

Case for Support: Individualized Job Training Project for young adults with Autism.

Employment is identified as the most socially desirable achievement for adults. Only 15% of ASD adults are employed and 6% are competitively employed compared to other developmental disabilities. ASD have highest rate of post-graduation underemployment (Watling & Spitzer, 2018)

Case #1 D is a young man with autism. He stands 6'8" He has a deep voice and he rocks back and forth when he gets anxious. He's larger than an NFL linebacker. People fear his size, his baritone, and restless moves. He sleeps badly and often stays up all night, walking the dog for exercise and staying in during the day. He's recently completed his AA degree. His plan was to matriculate into a Bachelor's program at SF State. Due to some transferring credits issues he was 1/2 of a credit short to transfer. D was despondent. Getting his degree was his life plan. He got anxious, angry and then depressed. We asked him to work at the ranch with the horses he adores but he struggles with strong smells and is repelled by the notion of ranch work where he would be exposed to hundreds of pounds of manure daily.

One day, he offered us a gift. He gave me the paper he'd written at college in his abnormal psychology class. D had written the paper about himself and his experience of autism. It became clear that D is a gifted writer. His style is refreshingly clear and succinct. I asked him to proofread a grant proposal for me. When I handed him the proposal, he began to shake and weep. "Nobody has ever asked me to do anything important before."

D now writes and reviews all of the Square Peg grants. He is being sought by other local non profits to write and review grants. He can work from home where he is comfortable and can work all night and have information ready to review in the morning. We created a career opportunity for D by playing to his strengths and interests.

Case #2 In the summer of 2016 we piloted a very small job training project at the ranch for four youth who were transitioning out of high school. We supplied a paycheck, job training, certification in HorseBoy™ Method and CPR training. One of those youth was "M" is diagnosed with Tourette's

"Happiness is a natural connector (Prizant). when we are happy, people are drawn to us. when we are connected, we are productive.

Syndrome, Chronic Asthma, ADHD and more. His barriers to employment are significant. It was clear that M had not the physical ability nor the interest to do ranch chores. However, he had a unique ability to connect to special needs children. In the next year, we tried to help M set up a tutoring business but the demands of scheduling and travel were triggers to his anxiety. Seemingly at a loss for how to help a young man who had since dropped out of college and become depressed, we engaged our network and found a school for severely autistic youth. The director immediately saw the value in hiring M. He now has full time employment and is a key staff member for his ability to connect with ASD youth.

M's struggles have turned into an asset to help others and a career. If that isn't success, we don't know what is.

Problem: 50,000+ Autistic Americans turned 18 in 2016. One in 10 will find jobs (Geer 2013). Of the 12+ leading job training programs for ASD clients we have explored, not one focuses on building leadership skills of the client. Most are entry-level customer facing jobs or else they are data intensive jobs. What we found as opportunities for intelligent ASD young adults with a sincere interest in learning work skills was unsatisfactory, unavailable and would under-employ, isolate or discourage ASD clients.

The Facts: Despite evidence of the potential of individuals with autism to perform competitive jobs, employment rates for people on the spectrum remain extremely poor. Approximately 75% of adults with autism are unemployed or underemployed (Autism Society, 2011; Van Laarhoven & Winiaski, 2012). In 2013, the U.S. Department of Labor (2014) reported unemployment for people with disabilities at 11.9%, with labor force participation for people with disabilities at 18.7%. In fact, only 6% of individuals with autism are actively employed (Shattuck, Wagner, Narendorf, Sterzing, & Hensley, 2011). In an analysis of nationally representative data, Shattuck et al. (2012) reported that in the eight years following high school only 53% of individuals with autism had worked for pay. Adult care and lost productivity from unemployment of individuals with autism have resulted in substantial costs to society. The annual cost for caring for the 1.5 million people in the U.S. with autism has been estimated from \$35 billion to \$60 billion, (Autism Society, 2011), with the lifetime cost to care for a person with autism at \$3.2 million. Two-thirds of these costs occur after the age of 18 and are directly related to unemployment (Autism Society, 2011).

