

Building Essential Skills Together:

Developing Employment and Skill Building Opportunities for Adults of All Abilities

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Abstract

The purpose of this doctoral capstone project was to address the gap in vocational and life skill services for Autistic young adults during their transition to adulthood. At the Building Essential Skills Together nonprofit organization, there is a goal to address this need and offer inclusive supported employment and life skill programs to adults of all abilities. Participants in these programs included two Autistic young adults on the Building Essential Skills Together team. Both young adults participated in food truck and cleaning/maintenance supported employment opportunities, completed weekly concession skill building experiences, and hosted a virtual trivia night using their interests. One young adult also participated in a 5-week life skills program led by the doctoral capstone student. This project utilized visual scripts, modeling, and prompting techniques during supported employment and skill building opportunities, and vocational and life skills assessments were established for future evaluation and tracking purposes. The Assessment of Functional Living Skills (AFLS)- Vocational Protocol was modified for the nonprofit's food truck and cleaning/maintenance supported employment opportunities, and a non-standardized skills inventory was created for the life skills curriculum from the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process (4th ed.). Development and implementation of supported employment and life skills materials during this project were guided by the Ecological Human Performance Model and Strengths-Based Frame of Reference for Autistic Individuals. Site feedback was obtained through electronic surveys at the conclusion of the project and indicated that project materials and implementation promoted inclusivity, independence, confidence, growth, and meaning for team members, as well as a foundation for the nonprofit programs.

Keywords: Autistic, transition, supported employment, vocational skills, life skills

Building Essential Skills Together:

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Young adults with developmental disabilities and their caregivers identified employment as an area of difficulty during the transition to adulthood, as well as insufficient services to meet their transition needs. This area of difficulty is reflected in both the literature and in the Indianapolis area. The capstone site is a company providing comprehensive therapy services to youth and their families in the Brownsburg and Crawfordsville communities. The founders and owners of the capstone site identified the need to assist youth they serve in the transition to adulthood, leading to the creation of Building Essential Skills Together (B.E.S.T.). B.E.S.T. is a nonprofit organization with a mission to develop meaningful and purposeful employment and skill building opportunities for adults of all abilities.

The need for the B.E.S.T. program was informed through an informal needs assessment at the capstone site, discussions with current B.E.S.T. team members and advisory board, and a literature review. The informal needs assessment at the capstone site utilized the viewpoints and experiences of young adults with developmental disabilities and their caregivers through informal discussion. In addition, discussions with the B.E.S.T. advisory board, young adult team members, and the young adults' caregivers established the current three programs. Furthermore, the doctoral capstone student completed a literature review assessing the effects of supported employment and skill building on young adults with developmental disabilities. The literature review results align with the capstone site's findings.

Two young adults currently serve on the B.E.S.T. team, both having a diagnosis of Autism spectrum disorder (ASD). ASD has been defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder represented by sensory challenges, problems with social skills and communication, and repetitive interests and behaviors (E. Lee et al., 2020). These mentioned characteristics cause problems

with functioning and performance of daily occupations for Autistic individuals, including employment. Difficulties with social skills and communication, such as interpreting social cues and observing the verbal and nonverbal communication of others, has been cited as a barrier to maintaining employment for Autistic individuals (Lerman et al., 2017). The rate of Autistic individuals transitioning to adulthood each year is approximately 50,000, and many will experience difficulty obtaining and maintaining employment (Anderson et al., 2018). Furthermore, caregivers report that finding meaningful jobs is difficult for their Autistic adolescents and young adults (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015). Difficulty obtaining and maintaining employment is a problem in the Indianapolis area, as caregivers in this area have expressed that there are lacking vocational services for their teen and young adult children (D. Winkler, personal communication, April 13, 2021). Due to these difficulties, Autistic individuals and their caregivers, as well as individuals with other disabilities, often need assistance from healthcare professionals through vocational supports and transition planning.

B.E.S.T. is newly established, and the primary focus area of this capstone experience was Program and Policy Development. The doctoral capstone student assisted in the development of B.E.S.T.'s three current programs for adults of all abilities, those programs including supported employment, life skills training, and volunteer opportunities. The secondary focus area of the capstone project was Clinical Skills, and the doctoral capstone student achieved this focus area through working with the young adults currently participating in the B.E.S.T. programs.

Needs Assessment

Prior to the establishment of B.E.S.T., the capstone site owners conducted a needs assessment with caregivers of teens and young adults with disabilities. Through formal and informal conversation, caregivers identified the need for inclusion and meaningful participation

for their young adult children as they transition to adulthood; however, the caregivers also identified limited services to help their children achieve these needs. B.E.S.T. was then created to provide meaningful experiences to all individuals in the Indianapolis community. After the establishment of B.E.S.T., the B.E.S.T. Board of Directors, young adult team members, and team members' caregivers held informal and formal discussions to review the organization's needs and plans. These discussions led to the creation of B.E.S.T.'s current operations and programs.

Capstone Site Assessment

The need for the B.E.S.T. program arose in 2020 when the capstone site owners spoke with caregivers of Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) clients they serve through informal discussion (D. Winkler, personal communication, April 13, 2021). According to the capstone site mentor, capstone site owners meet with clients' caregivers quarterly to discuss transitions and goals (D. Winkler, personal communication, April 13, 2021). At these discussions, caregivers of two clients inquired about how their teen children could remain involved at the capstone site and participate in meaningful occupations such as volunteer or group experiences (D. Winkler, personal communication, April 13, 2021). The capstone site owners then spoke with additional caregivers of teens with disabilities, and these caregivers identified the same need for inclusion and meaningful participation in occupations as their teens age (D. Winkler, personal communication, April 13, 2021). Throughout these informal discussions, the capstone site owners inquired about caregivers goals' for their children, available services, aspects of services they are satisfied and dissatisfied with, and any apparent gaps in services to assess the needs in this population (D. Winkler, personal communication, April 13, 2021). Consistent with the reviewed literature, caregivers stated that services for their children were limited once they

reached a certain age and transitioned into adulthood, recognizing employment as an area of need (D. Winkler, personal communication, June 22, 2020).

After informal discussions, two teen clients became mentors at a social skills group at the capstone site (D. Winkler, personal communication, April 13, 2021). In addition, three other young adults joined the capstone site in the summer of 2020 for part-time employment and involvement prior to the creation of B.E.S.T. (D. Winkler, personal communication, April 13, 2021). It was through these experiences that the capstone site gained first-hand experience and knowledge for their needs assessment (D. Winkler, personal communication, April 13, 2021). The capstone site owners then began researching services they could offer that aligned with their mission (D. Winkler, personal communication, April 13, 2021). The capstone site owners also reviewed the literature and found that 19.3 percent of people with a disability were employed in 2019 compared to 66.3 percent of people without a disability (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). B.E.S.T. was established to meet the need of these individuals, as well individuals of all abilities in the surrounding community.

B.E.S.T. Team Discussions

The B.E.S.T. Board of Directors, young adult team members, and team members' caregivers held many informal and formal discussions pertaining to the purpose, plan, and needs of B.E.S.T. After these discussions, three programs were established within the B.E.S.T. nonprofit organization. As mentioned previously, these three programs are supported employment, life skills training, and volunteer programs. At the inception of B.E.S.T., two supported employment opportunities, which include the B.E.S.T. Burgers and Fries food truck and More Than Mops cleaning and maintenance service, were created. Additionally, caregivers of current B.E.S.T. team members identified a need for their children to learn additional life

skills beyond the offered supported employment opportunities to support improved participation and independence (D. Winkler, personal communication, February 1, 2021). Furthermore, discussion among the B.E.S.T. Board of Directors led to the development of B.E.S.T.'s volunteer program (L. Knez, personal communication, February 16, 2021). All individuals, regardless of ability, have the opportunity to volunteer with B.E.S.T. on an event-to-event basis (L. Knez, personal communication, March 1, 2021). Due to aspects such as disability benefits or waivers, age, interest, or individuals' abilities, the supported employment program may not be the best fit for some participants (L. Knez, personal communication, February 16, 2021). The volunteer program provides experiences similar to those of the supported employment program and is an option for individuals to participate at their convenience while still gaining vocational and social skills.

