that did not meet expectations and would require adjustment before the program would be appropriate for replication or scaling.

Many of the programs delivered multiple or intensive services, and the associated staff time can be very expensive. For example, video modeling and other technology-based programs require a high initial investment to create and edit the videos or software and make them available on devices for each participant (Hayes et al., 2015; Kellems and Morningstar, 2012; Kwon and Lee, 2016; Walker et al., 2016). Having an incomplete assortment of videos can limit the programs' relevance and they often need to develop videos or games focused on additional tasks or skills as they expand to serve more young adults, so it can take a long time before the programs stop incurring new development costs (Bross et al., 2019; Kwon and Lee, 2016). Similarly, family-based programs need to develop and support separate curricula for young adults and their parents or caregivers (Kirby et al., 2021). Other programs provide participants with consistent one-on-one support until they master tasks (Bennett, 2013; Gilson and Carter, 2016; Myers et al., 2019). In some cases, programs could replace some of the human support with technology, but that is not appropriate in all cases (Gilson and Carter, 2016; McLaren et al., 2017; Myers et al., 2019). Many of these programs aim to offset these costs by securing external funding, but some pass the costs on to families through program participation fees (McLaren et al., 2017).

A few programs rely on people other than program staff to deliver the program, and training them can be challenging. Training and buy-in from school personnel was an implementation obstacle for two programs (Athamanah and Cushing, 2019; Shogren et al., 2018). For example, in a peer-mediated school-based intervention, students on the autism spectrum were paired with neurotypical classmates to complete work within the building, such as delivering mail. However, this intervention requires specific training for school personnel to support the pairings and placement (Athamanah and Cushing, 2019). One program relies on employers to identify and meet young adult employees' needs, making the intervention difficult to implement consistently (Burgess and Cimera, 2014). Three programs rely on parents or caregivers to deliver key aspects of the program, and providing consistent and effective training for parents and caregivers was a challenge (Hatfield et al., 2016, 2017; Kurtz, 2016; Sreckovic et al., 2020). Without effective training, program staff cannot be confident that the intervention is being implemented as intended. Missouri's statewide policy initiative, Show-Me-Careers, relied on integrating resources across state systems, which is difficult for states to accomplish (McVeigh et al., 2017).

Several programs depend on partnerships with schools or employers to deliver services. Six programs reported this as a challenge (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2018; Molfenter et al., 2017; Molina and Demchak, 2015; Rammler and Ouimette, 2016; Wehman et al., 2017, 2020). Not only does Project SEARCH require a partnership with an employer where young adults can participate in work experiences, but the employer's leadership must have strong and consistent buy-in throughout the duration of the nine-month program (Wehman et al., 2017).

Recruiting young adults to participate was a reported barrier to implementing or expanding several programs. Programs struggled to attract participants for a variety of reasons. Two programs require participants to commit to spending long hours at workplaces (Allen et al., 2012; Myers and Cox, 2020). One program is not well known in the community (Dean, 2018). Programs that serve high school students also struggle to convince parents and caregivers to enroll their children while they are still in high school (Rammler and Ouimette, 2016). These tended to be smaller programs, but one served 26 young adults.

Many of the programs described in the literature are pilot programs that are not ready for replication or scaling. The manuscripts describing these programs noted aspects of the program design that did not adequately meet the needs of the young adult participants. In some cases, the programs might be appropriate as is for some young adults, but they would require modification to meet the needs of a more varied audience (Bross et al., 2019; Connor, 2017; Kellems and Morningstar, 2012). For example, video modeling is only appropriate for certain work-based activities (Kellems and Morningstar, 2012). Two programs may need to be delivered over a longer period of time and with additional supports to meet participants' needs (Connor, 2018; Lee et al., 2019). In other cases, the programs failed to meet the needs of its current participants (Allen et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2019; Trepagnier et al., 2011). For example, participants' poor workplace performance during a program in which young adults received audio cues to support their work as mascots limits its eligibility for replication (Allen et al., 2012). Two pilot virtual programs identified software usability issues that would need to be addressed before scaling. (Politis et al., 2017; Trepagnier et al., 2011).