Solution: **Creative, individualized job training in a supportive environment** for young adults with ASD. Clients come to the program either by matriculating from our horseback riding program or by a demonstrated interest and passion for ranch life. By paying a wage and creating a supportive environment in a space that already fosters trust in the client, ASD clients develop life and work skills and are achieving in an optimal environment to alleviate stress and anxiety most often associated with ASD disorders. Some youth thrive in the ranch work, some, like D and M in the examples showed their worth in other aspects of running a non profit delivering human services. *The critical shift is that ASD clients are in a trusted environment where they can develop their interests and passions into skills that will develop into a professionally and recreationally satisfying life.* ASD clients find a new lens from which to view themselves and their role in their world and community.

History: Square Peg has a long and successful history with clients on the autism spectrum. Horseback riding and ranch life coupled with an ASD friendly physical space that encourages exploration and emotional growth has shown over the 17 years of our existence to be of tremendous value to ASD families.

What it Takes: Running two barns with 24 rescued and donated horses takes a lot of work. It's seven days a week, day in, day out. It takes physical labor, a keen eye for problems, a calm body in times of crisis. It takes planning and training and a sensitivity to other clients and their families. It takes flexibility and adaptability to weather, to emergencies, to the health and well-being of the animals, the clients, the volunteers and donors.

Running an organization that is committed to fiscal transparency takes dedication, accountability and sound business acumen. These youth have the opportunity to assist in bookkeeping, records management, scheduling, social media management, design and more. Square Peg Ranch is a leader in the space of Thoroughbred Racehorse Retirement - our non profit model is under scrutiny from regulatory agencies, donors and funding organizations.

Each aspect of the job is a demonstrated struggle and roadblock to employability for ASD clients. By making best use of peer mentors to assist in job training, in crisis handling, in judgment matters and in social interaction, ASD clients acquire skills while doing meaningful work alongside peers and mentors, both ASD and non-ASD.

Objectives: Meaningful and important work translates into improved self-esteem¹. Leadership skills and personal independence assist young adults to transition from high school to the work force and college. Participants earn a record of job experience that includes leadership responsibilities, planning and decision making.

Location: Square Peg Ranch Half Moon Bay is a 110 acre working horse ranch housing 15 rescued and donated horses. Square Peg Sonoma is an 11 acre farm housing 14 horses. Our adaptive lesson program operates six days per week and specializes in working with children and adults on the autism spectrum. The ranches are set up to minimize sensory triggers and to promote a healthy environment for the animals and for our clients, their families, volunteers and staff.

Outcomes: Our goal is to see significant improvement in social and job competence, and adaptive behaviors. With advanced job training, clients may be able to attain full time jobs in fields where they have keen interest.

Measures of Outcomes: Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales: The Vineland-II is a 297-item semi-structured interview measuring one's adaptive behavior and performance of daily activities for personal and social competency. The eleven sub-scales include receptive communication, expressive communication, written communication, personal daily living skills, domestic daily living skills, community daily living skills, interpersonal relationships, play and leisure time, coping skills, gross motor skills, and fine motor skills as well as an optional maladaptive. Due to overlap of some motor and social skills sub-scales, selected sub-scales will be used in the SRS, SPM and V-II. These sub-scales include: expressive communication, personal daily living skills, community daily living skills, interpersonal relationships, play and leisure time, coping skills, and the optional maladaptive behavior sub-scale. These sub-scales are validated to use as stand-alone measures.

Sustainability: Working directly with a combination of the Golden Gate Regional Center's Paid Internship Program, with the San Mateo County Workability Program, the local office of the Department of Rehabilitation for covering the pay for the clients as well as

¹ <http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/090208p12.shtml>

reimbursement for staff time and training, we are building a sustainable model to engage and retain engaged and talented staff to run the program.