For this project, the doctoral capstone student assisted B.E.S.T. in further developing existing supported employment opportunities and creating a life skills training curriculum for adults of all abilities. The doctoral capstone student incorporated the current team members' skills, interests, strengths, and caregiver input to create program curriculum. Sustainability and program awareness are two additional needs that were identified upon the doctoral capstone student's arrival on site (D. Winkler, personal communication, January 18, 2021). To further support B.E.S.T.'s needs, the doctoral capstone student also established a sustainability plan through creation of virtual curriculum templates and a fundraising event that can be replicated in the future with B.E.S.T. team members. Furthermore, the doctoral capstone student assisted in the development of marketing materials to promote awareness of the nonprofit organization and its mission within the surrounding community.

Literature Review

In this literature review, the benefits of employment, the types of community vocational programs, and the availability of community-level vocational assistance was first explored. The benefits of life skills programs, as well as the descriptions of and needs for life skills programs were then examined. To conclude, occupational therapy's role in addressing vocational and life skills in young adults with developmental disabilities was analyzed.

Across the reviewed literature, health promotion, improved quality of life, and financial independence were themes of employment for individuals of all abilities. There are vocational rehabilitation and job coaching services offered at the community level to facilitate employment acquisition and maintenance, but there is a theme of dissatisfaction with the quality and quantity of vocational supports for Autistic young adults and adults. In addition, there are underlying themes of fear and anxiety associated with the transition to employment for Autistic individuals and their caregivers. Harmful effects that may potentially result from unemployment, as described in the literature, are poor physical and mental health, loss of life skills, homelessness, or lack of independent living.

Overall life skill acquisition is correlated with greater self-efficacy, better health outcomes, and more independence at home and in the community (Keenan et al., 2014). In contrast, researchers have found that poor life skill development is associated with difficulty obtaining jobs, friendships, and housing. Individuals with disabilities have been described as experiencing difficulty in instinctively learning life skills (Chiang et al., 2017), and they could experience negative outcomes associated with underdeveloped life skills. Specifically, caregivers of Autistic young adults have cited their children as needing support in acquiring financial, home management, and relationship skills (Chiang et al., 2017). Occupational therapists (OTs) have

experience in addressing skills related to occupations, including work, self-care, and independent living skills, at home and in the community. OT's training in activity analysis and occupational analysis further strengthens their ability to address these skills. However, very few young adults utilize OTs in their transition out of high school to address their vocational and life skill needs (Eismann et al., 2017). While the benefits of employment and life skills programs have been cited in the literature for individuals with disabilities, the accessibility and utilization of these services are lacking.

Most information regarding employment, vocational supports, and life skills training examined in this literature review focused on the population of Autistic young adults and adults. The doctoral capstone student made this specification in literature on account of the B.E.S.T. team members' influence on the developing curriculum. Team members currently participating in B.E.S.T. have a diagnosis of ASD and have shaped the creation of program supports and curriculum with their interests, skills, and abilities. In the future, B.E.S.T. will encompass a more diverse group of team members with varying abilities. However, this literature review reflects the current state of the capstone project and its participating team members.

Employment

Benefits of Employment

The transition to adulthood can be overwhelming for all individuals. Life roles and responsibilities may change, and for people with disabilities, services are often changed or interrupted. Transitioning into the workforce is one path for individuals entering adulthood, and securing employment may contribute to individuals' stress during this period of transition. Once acquired and maintained, employment can provide all people with improved "sense of purpose, financial independence, and quality of life" (Wong et al., 2020, p. 1). Employment can also be a

source of friendship, as researchers have found that approximately 82% of individuals have at least five close friendships at work (Solomon, 2020). In addition, employment provides individuals with an opportunity to display their strengths. E. Lee et al. (2020) found that engaging strengths can promote better self-esteem and quality of life in Autistic young adults. According to their caregivers, Autistic individuals are often stigmatized and viewed more frequently for their problems rather than their strengths, including from employers (E. Lee et al., 2020). Employment opportunities would provide Autistic adults, such as the current participants in B.E.S.T., a space to further develop and display strengths beyond their homes. Furthermore, meaningful employment is a way to promote health, as unemployment has been associated with negative physical and mental health outcomes such as “chronic stress, anxiety, and depression” (Kaya et al., 2016, p. 74).

Without employment, individuals of all abilities may be at an increased risk of experiencing poor physical and mental health outcomes, social isolation, or difficulty with friendships (Kaya et al., 2016; Solomon, 2020). In addition, a lack of financial income and independence may create barriers to autonomy, independent living, and safety. Researchers have found that Autistic adults are at an increased risk of homelessness due to unemployment (Solomon, 2020), and homelessness may negatively affect physical and mental health outcomes. Some individuals who are unemployed may remain living at home with family, friends, or guardians, preventing them from experiencing complete independent living and autonomy. Moreover, Solomon (2020) found that unemployment may lead to a loss of vocational and life skills due to a lack of application. The literature clearly describes the benefits of employment and potential harms of unemployment facing individuals of all abilities.

Community Vocational Assistance

Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

Vocational supports for individuals with disabilities can be provided in community settings through state-federal programs, and these programs are termed vocational rehabilitation (VR) services (Kaya et al., 2016). Individuals with diverse abilities can receive VR services in preparation for employment, and these services may include: “assessment, job placement, on-the-job support, vocational and rehabilitation counseling, job search assistance, and assistive technology” (Kaya et al., 2016, p. 75). According to Kaya et al. (2016), Autistic young adults who receive these services more frequently are more likely to secure employment. In contrast, according to Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015), caregivers and their Autistic adolescents reported no significant benefits of vocational training on employment. These caregivers and adolescents reported that these programs need more individualization (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015).

Job Coaching.

Job coaches have been an additional resource for individuals with disabilities during employment and are an example of a supported employment opportunity (Kaya et al., 2016). Job coaches act as the connection between employee and employer, teaching and supervising the employee while also providing relevant information of the employee to the employer (Anderson et al., 2018). Within the job coach role, individuals help support employer and employee interactions and create a more conducive work environment (Anderson et al., 2018). Anderson et al. (2018) state that on-the-job support, specifically from the vocational provider, is beneficial to both the employee with a disability and their employer.

Availability of Vocational Supports

A theme of dissatisfaction with the quality and quantity of supports for

Autistic individuals transitioning to employment emerged from the reviewed literature. Focus groups conducted by Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015) demonstrated the themes of fear and anxiety from both Autistic adolescents and their caregivers due to lack of service availability when transitioning out of high school. These same focus groups also disclosed that it was the caregivers securing employment for their young adults the majority of the time through networking and previous connections rather than from school or community supports, assuming additional responsibilities in their caregiver role (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015). Additionally, answers from caregivers and young adults in a different study were consistent with this theme of fear and anxiety, citing that a decline of services while transitioning out of high school was concerning (Anderson et al., 2018). While the benefits of the available programs and supports has been documented, these benefits cannot be effectively obtained until adequate services are offered.

Funding, time, and knowledge are cited reasons for a lack of sufficient and effective services for this population. Healthcare professionals have disclosed that insurance reimbursement policies act as a barrier when providing vocational services to this population, as they are not reimbursed for the additional time it takes to address complex health needs for someone such as an Autistic individual (Anderson et al., 2018). Thompson et al. (2018) also found funding as a barrier to availability of services. In addition, both healthcare professionals and high school teachers reported lack of time and institutional support as reasons for not having autism-specific training that would help provide more effective vocational services (Anderson et al., 2018). Additional time could provide more opportunities to obtain autism-specific knowledge

needed to individualize programs and effectively support young adults and adults seeking employment. Thompson et al. (2018) also found lack of consistency and evidence as a reason for limited services.

Life Skills

Benefits of Life Skills Programs

Acquiring life skills is important for all individuals across a spectrum of abilities. Life skills have been described as skills necessary for daily life in the home and community and can be categorized into “self-care and domestic living, recreation and leisure, social interaction, employment, and community participation” (Chiang et al., 2017). Successful life skill development can promote more independent living, as well as positive health outcomes, self-efficacy, self-management, and decision making (Keenan et al., 2014). However, individuals with disabilities may have more difficulty than their typically-developing peers in life skill acquisition due to medical or cognitive impairments or a lack of skill building experiences and opportunities (Keenan et al., 2014).

Challenges in life skill development are associated with negative health outcomes, social isolation, and unemployment (Keenan et al., 2014). Hong et al. (2015) found that life skills are associated with a greater number of work opportunities, improved social reciprocity, and more independent living (p. 2793). Without developed life skills, individuals may experience difficulty obtaining jobs, friendships, and housing. Furthermore, Hong et al. (2015) found that caregivers whose children had strong life skills reported less parenting stress than caregivers whose children had poor life skills.