Even programs that were no longer in a pilot stage encountered challenges that suggest a need to refine the program before scaling. The initial study of Better OutcOmes & Successful Transitions for Autism (BOOST-A), an online interactive program, identified software usability issues; those appeared to have been addressed by the time of a later study, but new challenges emerged because the program relied on parents for face-to-face support (Hatfield et al., 2016, 2017).

IV. Conclusions and next steps

A wide range of programs has been delivered to support the employment outcomes of young adults with developmental disabilities in English-speaking countries and described in publications since 2011. More than half these programs exclusively serve young adults on the autism spectrum. A separate report identifies which of these programs have shown to improve outcomes through rigorous evaluations and will seek to identify any patterns in the services delivered by the most effective interventions.

The current review identified several important gaps in the literature on programs to support the employment outcomes of young adults with developmental disabilities. Very few programs include mental health supports, and even fewer include services to improve employers' ability to hire and support these young adults. These are underexplored strategies that might warrant additional attention or investment. There is also a shortage of established, replicable programs; many are resource-intensive or underdeveloped. There is also very limited information about how these programs are funded. If programs exist that include mental health supports or employer services or that serve varied clients, the field would benefit from more information about them. The field would also benefit from additional investment into some of the pilot programs to help them become better suited for replication, evaluation, and, if found to be effective, scaling.

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Appendix A: Database Search Strategy

The first step of our literature search was to search within electronic databases for publications that might meet our inclusion criteria. The goal of the database search was to identify publications that meet our inclusion criteria without being overly broad, to avoid screening through an excessive volume of publications that do not meet the inclusion criteria. We developed the search terms listed in Table A.1, in consultation with a professional librarian. We identified a set of terms related to participants' age and disability status and the nature of the employment programs. The literature search retrieved two groups of publications: (1) publications whose abstracts included at least one term from each of the three categories and (2) publications whose abstracts included terms from the age and disability status lists and whose subjects were tagged as *occupational training*, *employee training*, or *employment of people with disabilities*. We considered expanding these lists to include additional terms but decided the additional terms were likely to pull in more irrelevant publications than relevant ones. For example, including "worker" as an alternative term in the age category would return publications about programs for much older populations.

Table A.1. Literature search terms used in the database search

	Terms related to age	Terms related to disability status	Terms related to employment
Searched within abstracts	Any of: • youth • "young adult*" • teen*	Any of: • Autis* • Asperger* • "Pervasive developmental disorder*" • "Pervasive development disorder*" • "pervasive child development disorder*" • "PDD-NOS" • Rett* • "Childhood disintegrative disorder*" • "Heller's syndrome*" • "Heller syndrome*" • "intellectual disab*" • "developmental disab*" • "Spectrum Disorder*" • "cognitive challenges" • "cognitive disabilit*" • "cognitive disorder"	Any of: • program* • intervention • demonstration • pilot • strateg* • approach* • model* • policy • policies • initiative • trial • training Used within four words of any of: • employment • pre-employment • vocation* • occupation* • career • rehabilitat*
Searched within subjects			Any of: • "occupational training" • "employee training" • "employment of people with disabilities"

An asterisk (*) indicates truncation in literature search databases. This search technique efficiently searches for all forms of the word that share the given root. For example, "teen*" will return "teen(s)," "teenager(s)," and "teenage."

We conducted the search in 11 electronic databases:

- Academic Search Premier
- APA PsycInfo
- Business Source Corporate Plus
- CINAHL
- Cochrane Systematic Reviews
- ERIC
- MEDLINE
- ProQuest Dissertations
- SAGE
- Scopus
- SocINDEX

Appendix B: Organizational Website Search Strategy

The second step of our search was to cull resources from the organizational websites. We identified several organizations in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand that promote employment outcomes for people with developmental disabilities, particularly those on the autism spectrum. We then hand searched each website for information—included in publications or as web page text—about programs, models, and strategies that organizations have used to support the employment outcomes of young adults on the autism spectrum or with other developmental disabilities. Table B.1 lists these organizations and the count of publications that we retrieved from each website that met our inclusion criteria.

