

Creating Support Systems for Adults with ASDs

A *support system* is a network of people who provide an individual with practical or emotional support. Like anyone else, adults with ASD benefit from support systems. While people gain support from family members, it is also important to build a greater social network of other people like co-workers, friends, and perhaps a significant other. Challenges in social interactions and communication may make it difficult for the adult with ASD to develop and maintain these relationships, but with appropriate supports and assistance, success is certainly possible.

At every age, individuals with ASDs may benefit from instruction in communication and social skills. If a person with ASD does not have a way to communicate with community members, it will be very difficult to build supports. Certainly, developing and maintaining communication should be a priority. Additionally, social skills instruction may be helpful in assisting the person with ASD develop relationships.

If extra help is needed, there are several funding sources available. In Kentucky, many of these supports come from Medicaid Waivers like the Supports for Community Living Waiver (SCL) or the Michelle P Waiver. Additionally, the Hart Supported Living Grant provides assistance in arranging services designed to help them live independently and manage their own care. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Social Security Administration may also facilitate inclusion and participation in the community.

Although state services, families, and advocates work to improve opportunities for support and community inclusion, there are barriers. First, if the person with ASD does not have a functional communication system, or displays significant deficits in social skills, it may be difficult to interact with community members. Families may be unaware of or have difficulty accessing resources available to the family member with ASD. Community education and awareness may be needed to dispel misnomers about ASDs. While state funding may be available across the state, there may be inadequate or inaccessible services in certain areas.

Despite the potential for great barriers, adults with ASDs, families, and agencies must continue to advocate and work toward inclusion and the building of support networks. Certainly, we have come a long way in recent years because of the hard work of all of these groups. The Kentucky Autism Training Center works to network and support these efforts.

Recommendations

- Inform families and adults with ASD about resources available to them to increase support systems.
- Provide resources and training to family members supporting an adult with ASD on future planning, life skills instruction, stress coping and techniques.
- Increase community awareness of adults with autism and promote the inclusion of adults with ASD in the community.
- Investigate innovative ways to increase support to adults with ASD and facilitate further development of their own personal networks.