Classification of Life Skills Programs

Skill building for independent living can be completed in various settings and formats and may comprise a diverse set of skills. For adolescents, life skills training can be completed within the school environment, taught in general or special education classrooms (Chiang et al., 2017). According to Chiang et al. (2017), 77.4 percent of their Autistic adolescent participants had received life skills training services in the school setting (p. 1114). Adolescents, as well as young adults and adults across the lifespan, may also receive individual instruction or participate in community settings for life skill development (Chiang et al., 2017). Participation in community settings where there is opportunity for real-world application has been associated with improved life skill acquisition (Keenan et al., 2014). However, services outside of the school environment are not utilized as often. Chiang et al. (2017) found that participation from their Autistic adolescents in individual instruction and community settings was less frequent at 0.4 percent and 0.7 percent, respectively (p. 1115).

Within the previously mentioned settings, individuals may receive life skill instruction in a one-on-one or group format (Keenan et al., 2014). During one-on-one instruction, an individual's needs, interests, and abilities influence the instruction, creating an individualized program (Keenan et al., 2014). In contrast, group formats are not as individualized and commonly involve a coach instructing multiple individuals with "direct instruction, role play, and peer modeling" (Keenan et al., 2014, p. 124). However, Keenan et al. (2014) did not find a difference in effectiveness between individual and group instruction in their life skills program. As these authors mentioned, some individuals may benefit more from one type of instruction than the other due to abilities, needs, or interests (Keenan et al., 2014).

As mentioned previously, life skills can be defined as skills required for daily living at home and in the community (Chiang et al., 2017). There are numerous skills that may be addressed within life skills programs to promote greater independence in these areas for individuals of all abilities. Skills targeted in life skill programs may include “nutrition and cooking, money management, community mobility, recreation and leisure, communication, organization skills, independent living, career planning, and friendships and relationships (Keenan et al., 2014, p. 125). Within these content areas, individuals can make adaptations and incorporate supports as needed, as well as practice using assistive technology or adaptive devices during skill performance (Keenan et al., 2014).

Need for Life Skills Programs

Researchers have found that many individuals with disabilities do not instinctively learn life skills, often requiring the assistance of others (Chiang et al., 2017). Autistic individuals, specifically, often demonstrate skills that do not meet expected developmental milestones (Chiang et al., 2017). Due to these difficulties, Autistic youth and adolescents or individuals with other disabilities can engage in life skills programs at schools or in the community. However, not all youth have the opportunity to participate in life skills programs. As was previously mentioned, 77.4 percent of Autistic adolescent participants in Chiang et al. (2017)’s study had received life skill instruction in a school setting, and only 0.7 percent of those same participants had received life skills instruction in a community setting (pp.1114-1115). Chiang et al. (2017) also found that Autistic young adults with an intellectual disability (ID) are more likely to receive life skill instruction than Autistic young adults who do not have ID. While all Autistic individuals may experience challenges with life skills, it may be more difficult for some to receive the assistance they need. Furthermore, receiving life skill instruction within schools has

become more difficult in recent years due to the implementation of Common Core State Standards, shifting the focus of instruction to primarily mathematics, art, and literature and away from life skills (Chiang et al., 2017).

Caregivers of Autistic young adults have identified the need for life skill instruction during the transition to adulthood, regardless if their child did or did not receive life skills training in school (Chiang et al., 2017). According to Chiang et al. (2017), approximately 80 percent of caregivers whose children had received life skill instruction in school and approximately 30 percent of caregivers whose children had not received life skill instruction in school reported a need for their child to engage in life skills programs after high school (p. 1117). For Autistic young adults who did receive life skill instruction in school, their caregivers identified home care skills and financial skills to be priorities in life skill instruction (Chiang et al., 2017). For Autistic young adults who did not receive life skill instruction in school, their caregivers identified financial skills and relationship skills to be priorities for their life skill instruction (Chiang et al., 2017). These content areas, as well as other content areas previously mentioned, can be addressed with individuals. Determining which skills to address may be reliant upon the individual and their specific needs, wants, or abilities.

Occupational Therapy's Role

Occupational therapy can address vocational support and life skills training for individuals with disabilities who are transitioning into adulthood or are already in adulthood within the community. OTs are client-centered and focus on promoting health and maximizing independence in occupations, including work, self-care, and independent living at home and in the community. OTs have experience working with young adults with disabilities, including ASD, in promoting involvement in paid and unpaid work experiences, developing social and

daily living skills, and consulting on and providing assistive technology (Eismann et al., 2017). According to Eismann et al. (2017), OTs typically contribute to the transition of Autistic young adults into adulthood by addressing “upper extremity function, self-care skills, and social skills” (p. 6). OTs can use these three areas to promote positive employment outcomes during supported employment opportunities and life skills development, as all are essential for successful functioning in the workplace.

OTs’ training in activity analysis and occupational analysis strengthens their role in vocational and life skills programs for individuals of all abilities. Activity analysis is defined as assessing the “typical activity demands within a given culture” (American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.[AOTA], 2020, p. 20) for a specific task and does not take the context of the activity or individual into consideration. OTs are instructed in this type of analysis, assessing and breaking down activities into sequential steps for their clients. OTs are also trained in occupational analysis where they analyze the characteristics, skills, and performance patterns specific to the individual performing the activity, as well as the context in which the activity is being performed (AOTA, 2020). As mentioned previously, OTs are client-centered and are trained to focus on the individual, including an individual’s needs, wants, goals, personal factors, and social, cultural, physical, and temporal contexts. Training in both activity and occupational analysis can be of use in addressing vocational and life skills, as OTs can tailor instruction to individuals’ areas of need, strengths, and abilities.

OTs have the experience and training to address the vocational and life skill needs of Autistic individuals and individuals with other disabilities during the transition into adulthood, yet very few young adults utilize these services. According to Eismann et al. (2017), approximately 7.5% of students with disabilities receive occupational therapy services during

their transition out of high school into adulthood. OTs have the opportunity to strengthen their role and contributions to young adults with disabilities during this transition period out of high school, facilitating improved health, well-being, and independence through vocational support and skill building opportunities. OTs can also apply their skills and use vocational supports and skill building with older populations, promoting growth, independence, and productive aging in individuals with disabilities across the lifespan.

Gap Analysis

Within the reviewed literature, limited services for Autistic young adults transitioning into adulthood was a theme that emerged. While researchers have cited the benefits of employment, such as better physical and mental health, financial independence, and a stronger sense of meaning, individuals with disabilities are often at a disadvantage at securing employment and obtaining these outcomes due to lack of available services as well as stigmatization. Researchers have also cited the role OTs play with this population during the transition to adulthood; however, OTs are not effectively being utilized for vocational support and skill building during this transition (Eismann et al., 2017). Autistic individuals and their caregivers have identified the need for more vocational services and supports, as well as life skill development, to promote independence and participation across all occupations. Therefore, the purpose of this project was to further develop B.E.S.T.'S existing programs, supplying vocational supports and materials and a life skills training curriculum for adults of all abilities.

Guiding Model and Frame of Reference

Ecological Human Performance Model

To ensure meaningful and effective programs and experiences were created for B.E.S.T and its members, the doctoral capstone student drew upon the Ecological Human

Performance (EHP) model for this project. The EHP model focuses on the “skills, abilities, and experiences of the person; social, cultural, physical, and temporal contexts; tasks; and performance” (J. Lee, 2010, p. 208). Within this project, team members’ abilities, strengths, and skills determined the supports and modifications made to existing programs, as well as guided the creation of new programs. Social, cultural, physical, and temporal contexts also had a significant influence on the modification and creation of programs, as each team member has unique social needs, environmental modifications and supports, and stressors related to this time of transition into adulthood. Team members also have differing views and interests in regard to vocations or life skills that may be shaped by their caregivers, families, and culture which should be taken into consideration. It is also important to note the large role caregivers have in these team members’ lives. Obtaining feedback from caregivers in addition to their children was important when developing vocational supports and the life skills curriculum. Ultimately, the components of the team member and their environments can influence both the tasks they engage in and how they engage in those tasks, as well as affect their performance in the role of worker, participant, or volunteer. The EHP model also utilizes intervention approaches of “establish/restore; modify/adapt; alter/prevent; and create” (J. Lee, 2010, p. 214), which were used when developing interventions or supports for the vocational and life skills programs to ensure a good person-program fit.