Table B.1. Organizational websites

Organization	Website	Eligible publications retrieved
Administration for Community Living	https://acl.gov/	0
Academic Autism Spectrum Partnership in Research and Education (AASPIRE)	https://aaspire.org/	0
AJ Drexel Autism Institute	https://drexel.edu/autismoutcomes/publications-and-reports/	0
American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities	https://www.aaidd.org/news-policy/policy/position-statements/employment	0
Annual International Meeting of Autism Research (IMFAR)	https://www.iancommunity.org/international-meeting-autism-research-imfar	0
Asia Pacific Autism Conference	http://apac.autismcongress.org/	0
Asperger/Autism Network	https://www.aane.org/adults/employment/	1
Aspect (Australia)	https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/	0
Association of University Centers on Disabilities	https://www.aucd.org/	0
Australian Autism Alliance	https://australianautismalliance.org.au	0
Autism Job Club (Canada)	https://autismjobclub.ca/index.html	3
Autism NZ (New Zealand)	https://autismnz.org.nz/employment-transition-service/	0
Autism Ontario (Canada)	https://www.autismontario.com/	1
Autism Research Centre (Cambridge)	https://www.autismresearchcentre.com/	0
Autism Research Institute	https://www.autism.org/	0
Autism Self Advocacy Network	https://autisticadvocacy.org/	0
Autism Society National Conference	https://www.autism-society.org/get-involved/conference/	0
Autism Society	https://autism-society.org/	0
Autism Speaks	https://www.autismspeaks.org/	0

Organization	Website	Eligible publications retrieved
Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network	https://awnnetwork.org/	0
Child Mind Institute	https://childmind.org/	0
Disability:IN	https://disabilityin.org/	0
Disability Scoop	https://www.disabilityscoop.com/	3
DOL Office of Disability Employment Policy	https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/autism	0
Organization for Autism Research	https://researchautism.org/resources/hire-autism/	2
KTER Center Autism Technical Working Group	https://kter.org/research/autism-technical-working-group	0
Institute for Community Inclusion, UMass-Boston	https://www.thinkwork.org/	2
International Society for Autism Research	https://www.autism-insar.org/	0
Melwood	https://melwood.org/newsroom/news/	0
NARRTC (formerly known as the National Association of Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers)	https://narrtc.org/	0
National Autistic Society (UK)	https://www.autism.org.uk/	0
National Autistic Society's Professional Conference	https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/professional-development/training-and-conferences	0
National Autism Conference at Penn State	https://autism.outreach.psu.edu/	2
NeuroTalentWorks	https://www.neurotalentworks.org/	0
NEXT for AUTISM	https://www.nextforautism.org/	9
RespectAbility	https://www.respectability.org/	0
Specialisterne	https://www.us.specialisterne.com/	0
Spectrum News by the Simons Foundation	https://www.spectrumnews.org/	1
Spectrum Works	https://www.spectrumworks.org/	2
VCU Autism Center for Excellence	https://vcuautismcenter.org/research/database/listArticles.cfm	0
WorkSupport	https://worksupport.com/	8

Appendix C: Publications included

Table C.1 lists the 140 publications that met all inclusion criteria and are summarized in the report.