Replicable: A program similar to this in Bray, Ireland² has demonstrated significant improvement in areas such as self-advocacy, independence, decision-making and self-confidence. Square Peg Ranch is a premiere site for HorseBoy™ Work. HorseBoy has sites worldwide.³ Success with this program means we can replicate it in HorseBoy Centers. The first project is to replicate the program at the HorseBoy home site in Elgin, Texas and then at sites all over the globe.

Staff Training: All staff (executive, managerial, interns and research assistant) will receive additional training in HorseBoy Method. All staff receive First Aid, CPR Horse safety and sexual harassment prevention training.

Advisors: Rupert Isaacson, Founder, The HorseBoy Foundation
Jill Escher, President, The San Francisco Autism Society
Janet Lawson, BCBA, LMFT, Autistry Studios

Costs Year 1

Client Pay	
8 clients working an average of 15 hours per week, 50 weeks per year @ \$20 per hour	
\$120,000	
3 full time job training supervisors	
\$150,000	
Executive Direction and Overview	
\$60,000	
Volunteer Support	\$ 7,000
Staff and key volunteer Training	\$ 12,000
Supplies	\$ 2,800
Assessment Assistance Vineland Adaptive Scales	\$2,500
Total 12 month program	\$354,300

Personnel

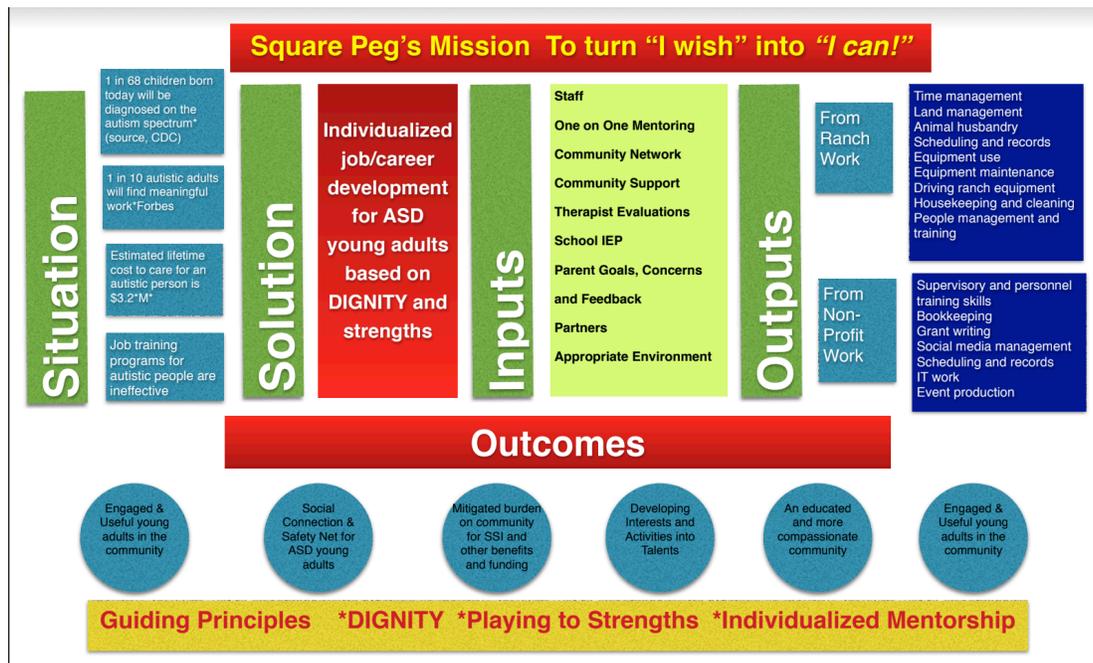
- Executive Director Joell Dunlap to devote 60% time and effort for year 1 as project principal to develop, implement, assess and deliver the program and protocols.