Strength-Based Frame of Reference for Autistic Individuals

The doctoral capstone student also utilized the Strength-Based Frame of Reference for Autistic Individuals when completing this project. Competence, autonomy, and relatedness are the three core components of this frame of reference and are cited to be essential to the well-being and goal achievement of an Autistic individual (Kramer et al., 2020). In addition, this

frame of reference outlines three assumptions that OTs should follow when interacting with Autistic individuals. The first assumption is that all individuals have intrinsic strengths they want to evolve (Kramer et al., 2020). The second assumption is that motivation drives participation and performance in activities chosen by an individual (Kramer et al., 2020). The third and final assumption is that strengths, talents, and abilities create meaning in life (Kramer et al., 2020).

Throughout this capstone project, a strength-based perspective was used with B.E.S.T. team members in supported employment, skill building, and fundraising opportunities. In the supported employment programs, young adult team members were offered various experiences to explore and apply skills. Team members were asked which roles they preferred or would like to try, such as hamburger cook or food delivery within the food truck, and participation in the program was driven by interests. For skill building experiences, the participating team member informed the doctoral capstone student of topics they would like to learn or further explore, and these interests determined the first month of the skill building program. In addition, a trivia fundraising event incorporated the two B.E.S.T. team members and their interests. The doctoral capstone student developed trivia categories using the B.E.S.T. team members' interests, and the team members were tasked with finding facts for their assigned categories.

In all of these opportunities, B.E.S.T. team members were given moments to voice their opinions and interests, granting them respect and autonomy. Abilities and strengths, rather than problems and weaknesses, were assumed, providing B.E.S.T. team members with opportunities to explore desired experiences or interests. Being given the chance to utilize interests was also motivating to individuals and encouraged participation. Moreover, supports were individualized and provided as needed to enhance competence and autonomy of the young adult team members.

Capstone Project Plan and Process

Project Goal 1

The student will develop skill building activities and vocational supports for supported employment opportunities by end of week 4.

Objective 1

Review previous needs assessment completed by facility and implement updated needs assessment if necessary with key stakeholders (young adults, caregivers, facility staff) to identify focus areas for program by end of week 3.

Objective 2

Identify and define roles, responsibilities, and procedures for team members within available supported employment opportunities by end of week 3.

Objective 3

Create materials and handouts for relevant skill building activities and vocational supports by end of week 3.

Project Goal 2

The student will implement vocational supports and evaluate supported employment opportunities from beginning of week 5 through the end of week 12.

Objective 1

Assess young adults' relevant vocational skills using identified measure at beginning of program for each supported employment opportunity.

Objective 2

Implement all aspects of vocational and skill building supports within supported employment curriculum with young adults participating in program.

Objective 3

Use pre/post assessment measure (identified vocational skills assessment) with young adult population in program.

Objective 4

Complete post-program electronic, anonymous survey with key stakeholders at site (participating young adults, caregivers, and staff) to obtain program feedback.

Project Goal 3

The student will implement and evaluate life skills curriculum from beginning of week 5 through the end of week 12.

Objective 1

Implement all aspects of life skill curriculum with young adults enrolled in program.

Objective 2

Use identified pre/post assessment measure with young adults in program to track progress of each life skill addressed in curriculum.

Objective 3

Complete post-program electronic, anonymous survey with key stakeholders at site (participating young adults, caregivers, staff) to obtain program feedback.

Project Goal 4

The student will establish sustainability plan for supported employment opportunities and life skills curriculum through creation of curriculum template, staff education and training, development of marketing materials, and identification of additional funding sources by end of week 14.

Objective 1

Create program template and train appropriate staff on curriculum implementation to facilitate sustainability.

Objective 2

Create marketing materials to be used via social media and other platforms as needed to promote awareness of programs in community.

Objective 3

Identify fundraising opportunities or funding sources such as grants or community organizations that can provide programs with supplemental funding to facilitate sustainability.

Objective 4

Identify community partners and events that can hire supported employment services to promote program awareness and sustainability and create revenue for nonprofit.

Capstone Project Implementation

The doctoral capstone student focused on four areas of need during the capstone experience: supported employment, life skills curriculum, fundraising and sustainability, and program awareness. Throughout the experience, key stakeholders involved in the doctoral capstone student's project included two Autistic young adults and their caregivers, the capstone site mentor, and the B.E.S.T manager and Board of Directors. In the area of supported employment, the doctoral capstone student modified an existing skills assessment to track team members' skill development in both the B.E.S.T. Burgers and Fries food truck and More Than Mops cleaning service. Furthermore, the doctoral capstone student developed visual supports and skill building activities for the food truck to facilitate team members' participation and confidence. For the life skills curriculum, the doctoral capstone student created a 10-topic virtual curriculum and implemented the curriculum with one B.E.S.T. team member for five weeks. In

collaboration with the capstone site mentor, the doctoral capstone student developed a skills inventory from the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (OTPF) to assess team members' baseline skills, levels of support, and areas of need in various occupations. In addition, the doctoral capstone student collaborated with the B.E.S.T. team in two fundraising opportunities during the capstone experience to support B.E.S.T.'s sustainability. The fundraising opportunities included a concession service carried out by the doctoral capstone student and two B.E.S.T. team members, as well as a virtual trivia night fundraiser co-hosted by the two B.E.S.T. team members. Moreover, the doctoral capstone student collaborated with the capstone site mentor and B.E.S.T. manager to create a marketing card that can be distributed in the surrounding community to promote program awareness.

Participants

Key stakeholders in this project included two Autistic young adults between the ages of 18-21, the young adults' caregivers, the B.E.S.T. manager, the doctoral capstone student's site mentor, and the B.E.S.T. Board of Directors. The two young adults are the current B.E.S.T. participants, engaging in the supported employment and life skills training programs. One young adult previously received services at the capstone site, which is the location of B.E.S.T., and the other young adult and their family are acquaintances of the capstone site owners. The young adults' participation in the B.E.S.T. programs developed from these connections. The B.E.S.T. manager currently oversees the daily operations of the nonprofit, and the capstone site mentor provides input and assistance to the manager as needed. The B.E.S.T. Board of Directors is comprised of a president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, and additional member, and they assist the B.E.S.T. manager in contractual agreements with community partners and businesses, scheduling, financial and legal matters, and long-term goal setting.

B.E.S.T. Supported Employment Opportunities

B.E.S.T. is comprised of three programs, including supported employment, life skills, and volunteering. Current supported employment opportunities are the B.E.S.T. Burger and Fries food truck and the More Than Mops cleaning and maintenance service. Within the B.E.S.T. Burgers and Fries food truck, team members have learned skills for food preparation, money handling, and customer interactions while managing the truck at the capstone site. The More Than Mops cleaning service offers team members the ability to participate in indoor and outdoor cleaning and maintenance jobs at local businesses within the community.

B.E.S.T. Burgers and Fries Food Truck

B.E.S.T. team members participated in five food truck events at the capstone site during the doctoral capstone student's 14-week project. At these events, one B.E.S.T. team member grilled hamburgers while the other team member filled out delivery labels for food containers and completed deliveries to staff members at the capstone site. These roles were chosen by the team members based on their interests; the team member who grilled hamburgers stated that their dream job is to be a cook. In addition, the B.E.S.T. manager cooked fries and assisted in the assembly of toppings on burgers while the doctoral capstone student supervised team members in their roles, providing modeling, audio cueing, and prompting as needed. The doctoral capstone student developed skill building activities and visual supports relevant to the food truck to facilitate food preparation, assembling food and drink orders, delivery practices, and social interactions with customers. Skill building activities were utilized prior to food truck events, and visual prompts were used during events to promote team members' independence. Boles et al. (2019) found that audio cueing, visual schedules and scripts, and prompting had strong effects on the development of employment skills, and the doctoral capstone student incorporated these

methods in skill building for the food truck. An outline of skill building activities and prompts may be found in Appendix A.

In addition, the doctoral capstone student modified a vocational skills assessment, and this assessment will be used to evaluate team members' skills relevant to food truck responsibilities. The assessment used, per request of B.E.S.T., was the Assessment of Functional Living Skills: Vocational Skills Protocol. The modified assessment was not used during the doctoral capstone student's project but will be used in the future to measure baseline skills and track progress skills utilized in the food truck. A sample of the modified assessment may be found in Appendix B.

