

VISION AND PLANS

People on the autism spectrum are integral members of their families and communities, and have the right to fully participate in the educational, social, cultural, political, and economic life of society. In support of this belief, the Center will be the primary resource in the state of Maryland for education and research by supporting community engagement of adults on the autism spectrum through inter-professional collaborations and community partnerships.

To address these goals, the Center for Adults with Autism intends to focus on the following areas:

- Offering high quality educational opportunities in an interdisciplinary model for:
 - Professionals and graduate students via the Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Autism Studies
 - Students at Towson University through coursework and supervised practicum experiences
 - Faculty and staff relative to strategies to enhance the university experience of students on the autism spectrum
 - Employers and prospective employers of adults on the autism spectrum
 - Family members and the general public
- Offering programs for young adults on the autism spectrum in conjunction with student education and research in the following areas:
 - Employment-related skills in a variety of models, with pilot initiatives for young adults
 - Social communication and life skills for young adults across the autism spectrum
 - Social and transitional skills to support successful college life for Towson University students on the autism spectrum
- Supporting best practices in all areas of Maryland via professional development and program development and evaluation using distance learning and off-site programs and short workshops
- Conducting research related to adults on the autism spectrum that supports their full integration into society, including sustainable employment
- Building partnerships with agencies that serve individuals with autism to identify and implement collaborative programs

MAKING A GIFT TO THE CENTER FOR ADULTS WITH AUTISM
To make a gift to the Center to support education, research, and outreach initiatives, visit www.tigertracks.com/autism or call 866-310-3375.

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College of HEALTH PROFESSIONS

CENTER

for Adults with Autism

HELPING YOUNG ADULTS ON THE
AUTISM SPECTRUM TO LEAD
PRODUCTIVE AND FULFILLING
LIVES WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES



MISSION

The gap between the needs of an increasing number of young adults on the autism spectrum and available resources is substantial. The Center for Adults with Autism at Towson University was developed to address this discrepancy, with a particular focus on young adults as they transition from school-based services to community integration and workforce participation. The Center's work is congruent with Towson University's identity as Maryland's Metropolitan University with a strong commitment to addressing community needs. The College of Health Professions provides the leadership for this Center. This College has a long-standing history of commitment to initiatives associated with its motto of "Optimizing Wellness for Life". This focus emphasizes a commitment to the integration of multiple dimensions of people's lives that are important for health, well-being, human performance, and participation in society across the life span.

The mission of the Center for Adults with Autism is to assist young adults on the autism spectrum in leading productive and fulfilling lives as fully engaged members of their communities. Full engagement within the community requires social and communication skills and other knowledge, skills, and experiences that support employment, independent living, and wellness.

This mission is being realized through the Center for Adults with Autism by:

- Providing educational opportunities for students, professionals, family members, and the public,
- Offering and evaluating models for programs and services,
- Supporting applied research by faculty and students, and
- Providing links between community and academic resources.

In keeping with the mission of the Center, young adults on the autism spectrum are included in planning and developing models for programs and services. "The true test of any program or organization aiming to support autistic people is the approval of the autistic people being served."

—Katie Miller, participant

The College of Health Professions Center for Adults with Autism



APPLIED RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY LINKS

Understanding strengths and challenges of young adults on the autism spectrum is critical to supporting them in leading productive and fulfilling lives within their communities. Faculty and students complete applied interdisciplinary research projects and extensive program evaluations, adding to a body of knowledge about best practices for achieving the goal of transitioning effectively into the community.

and community resources for young adults on the autism spectrum and their families. With more than 20,000 students on campus, numerous opportunities exist for young adults on the autism spectrum to engage in meaningful social interactions with their peers within a supportive environment. Additionally, community organizations and area high schools collaborate with the Center to promote community integration. The expected outcomes include greater opportunities for success in meaningful engagement and sustainable employment for adults on the autism spectrum.

The Center for Adults with Autism is focused on being an effective interdisciplinary center, linking academic

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Center for Adults with Autism is a resource for those seeking to increase knowledge about the unique issues facing young adults on the autism spectrum. Faculty, staff, and students at the university, as well as individuals in the community and in Maryland benefit from educational opportunities that foster greater understanding of these issues through the following venues:

Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Autism Studies

The College of Health Professions offers a 16-credit certificate covering contemporary issues of individuals on the autism spectrum and their families across the lifespan. Faculty instructors collaborate with the Center to provide educational experiences for students.

Internships and Practicum Experiences

Students from occupational therapy, speech-language therapy, kinesiology, marketing, psychology, and other programs gain expertise in working with young adults on the autism spectrum through program development, evaluations, and clinical interventions.

Speaker Events

The Center is committed to hosting prominent speakers to increase awareness of the complex issues facing young adults on the autism spectrum.

Mentor Training

Faculty with expertise in autism prepares Towson University students to serve as supportive partners for participants in the Center's programs. The mentors gain a heightened awareness of the strengths and challenges of young adults on the autism spectrum and take this awareness into other settings, including their current and future work roles.

Conference and Community Presentations

Faculty from the Center disseminates information and provide resource materials about model programs and critical issues for young adults on the autism spectrum.

Interdisciplinary Case Study

Graduate students participate in a facilitated discussion of autism in an interdisciplinary forum, complemented by presentations of young adults on the autism spectrum, family members and experienced professionals.

PROGRAMS: PARTNERING STUDENT MENTORS WITH YOUNG ADULTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

The Center supports the development of model programs with an interdisciplinary focus through collaboration with Towson University faculty and students. All programs facilitate a reciprocal learning experience between young adults on the autism spectrum and student mentors from a variety of disciplines. The following are examples of some model programs implemented during the first year:

Adult Language and Pragmatic Skills (ALPS) Group

This clinical group focuses on improving social pragmatic skills under the direction of a speech language pathologist. Session topics include: communication and conversation skills, initiating and maintaining friendships, problem solving, perspective taking, communicating on the job, coping with sensory issues, and determining personal strengths and needs. Techniques of discussion, role playing, video observation, and practical application of skills are emphasized.

Adventure Pursuits

In collaboration with Campus Recreation Services, programs on an outdoor Challenge Course and in an indoor Rock Climbing gym provide opportunities to develop and practice problem solving, communication, leadership, decision-making, and relationship skills.

Social Group

This informal group of college age adults on the autism spectrum from the surrounding community meets monthly at the university to provide opportunities for young adults to socialize in a relaxed and supportive atmosphere.

Wellness Program

This structured program promotes individualized fitness goals while addressing social interaction skills. Students from the Kinesiology department assist young adults on the autism spectrum in developing and implementing personal training goals in a group setting within the University's Wellness Center.

TU Crew

This group was developed in collaboration with peer mentors for Towson University students on the autism spectrum to support social integration on the college campus. Activities focus on addressing the challenges that arise in the transition to college life: leaving home, community living, adjusting to the rigors of academics, and integrating into the social context of the university.

Women's Group

This group of young women from the community meets at the campus Women's Center with student facilitators to discuss issues specific to young women on the autism spectrum, including women's health, relationship building, coping with peer pressure, self-expression, and self-advocacy.