Table C.1. Publications meeting inclusion criteria and programs described

Citation	Program described
Allen, K. D., R. V. Burke, M. R. Howard, D. P. Wallace, and S. L. Bowen. "Use of Audio Cuing to Expand Employment Opportunities for Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Intellectual Disabilities." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, vol. 42, no. 11, 2012, pp. 2410–2419. doi:10.1007/s10803-012-1519-7.	Audio cuing intervention
Asperger/Autism Network. "LifeMAP Coaching." n.d. Available at https://www.aane.org/resources/adults/lifemap-coaching/. Accessed December 13, 2021.	Life Management Assistance Program (LifeMAP)
Athamanah, L. S., and L. S. Cushing. "Implementing a Peer-Mediated Intervention in a Work-Based Learning Setting for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders." *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, vol. 54, no. 2, 2019, pp. 196–210. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1217381.	Peer-mediation intervention
Autism Ontario. "Autism Ontario, Apex Academy Online Help Autistic Job Seekers and Employers with Autism Career Connections." November 3, 2021. Available at https://www.autismontario.com/news/autism-ontario-apex-academy-online-help-autistic-job-seekers-and-employers-autism-career. Accessed December 13, 2021.	Autism Career Connections
Babb, S., J. Gormley, D. McNaughton, and J. Light. "Enhancing Independent Participation Within Vocational Activities for an Adolescent with ASD Using AAC Video Visual Scene Displays." *Journal of Special Education Technology*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2019, pp. 120–132. doi:10.1177/0162643418795842.	Augmentative and alternative communication video visual scene display intervention
Baker-Ericzén, M. J., M. A. Fitch, M. Kinnear, M. M. Jenkins, E. W. Twamley, L. Smith, G. Montano, et al. "Development of the Supported Employment, Comprehensive Cognitive Enhancement, and Social Skills program for Adults on the Autism Spectrum: Results of Initial Study." Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, vol. 22, no. 1, 2018, pp. 6–19. doi:10.1177/1362361317724294.	Supported Employment, Comprehensive Cognitive Enhancement, and Social Skills program
Bennett, K. D. "Improving Vocational Skills of Students with Disabilities: Applications of Covert Audio Coaching." Teaching Exceptional Children, vol. 46, 2013, pp. 60–67. doi:10.1177/004005991304600207.	Covert audio coaching
Bennett, K. D., R. Ramasamy, and T. Honsberger. "The Effects of Covert Audio Coaching on Teaching Clerical Skills to Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2013a, pp. 585–593. doi:10.1007/s10803-012-1597-6.	Covert audio coaching
Bennett, K. D., R. Ramasamy, and T. Honsberger. "Further Examination of Covert Audio Coaching on Improving Employment Skills Among Secondary Students with Autism." *Journal of Behavioral Education*, vol. 22, 2013b, pp. 103–119. doi:10.1007/s10864-013-9168-2.	Covert audio coaching
Bieniek, E.J. "The Effectiveness of Video Modeling on Vocational Skill Development for High School Students Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder." Doctoral dissertation. Pittsburgh, PA: Robert Morris University, 2011. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED548905.	Video modeling intervention
Bross, L. A., J. C. Travers, V. D. Munandar, and M. Morningstar. "A Packaged Intervention to Improve Job Performance of a Competitively Employed Young Adult with Autism Spectrum Disorder." *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2020, pp. 227–239. doi:10.3233/JVR-201099.	Evidence-based practices package intervention

Citation	Program described
Bross, L. A., J. C. Travers, V. D. Munandar, and M. Morningstar. "Video Modeling to Improve Customer Service Skills of an Employed Young Adult With Autism." *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2019, pp. 226–235. doi:10.1177/1088357618805990.	Video modeling intervention
Burgess, S., and R. E. Cimera. "Employment Outcomes of Transition-Aged Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders: A State of the States Report." *American Journal on Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities*, vol. 119, no. 1, 2014, pp. 64–83. doi:10.1352/1944-7558-119.1.64.	Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services; evidence-based practices package intervention
Burke, R. V., K. D. Allen, M. R. Howard, D. Downey, M. G. Matz, and S. L. Bowen. "Tablet-Based Video Modeling and Prompting in the Workplace for Individuals with Autism." *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2013, pp. 1–14. doi:10.3233/JVR-120616.	VideoTote (video modeling)
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