B.E.S.T. More than Mops

During the doctoral capstone student's project, B.E.S.T. participated in one More than Mops cleaning contract. During this contract, B.E.S.T. team members, the B.E.S.T. manager, and the doctoral capstone student performed the following cleaning tasks: cleaning baseboards, sanitizing surfaces and door handles, sweeping, and mopping. The doctoral capstone student and B.E.S.T. manager provided modeling and verbal prompting for task completion during this opportunity. The More than Mops supported employment program is not as developed as the food truck program. However, the doctoral capstone student modified a skills assessment for the More than Mops program, and this assessment will be used to evaluate team members' custodial and cleaning skills in the future when the program becomes more developed. The assessment used, per request of B.E.S.T., was the Assessment of Functional Living Skills: Vocational Skills Protocol. A sample of the assessment may be found in Appendix C.

B.E.S.T. Life Skills Program

An additional program of B.E.S.T. is the life skills program. Team members engage in activities to learn life skills needed for improved participation and independence in all desired roles and occupations. Skills addressed during the life skills program are not directly related to the B.E.S.T. supported employment opportunities; however, team members may learn skills such as performing dress and hygiene tasks, completing simple household tasks, or managing income that will support life at home or in a work environment.

During this project, the doctoral capstone student completed five weeks of life skill sessions with one B.E.S.T. team member, engaging in one-hour sessions three days each week. Per the team member's request, sessions during the first week addressed paying bills, writing checks, and budgeting. Handouts and modeling from the doctoral capstone student were the methods used during week one instruction. The second week addressed shoe-tying per request of the team member's caregiver, and the doctoral capstone student utilized point-of-view modeling videos, in-person modeling, and backward chaining methods during instruction. Richard III & Noel (2018) found that video-prompt modeling with backward chaining is effective in skill acquisition during shoe-tying for Autistic children, supporting the doctoral capstone student's use of video-modeling and backward chaining. During the third week, the doctoral capstone student created lessons about workplace social skills, including responding to feedback, initiating and concluding conversations, and assessing if others are available or unavailable to have a conversation. The B.E.S.T. team member viewed videos of typical responses to feedback, as well as participated in role play scenarios to address feedback and conversation skills. At the request of the B.E.S.T. team member, health management was addressed in the fourth week, and the doctoral capstone student and B.E.S.T. team member used various videos, handouts, and role

play scenarios to learn about health insurance and making medical appointments over the phone. During the fifth week, the doctoral capstone student addressed the executive functioning skills of time management, planning, and organization. Various handouts and activities were utilized to engage these skills.

The doctoral capstone student created a life skills curriculum for B.E.S.T. to use in the future. The life skills curriculum is composed of 10 modules, and each module contains three session outlines and supporting materials for one topic. Materials incorporate visual schedules and scripts, descriptions for audio cueing, prompting, and modeling, and links to video modeling. Boles et al. (2019) found that audio cueing, visual schedules and scripts, and prompting had strong effects on the development of functional living skills, and video modeling had moderate effects on the development of functional living skills. B.E.S.T. plans to continue a schedule of three life skill sessions per week, as was executed by the doctoral capstone student, determining the outline of the student's curriculum. Topics included in the life skills curriculum were influenced by the participating team member's interests, their caregiver's requests, the capstone student's daily experiences with the team member, the reviewed literature, and the OTPF. An outline of the doctoral capstone student's life skills curriculum can be found in Appendix D.

In order to assess team members' baseline skills upon entry to the life skills program, the doctoral capstone student collaborated with her capstone site mentor to create a non-standardized skills inventory. The skills inventory is derived from the OTPF and will be completed by an OT to evaluate team members' participation in the following types of occupations: Activities of Daily Living, Instrumental Activities of Daily Living, Education, Work, Leisure, and Social Participation. Ratings on the inventory will determine a member's level of need in each occupation and will guide participation in the life skills program. An informal interview with the

team members and their caregivers will also determine which skills to address in the program. A sample of this skills inventory can be found in Appendix E.

B.E.S.T. Fundraising

B.E.S.T. Concession Service

Due to its recent creation in 2020, as well as nonprofit status, B.E.S.T. needs funding to maintain current operations and establish sustainability for the future. The doctoral capstone student assisted in the coordination of two fundraising opportunities for B.E.S.T, the first opportunity being concession sales. The doctoral capstone student and two B.E.S.T. team members sold snacks and beverages for cash or electronic purchase to site staff on the capstone site's campus four days per week for 10 weeks. Concession sales produce revenue for the nonprofit while also providing B.E.S.T. team members with skill building opportunities in cash handling, processing electronic payments, customer greetings, inventory management, and distribution of orders. The doctoral capstone student provided in-person modeling, prompting, and assistance to the team members as needed during concession sales for eight weeks. During the last two weeks, the doctoral capstone student created a binder detailing the sequence of steps for setup, completion, and cleanup of concessions and provided assistance as needed from a distance with a walkie talkie, facilitating greater independence for team members. The doctoral capstone student also created visual scripts describing how to sell and deliver concessions, and these scripts were used by one B.E.S.T. team member for approximately five weeks until they felt like the scripts were no longer needed. The visual scripts may be found in Appendix F.

Virtual Trivia Night

Additionally, the doctoral capstone student collaborated with the B.E.S.T. team to organize and host a virtual trivia night fundraising event. The trivia event was open to the

community, and all money from registration was directed toward the nonprofit organization. B.E.S.T. team members hosted the event for 22 teams. Team members' interests were incorporated into trivia, as the doctoral capstone student developed trivia categories according to the team members' interests. Team members were then tasked with finding facts for their assigned categories, and the doctoral capstone student facilitated fact-finding with each team member, providing prompts as needed. On the day of the event, the doctoral capstone student held a practice event with the two team members to model hosting with use of the developed visual script. The practice event and supports promoted independence and confidence in B.E.S.T. team members during the event. During the night of the event, the two B.E.S.T. team members used the visual script developed by the doctoral capstone student with minimal prompting.

B.E.S.T. Marketing Materials

Upon the doctoral capstone student's arrival to the site, B.E.S.T. expressed that promoting program awareness was a need due to its recent establishment. To help address this need, the doctoral capstone student collaborated with the B.E.S.T. manager and her capstone mentor to create a marketing postcard that can be distributed to local businesses and at B.E.S.T. food truck events in the community. The postcard highlights current programs and may be used to recruit team members, volunteers, donors, or business partnerships. A sample of the postcard can be found in Appendix G.

Project Evaluation

Methodology

To evaluate the materials produced during the doctoral capstone experience, the doctoral capstone student administered an electronic survey to the capstone site mentor and B.E.S.T. manager. The survey was created with Indiana University's Qualtrics software program and was

composed of six short-answer questions. Survey questions assessed how B.E.S.T.'s needs had been addressed, how the student's project affected B.E.S.T.'s progress towards their goals, and satisfaction, feasibility, and future utilization of project resources and materials for the supported employment and skill building programs. A survey was chosen as the method of evaluation to measure site satisfaction with materials and how site needs had been addressed during the 14-week project.

In addition, the doctoral capstone student created an electronic survey for the two B.E.S.T. team members. The doctoral capstone student received assistance in administering this survey, as one B.E.S.T. team member received help while taking the survey from the B.E.S.T. manager. The other B.E.S.T. team member independently completed the survey after receiving instruction from the doctoral capstone student. This survey was also created with Indiana University's Qualtrics software program and was composed of both Likert-type scales and short-answer questions. Likert-type scales evaluated satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the virtual trivia night, food truck, concession, and skill building opportunities using a 4-point scale, comprised of "Liked A Lot," "Liked a Little," "Disliked a Little," or "Disliked a Lot." Each phrase was accompanied by thumbs up or thumbs down emojis; "Liked a Lot" included two thumbs up emojis, "Liked a Little" included one thumbs up emoji, "Disliked a Little" included one thumbs down emoji, and "Disliked a Lot" included two thumbs down emojis. Moreover, B.E.S.T. team members were also asked to answer what they most liked and least liked about the virtual trivia night, food truck, concession, and skill building opportunities. An electronic survey was the chosen method of evaluation to measure team member satisfaction with current opportunities and supports, and the doctoral capstone student will provide the results to the B.E.S.T. team for future planning. This survey was not anonymous, as only one B.E.S.T. team

member participated in skill building opportunities and answered the skill building questions on the survey.