² Festina Lente <http://www.festinalente.ie/index.php/transition-training-programme-festina-lente/>

³ HorseBoy Method <http://horseboyworld.com/programs/autism-special-needs/horse-boy-method-autism.html>

- Ranch Managers Emma Bond (Half Moon Bay Facility) and Rebecca Knopf (Sonoma Facility) to be the primary job training supervisor for the project. 50% of their time will be dedicated to the project. They will actively train, supervise and direct the majority of the clients.
- Direct Job Supervisors, Joe McIntyre and Kemma Peters will work with clients on a 1:1 and 2:1 basis for job mentoring, safety and training.
- Chief Knowledge Manager Davis Finch will collect data on daily and regular job responsibilities for each trainee. Collaborates with ED in writing and reviewing all reports, grant requests and reviews for completeness and accuracy. Advises the entire team on appropriate action and environment for ASD clients.

Theory of Change Model



Testamonials

One of the unique challenges families struggling with special needs children and young adults is finding a path after their child has "aged out of the public system" - and in this regard we were not unique. Helping to find appropriate employment for our son Nick was a frustrating experience, particularly as most opportunities failed to teach any useful job skills beyond enduring mind-numbing, repetitive tasks - providing little downstream value for both our son and the employer.

Finding Square Peg Ranch was a revelation that quickly helped Nick progress both intellectually and emotionally. Joell and her fabulous staff provide truly meaningful work - with firm compassion in a unique

outdoor environment. Tending to these magnificent creatures has immeasurably enhanced Nick's life; he relates to the horses in a visceral, nearly spiritual way - providing a comforting rhythm and cadence in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

Having a place to go every day as part of a team has also enhanced Nick's self-esteem and confidence in himself, a crucial component as he struggles to fit into a neuro-typical world lacking in awareness and an understanding of his struggles living with autism.

As a parent, we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Joell and the Square Peg team - and are committed to supporting this wonderful organization as it moves to the next level. After years of searching for the right fit, Joell's unique approach has done wonders and we look forward to sharing in Nick's development under her wing for years to come.

Gilbert "Gib" Papazian II

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Square Peg has been a Godsend to our family. I think that the deepest and most basic fear a parent of an autistic child faces is, "what's going to happen to my kid after I'm gone?"

There are many programs designed to help young children on the autistic spectrum but once they reach adulthood the options and resources quickly dry up .

The Autistic Spectrum is a range from very low functioning to very high functioning. Depending on the severity of the diagnosis, most of the programs that do exist focus on basic life skills, such as personal hygiene, money management, navigating public transportation and personal safety. In addition, there are resources which help in obtaining education, employment and safe living environments.

This is all well intentioned and greatly appreciated but most of it is geared for survival only and often ends up becoming more like warehousing for autistic people. Most of the help for employment is in the form of performing simple rote tasks. Living arrangements are often in group homes. What these intelligent and very self-aware human beings really need is the opportunity to blossom into sensitive, purposeful and fulfilled members of society. Just like everyone else, they want to have a life full of experiences, friendships, love, happiness and the ability to successfully manage the inevitable challenges that come with life on this planet.

Square Pegs is a rare piece of heaven on earth. Not only is it a safe place for these kids and young adults to interact with these beautiful animals, it is also a place full of love and real life. It's a place that gives them opportunities to acquire meaningful life skills, for themselves, at their own pace in a non-judgmental environment.

Our 22 year old daughter, Am, is a ranch hand here. Her job is to care for the horses, maintain the stables and grounds and generally help run the whole facility. She is an active member of the staff doing important work to help others and herself. For the first time in her life, she is living independently, making friends, driving

vehicles, operating farm equipment, creating and managing schedules and most importantly, taking charge of her own life.

Seeing that smiley face of hers covered in dirt and sweat and stinking like a barn is the greatest joy on earth. Hearing her complain about being tired or sore from work and looking forward to resting on the weekend is like listening to fine music. When she shares her plans for her future with her mom and I, it brings tears of joy to our eyes.

This place is helping Am develop the skills she needs to create her own future.

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