Results

Capstone Site Mentor and B.E.S.T. Manager

The capstone mentor and B.E.S.T. manager were asked to describe how B.E.S.T.'s needs were addressed by the doctoral capstone student's project. Both participants noted that the doctoral capstone student created foundational procedures, materials, and inclusive supports for individuals of all abilities. When asked how the student's project progressed B.E.S.T. towards its goals, one participant expressed that project materials will help guide future job coaches, instructors, or volunteers once onboarded into B.E.S.T. The other participant stated, "B.E.S.T. aims to be all-inclusive, which the resources allow us to better do." Furthermore, both participants expressed that materials developed for the skill building program were appropriate and adequate and that resources developed for the B.E.S.T. food truck and concession opportunities were clear and easy to follow. With the B.E.S.T. food truck and concession materials in question, one survey participant stated that the doctoral capstone student's materials have helped the current B.E.S.T. team members develop "independence and confidence." Additionally, both survey participants noted that they will implement all resources created by the doctoral capstone student.

B.E.S.T. Team Members

B.E.S.T. team members were asked to rate their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the virtual trivia night, food truck, concession, and life skill building opportunities. Both participants selected "Liked a Lot" for the virtual trivia night, food truck, and concession experiences. The team member who participated in skill building also chose "Liked a Lot" for their life skill

sessions with the doctoral capstone student. When asked what they most liked about the virtual trivia night fundraiser, one team member noted “researching and making questions” while the other team member stated “asking the questions.” Both members expressed that they did not dislike any aspect of the virtual trivia night experience. When asked about the B.E.S.T. Burgers and Fries food truck program, one team member expressed that working on the grill is their favorite part of the experience; however, they do not like “getting their hands hot near the grill.” The other member mentioned that they most like travelling to the different locations of the food truck. Team members’ opinions also differed on what they most like and dislike about the concession service; one team member likes taking orders and dislikes walking around the capstone site campus while the other member likes walking around the capstone site campus and dislikes writing orders, as they are still unfamiliar with capstone site staff. Furthermore, the team member who participated in the life skill sessions stated that they most enjoyed learning about budgeting, paying bills, and health insurance and most disliked learning how to tie their shoes.

Discussion and Impact

Discussion

Limited vocational services for Autistic young adults transitioning into adulthood was a theme to emerge from the doctoral capstone student’s literature review, and Autistic individuals and their caregivers have identified the need for more vocational and life skill development opportunities to promote independence and participation in meaningful occupations. Specifically, caregivers of Autistic young adults have identified their children as needing support in financial, home care, and relationship life skills (Chiang et al., 2017). B.E.S.T. desired to address these gaps and identified the need for a life skills program, as well as materials to support the skills and procedures used in their current supported employment opportunities. The

doctoral capstone student set goals and objectives to further develop B.E.S.T.'s supported employment opportunities with skill building activities, assessments, and supports, as well as create a life skills curriculum and skills assessment that could be used with individuals of all abilities.

Throughout the 14-week project, the doctoral capstone student created visual scripts and procedures for the B.E.S.T. Burgers and Fries supported employment program and concession skill building service. In addition, the doctoral capstone student modified two skills assessments for B.E.S.T.'s supported employment programs and developed a 10-topic life skills curriculum with a non-standardized skills inventory to assess baseline skills and progress for participants. The doctoral capstone student's resources will be used in the future to guide job coaches, instructors, and volunteers when assisting B.E.S.T. team members in the supported employment or skill building programs. B.E.S.T. did not have any formal procedures, assessments, supports, or skill building activities in place prior to the doctoral capstone student's arrival, and the student's materials have helped create a foundation for the supported employment and life skills programs that can be expanded upon in the future as needed for individuals' diverse and unique needs. The visual scripts and schedules also promoted inclusion and facilitated participation in occupations that B.E.S.T. team members found enjoyable and meaningful. For example, the B.E.S.T. team member who desired to learn about financial skills stated that the budgeting and bills module was their favorite week of the life skills program. Furthermore, that same team member has the dream of being a cook and noted that their favorite aspect of the food truck is working on the grill. The doctoral capstone student's materials facilitated participation in these experiences and helped the team member progress toward their goals. B.E.S.T.'s mission is to be an inclusive nonprofit organization and offer opportunities to individuals of all abilities. The

materials developed by the doctoral capstone student were tailored to the unique needs of the B.E.S.T. team members and promoted growth, independence, and competence in supported employment and skill building activities.

Limitations of the doctoral capstone student's project include a small number of participants and the lack of skill assessment implementation. Due to the recent establishment of B.E.S.T and developing funds, few individuals are members of the B.E.S.T. team. While the two B.E.S.T. participants have benefitted from the programs and their associated supports, the sample size is small. In addition, the doctoral capstone student was unable to implement skills assessments for the supported employment and skill building programs as intended. As a result, objective data has not yet been obtained to measure the effectiveness of the skill building activities and supported employment experiences.

Impact

As mentioned previously, B.E.S.T. did not have any procedures or materials in place upon the doctoral capstone student's arrival. The materials created during the student's project laid the groundwork for B.E.S.T. and may be further edited or developed in the future to adapt to new team members' needs and abilities. The skills assessments developed for the supported employment and skill building opportunities will be used by the capstone mentor, who is an OT, to obtain objective data regarding team members' skills and measure the effectiveness of B.E.S.T.'s programs. These materials will help sustain B.E.S.T. and its programs, allowing it to reach a greater number of individuals desiring meaningful employment, skill building, or volunteer opportunities.

Through participation in B.E.S.T.'s supported employment and skill building programs, young adults can gain valuable life and vocational skills, as well as develop a sense of belonging,

competence, greater independence, and a better quality of life. Employment can provide all individuals with improved “sense of purpose, financial independence, and quality of life” (Wong et al., 2020, p. 1). Employment can also provide individuals with opportunities to exhibit their strengths, which can promote better self-esteem and further improve quality of life (E. Lee, et al, 2020). Furthermore, the workplace is an opportunity to explore and create friendships (Solomon, 2020). With the doctoral capstone student and B.E.S.T. manager’s guidance, B.E.S.T. team members developed a sense of purpose as they were given specific roles and expectations within the supported employment and other skill building experiences. B.E.S.T. members also became a part of a team and were able develop friendships not only with each other, but also with staff members at the capstone site during their food truck and concession services. The doctoral capstone student’s visual scripts, modeling, and skill building sessions facilitated team members’ participation, communication, and independence in these occupational experiences. Most importantly, the materials produced by the doctoral capstone student facilitated participation in occupations that team members desired to perform and noted to enjoy.

While researchers have cited the role OTs can play with the Autistic population during the transition to adulthood, OTs are not effectively being utilized for vocational support and skill building during this transition (Eismann et al., 2017). However, the doctoral capstone student’s materials provide an example of how OTs may address vocational or life skills with teens and young adults of all abilities. Within the supported employment opportunities, OTs could step into a job coaching role and use the doctoral capstone student’s materials to assess vocational skills, implement skill interventions related to employment opportunities, or enact environmental supports. OTs could also use the doctoral capstone student’s resources to evaluate life skills and create or implement client-centered interventions to facilitate participation and growth at home,

work, or in the community. Throughout this experience, the doctoral capstone student learned of the significant role OT can have in this population, as well as how each individual has unique goals, strengths, abilities, and areas of need. A strengths-based and client-centered approach is essential to have when working with this population, as that mindset can help achieve the most effective and meaningful outcomes for team members.

Sustainability

All of the doctoral capstone student's materials have been uploaded to a Google Drive and can be easily accessed by the B.E.S.T team and advisory board. Level II occupational therapy fieldwork students will implement skill building sessions after the doctoral capstone student's departure, with the B.E.S.T. manager leading sessions when there are gaps in occupational therapy students' rotations. In addition, the B.E.S.T. manager and other capstone site staff will supervise B.E.S.T. team members in the concession skill building experience. In the future, all individuals, including B.E.S.T.'s manager, occupational therapy fieldwork students, and volunteers who assist with B.E.S.T., will also be able to access and use the doctoral capstone student's resources from the Google Drive when working in the supported employment and skill building programs.

Conclusion

Autistic young adults and their caregivers have identified a gap in vocational and life skill services during the transition to adulthood. Meaningful engagement in occupation can improve Autistic individuals' independence, self-efficacy, quality of life, and sense of meaning. However, it is more difficult for Autistic individuals to achieve these outcomes due to an innate difficulty in learning skills and a lack of services. OTs can work with Autistic young adults using a strengths-based and client-centered approach to address vocational and life skill goals and

achieve more positive health outcomes. The goal of this project was to assist B.E.S.T. in its mission of providing inclusive supported employment and life skill programs to adults of all abilities, and the doctoral capstone student addressed B.E.S.T.'s needs with the creation and implementation of skill building activities, visual scripts, procedural materials, and a life skills curriculum. Feedback from the site and B.E.S.T. team members indicate that the developed resources promote independence, competence, enjoyment, inclusivity, and greater participation in meaningful occupations. With the doctoral capstone student's resources, B.E.S.T. now has a foundation they can expand upon in the future to reach a greater number of individuals. B.E.S.T. is using its programs to close the gap in vocational and life skill services for adults of all abilities, providing individuals in the Indianapolis community with more opportunities to explore interests, develop skills, and participate in meaningful experiences with others.

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Appendix A

B.E.S.T. Burgers and Fries Skill Building Activities and Prompts

Skill Building Activities

1. Line Cook-Burgers
 - a. Grilling a Burger
 - i. Activity Type: Individual
 - ii. Materials: Laminated picture of hamburger, timer, Hamburger Task List
 - iii. Description: Team member will use materials mentioned above to sequence steps, as detailed on Hamburger Task List, to grill mock hamburger.
 - b. Assembling Burgers to Order
 - i. Activity Type: Individual
 - ii. Materials: Mock customer order(s), laminated photos of hamburger components
 - iii. Description: Team member will first read “mock” customer order and then use laminated photos (i.e. photos of bottom hamburger bun, hamburger, cheese slice, tomato, onion, lettuce, pickle, top hamburger bun) to assemble cheeseburger in correct sequence according to order.
2. Delivery
 - a. Setting Up a Delivery Tray
 - i. Activity Type: Individual
 - ii. Materials: Delivery tray, laminated photos of napkins, condiments, and drinks and/or actual materials, mock customer order(s)

- iii. Description: Team member will set up delivery tray according to “Delivery Tray Task List” using laminated photos or actual materials used on the delivery tray. Team member will also read a mock customer order(s) to complete the setup of delivery tray with drink.
- b. Delivering Meals to Customers
 - i. Activity Type: Individual
 - ii. Materials: Laminated photos of condiments, napkins, food, and drinks, “Food Delivery” prompts
 - iii. Description: Team members will engage in role play activity. Team members may use a visual prompt card to practice the following delivery skills: confirming customer by name, providing customer with an order, asking if customer wants condiments or napkins and providing if appropriate, responding to missing or incorrect order items, and saying thank you.
 - c. Completing Delivery Labels
 - i. Activity Type: Individual
 - ii. Materials: Mock customer order(s), delivery labels for food containers
 - iii. Description: Team member will read mock customer order and fill out delivery label to be placed on food container. Team member will correctly locate and write customer name and location, if appropriate, as well as check the boxes of any toppings, drinks, and sides ordered.
 - d. Communicating with Coworkers
 - i. Activity Type: Group

- ii. Materials: Mock customer order(s) or delivery labels
- iii. Description: This activity will involve 2+ team members. One team member will read a mock order or delivery label and will tell another team member (s) what the customer ordered (i.e. special toppings on burger, type of drink, etc.)

Visual Prompts

1. Washing Hands

- a. Description: Displays when to wash hands (i.e. after touching raw meat, money, trash, or electronics) in word format and how long to wash hands in picture format.

2. Cooking Hamburgers

- a. Description: Lists sequence of grilling hamburgers to appropriate temperature as defined by health guidelines.

3. Preparing Deliveries

- a. Description: Lists sequence of steps to follow to ensure all items are on delivery tray prior to making delivery (each condiment, napkins, drinks for orders). Steps described in words and accompanied with pictures.

4. Delivery Script for Customer Interactions

- a. Description: Lists sequence of steps to follow, in word and picture format, when delivering meal to customer: greeting, confirming customer's name, providing customer with order, asking customer if they want any condiments or napkins, determining if anything is missing from order, and thanking customer.

Appendix B

The Assessment of Functional Living Skills (AFLS):

B.E.S.T. Burgers and Fries Food Truck

Modified Version of Vocational Skills Assessment Protocol, Sample

B.E.S.T. Burgers and Fries (51 total)

Restaurant Skills

TASK	SCORE	TASK NAME	OBJECTIVE	QUESTION	EXAMPLE	CRITERIA	COMMENT
RS 8	0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4	Hand-washes dishes and utensils.	Learner will hand-wash dishes and utensils.	Can learner hand-wash dishes and utensils?		4=soaks pans if required to soften baked on food, washes all dishes, glasses, and utensils thoroughly, 3=soaks pans if directed to in order to soften baked on food, washes all dishes, glasses, and utensils thoroughly, 2=washes dishes and pans independently, requires verbal prompts to wash glasses and utensils, 1= washes dishes and pans that do not contain baked on food.	
RS 12	0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4	Refills napkin holder.	Learner will refill napkin holders.	Learner checks tables and refills napkin holders being careful not to overfill them.	Learner checks delivery trays and napkin holders, being careful not to overfill them.	4=checks napkin holders, obtains napkins from storage, replenishes when low, 3=checks napkin holders, obtains napkins from storage, replenishes when told to do so, 2=when given a supply of napkins, replenishes when told to, 1=when given a supply of napkins, replenishes when told to, with only verbal prompts	
RS 13	0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4	Replenishes packets of condiment items.	Learner will replenish condiment packets into table-top containers as needed to maintain usable supply.	Can learner replenish condiment packets?	Ketchup, mustard, mayo, etc.	4=independently checks condiment holders, obtains required condiments from storage, replenishes when low, 3=checks condiment holders, obtains required condiments from storage, replenishes when told to do so, 2=when given a supply of condiments, replenishes when told to, 1=when given a supply of condiments, replenishes when told to, with only verbal prompts	

Appendix C

The Assessment of Functional Living Skills (AFLS): B.E.S.T. More Than Mops

Modified Version of Vocational Skills Assessment Protocol, Sample

B.E.S.T. More Than Mops (41 total)

Custodial and Cleaning

TASK	SCORE	TASK NAME	OBJECTIVE	QUESTION	EXAMPLE	CRITERIA	COMMENT
CC 1	0 1 2 0 1 2	Cleans sinks	Learner will clean sinks	Does learner clean sinks?		2=cleans sink bowl, faucets, and countertop area without leaving streaks or any scum, 1=cleans bowl, faucets, and counter with only verbal prompts	
CC 2	0 1 2 0 1 2	Cleans counter tops	Learner will clean counter tops	Does learner clean counter tops?		2=cleans countertops thoroughly without leaving residue, 1=wipes liquids from countertops	
CC 3	0 1 2 0 1 2	Cleans windows and mirrors	Learner will clean windows and mirrors.	Does learner clean windows and mirrors?	Sprays cleaner on surface, wipes surface clean without leaving streaks.	2=cleans windows and mirrors, 1= cleans windows and mirrors with only verbal prompts	
CC 4	0 1 2 0 1 2	Cleans walls	Learner will clean walls.	Does learner clean walls?	Uses cleaning spray, water, or cleaning wipes to clean food or other debris from walls.	2= removes handprints, food, or other debris from walls, 1=removes food or other debris from walls with only verbal prompts	
CC 5	0 1 2 0 1 2	Cleans a toilet seat	Learner will use disinfectant spray and paper towel to clean a toilet seat.	Does learner adequately clean a toilet seat?	Sprays seat with disinfectant and wipes clean with a paper towel.	2= uses disinfectant spray and paper towel to clean a toilet seat and then washes hands, 1= requires only verbal prompts to spray toilet seat with disinfectant and wipe clean with a paper towel	

Appendix D

B.E.S.T. Life Skills Program Curriculum Outline

- **Module 1: Budgeting**
 - Session 1
 - Use deposits/income and expenses to add and subtract from a budget.
 - Shop within a budget.
 - Distinguish between “want” expenses and “need” expenses.
 - Review an example of a budget.
 - Session 2
 - Define savings.
 - Distinguish between fixed and variable expenses.
 - Review budgeting strategies.
 - Session 3
 - Create budgets on simulated and/ or personal information.
- **Module 2: Careers**
 - Session 1
 - Explore career options related to interests using the O*NET Interest Profiler or 123 Career Aptitude Test.
 - Explore platforms used for a job search.
 - Session 2
 - Identify components of a typical resume.
 - Create own resume from template with personal information.
 - Session 3

- Identify appropriate and inappropriate clothing for job interviews.
 - Recognize positive and negative body language as it relates to job interviews.
 - Role play answering typical interview questions.
- **Module 3: Clothing**
 - Topic 1: Tying Shoes
 - Topic 2: Buttoning/ Unbuttoning Shirt
 - Topic 3: Choosing Clothing Appropriate for Weather
 - Topic 4: Following a Dress Code
- **Module 4: Executive Functioning Skills**
 - Session 1
 - Define time management.
 - Identify 2-3 positive time management tools or strategies.
 - Learn and implement the following time management skills: prioritizing tasks, estimating time taken for tasks, making a checklist, and choosing time “helpers” over time “eaters.”
 - Session 2
 - Fill out a calendar with correct dates and times from a given list of activities and appointments.
 - Write or direct another to write a daily routine for at least 1 day of week.
 - Session 3
 - Place given items in appropriate locations for organizational purposes.

- Identify similarities or differences among items, sorting similar items together for organizational purposes.
- **Module 5: Grocery Shopping**
 - Session 1
 - Create grocery list from template.
 - Locate items from grocery list on online platform.
 - Simulate paying for items online with fake credit/debit card information.
 - Session 2
 - Identify typical interactions among grocery store shoppers and employees.
 - Make price comparisons between similar items.
 - Locate items and their price tags in simulated grocery store setup.
 - Session 3
 - Simulate self-checkout experience at grocery store: locate item price tag, scan, put in bag, and self-pay with cash or “card.”
 - Define sales tax and its purpose.
- **Module 6: Health Management**
 - Session 1
 - Identify basic components of prescription medication label.
 - Practice dispensing “medication” into pill organizer according to prescription labels. Pill organizer, medication bottles, and beads to be used.
 - Increase knowledge of the strategies and apps available to help manage medications.

- Establish stress management techniques to improve quality of life: exercise, yoga/ stretching, deep breathing, fidget toys, or listening to music.
- Session 2
 - Learn the process of scheduling medical appointments.
 - Develop or strengthen phone skills needed to make medical appointments.
- Session 3
 - Identify purpose of health insurance.
 - Define basic terms related to health insurance: deductible, co-pay, co-insurance, premium, and out of pocket maximum.
- **Module 7: Laundry**
 - Session 1
 - Describe the appropriate sequence of steps to complete laundry.
 - Distinguish between clean and dirty clothing.
 - Sort clothing into 4 categories: light colors, dark colors, white color, and delicates.
 - Identify typical symbols used on clothing tags.
 - Session 2
 - Describe the appropriate sequence of steps to complete laundry.
 - Improve knowledge of tools used to wash and dry clothes (washer, dryer, detergent, fabric softener).
 - Practice using the tools used to wash and dry clothes (washer, dryer, detergent, fabric softener).

- Session 3
 - Describe the appropriate sequence of steps for completing laundry.
 - Practice folding and hanging different clothing items.
 - Clean lint trap and recognize importance/ safety.
- **Module 8: Meal Preparation**
 - Session 1
 - Identify safe and unsafe kitchen practices while cooking.
 - Identify purpose of appliances and supplies typically used in a kitchen.
 - Session 2
 - Prepare at least 2 foods typically eaten at breakfast with visual recipes.
 - Complete meal cleanup tasks (wipe spills, put away leftover food, wash/dry dishes).
 - Session 3
 - Prepare at least 2 foods typically eaten at lunch or dinner with visual recipes.
 - Complete meal cleanup tasks (wipe spills, put away leftover food, wash/dry dishes).
- **Module 9: Money Management**
 - Session 1
 - Identify values of coins and bills.
 - Pay for items with appropriate amounts of money.
 - Give correct change.
 - Session 2

- Identify parts of a check.
- Identify parts of a checkbook register.
- Practice writing signature.
- Write checks and record in checkbook register.
- Session 3
 - Distinguish differences between debit and credit cards.
 - Identify components of debit and/or credit cards.
 - Practice locating and inputting card number, cardholder name, expiration date, and CVV into appropriate locations for simulated online purchase.
 - Review sequence of steps for in-store purchase using a debit or credit card.
- **Module 10: Workplace Social Skills**
 - Session 1
 - Review and practice skills to initiate, maintain, and conclude conversations.
 - Distinguish between figurative and literal language.
 - Session 2
 - Identify social cues that signal availability or unavailability.
 - Role play workplace scenarios and conversations.
 - Session 3
 - Distinguish among constructive feedback, compliments, and criticism.
 - Review and role play appropriate responses to feedback in the workplace.

Appendix E

B.E.S.T. Skills Inventory, Sample



Skills Inventory

- 1= Completely Dependent
- 2= Maximum Support
- 3= Moderate Support
- 4= Minimum Support
- 5= Independent

Directions: Consumer works with clinician to determine baseline at the beginning of the Building Essential Skills program and reassesses quarterly.

Activities of Daily Living	
1. Completes morning grooming routine.	1 2 3 4 5
2. Completes toileting routine.	1 2 3 4 5
3. Feeds him/herself.	1 2 3 4 5
4. Completes showering/ bathing routine.	1 2 3 4 5
5. Dresses and undresses him/ herself.	1 2 3 4 5
ADL Score	

Instrumental Activities of Daily Living	
1. Safely prepares at least 3 meals.	1 2 3 4 5
2. Appropriately uses cash, coins, or debit/credit cards.	1 2 3 4 5
3. Completes simple household cleaning tasks (dusts, sweeps, mops, wipes counters).	1 2 3 4 5
4. Completes laundry routine.	1 2 3 4 5
5. Purchases items (groceries or other) via the internet or in store.	1 2 3 4 5
IADL Score	

Appendix F**B.E.S.T. Concessions: Visual Scripts****SELLING Concessions**

1. **SAY HI**
2. **ASK**: Does anyone want candy, chips, slim jims, or a drink for cash OR Venmo purchase?
3. If **YES**, **SHOW** menu and **SAY** menu prices.
4. **ASK** for their name & **WRITE** order.
5. **ASK** how they will be paying (Cash or Venmo?)
6. **TELL** customer:
 - a. Thank you :)
 - b. You will be back with order.
 - c. They pay when you come back.
 - d. How much money they will pay.

DELIVERING Concessions

1. **SAY** customer's name.
2. **GIVE** customer their snacks/drinks.
3. **TELL** customer how much money to pay.
4. If they pay with cash, **TAKE** money and **GIVE** change if they need it.
5. **ASK** if anything is missing from order.
6. **SAY** thank you :)

Appendix G

B.E.S.T. Marketing Postcard, Sample

<p>How to Support the Mission:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host our food truck at your business • Hire our cleaning and maintenance services for your business's needs • Sponsor and/or participate in one of our fundraising events • Volunteer your time with our B.E.S.T. team • LIKE, FOLLOW, and SHARE our social media page on Facebook @buildingessentialskills • Donate 	<p>Skill-building Workshops</p> <p>Participants engage in activities designed to improve independence and vocational preparedness. Focal points include following directions, solving problems, performing tasks to completion, and communicating needs. Individuals also learn skills to support career development such as performing dress and hygiene tasks, managing finances, and job field specific skills.</p> <p>Volunteer Opportunities</p> <p>Sometimes employment is not the right path for those we serve. So, we seek and develop volunteer opportunities on par with our supported employment experiences. Our teens and young adults can still gain valuable vocational and social skills volunteering with B.E.S.T. Burgers & Fries, More Than Mops, and Building Essential Skills Together as part of the larger mission to make positive impacts on families and communities.</p> <p>Supported Employment</p> <p>We offer B.E.S.T. Burgers & Fries food truck and More Than Mops cleaning/maintenance service. With B.E.S.T. Burgers and Fries, team members learn skills for food preparation, money handling, and interacting with customers while managing the truck at community events. More Than Mops team members participate in cleaning and maintenance jobs through <u>business to business</u> partnerships.</p>	<p>UPCOMING EVENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Trivia Tuesday w/B.E.S.T.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>March 23 @ 7pm</i> • <i>Register your team at buildingessentialskills.org!</i> • <i>Barn & B.E.S.T. Night!</i> Enjoy dinner from our food truck followed by a tasty shaved ice from our neighboring vendor. Weekly in Brownsburg; stay tuned for details. • <i>Golf Tournament at The Country Club of Indianapolis</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>August 12, 2021</i>
<p>WAYS TO DONATE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give online at buildingessentialskills.org/donate, through Venmo @BESTsnacks, or on Facebook at @buildingessentialskills • In-kind product donations to stock our food truck and snack bar (all proceeds support our programs). 	<p>Follow our journey/contact us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website: buildingessentialskills.org • Facebook: @buildingessentialskills • Email: serve@buildingessentialskills.org • Phone: 317-294-5242 	