

Unlocking Potential of Autistic Youth: A Strength-based Approach to Empowering Employment Readiness through ASSET and EPASS

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Outline of Presentation

- **Current situation**
- **Strength-based employment training program**
 - Assistive Soft Skills and Employment Training
 - Employment Preparation And Skills Support

What are the Outcomes of Autistic Individuals?



Employment and Other Day Activities

Had a paid job in the community

14%

Worked in the community for pay in settings that also employed people without disabilities.

Were in unpaid, activities in facilities

42%

Participated in unpaid activities in facilities with others with disabilities (sometimes called day programs).

Had no work or activity

27%

Had no work or activities in the previous two weeks in community or facility-based settings.



Health and Mental Health

Had co-occurring health conditions

51%

Had at least one additional health condition from a list of 11 common conditions.

Had co-occurring mental health conditions

54%

Had anxiety, mood disorder, psychotic disorder, or “other mental illness/psychiatric diagnosis” in addition to ASD.

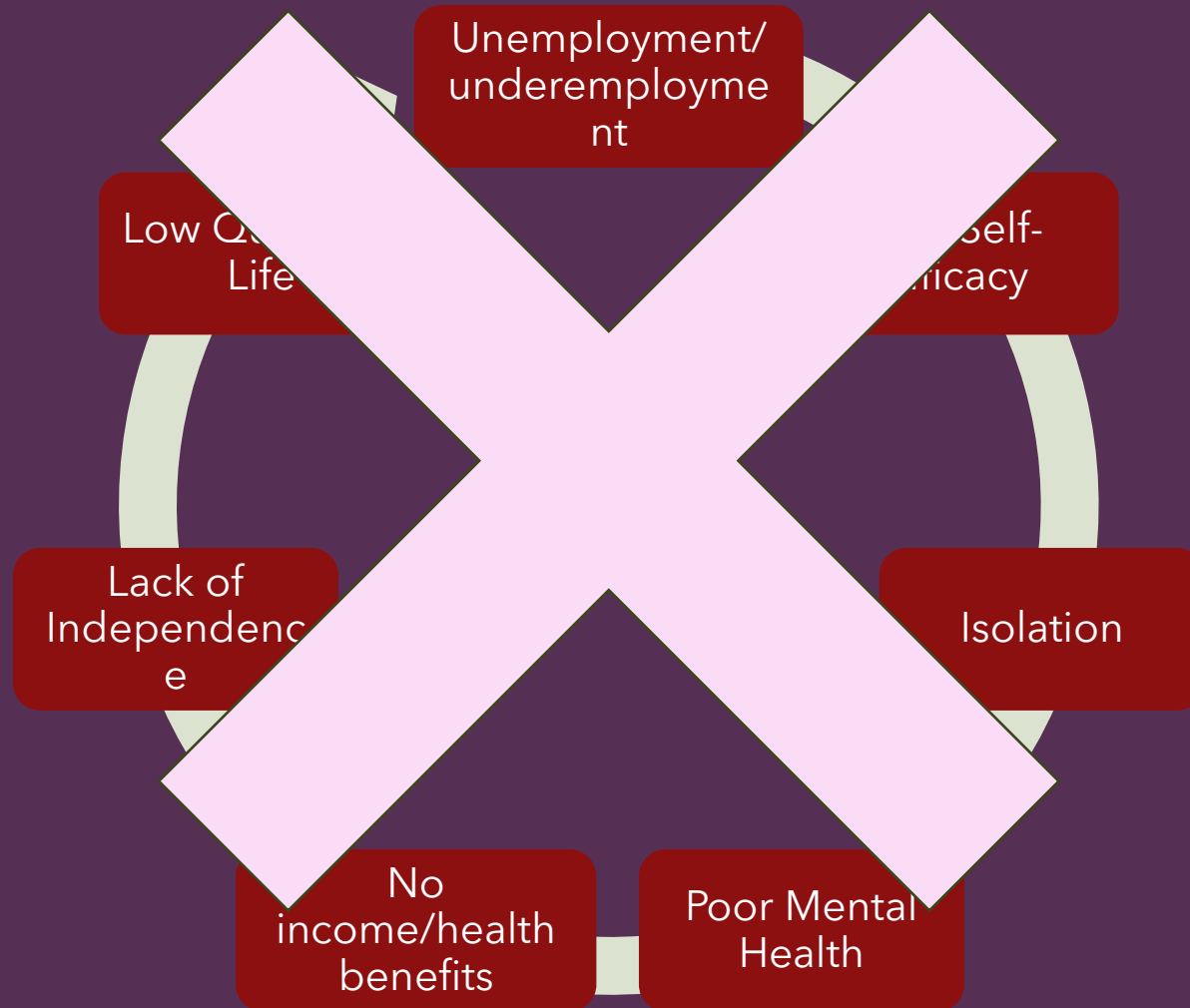
Took medication to treat mental health conditions

64%

Took medication for either mood disorders, anxiety, and/or psychotic disorder, and/or behavioral challenges.

Roux, A. M., Rast, A. E., Anderson, K. A., and Shattuck, P. T. (2017). National Autism Indicators Report: Developmental Disability Services and Outcomes in Adulthood. Philadelphia, PA: Life Course Outcomes Program, A.J. Drexel Autism Institute, Drexel University.

Breaking the Cycle...



To improve:

- Skills & abilities
- Self-efficacy
- Employment opportunities
- Mental health
- Quality of life

(Chen, Sung, et al., 2015; Chen, Leader, Sung, et al, 2017; Sung et al., 2015)

Why chose Soft Skills Intervention?



of all jobs will be soft skills incentive by 2030

Source: Deloitte Access Economics



of executives say that soft skills are equally important or more important than technical skills

Source: The Wall Street Journal



of executives say that it is difficult to find people with soft skill

Source: The Wall Street Journal

A Comprehensive Digital Platform For Skill-Based Employment Readiness Training For Individuals With Disabilities

ASSET

Assistive Soft Skills and Employment Training

WHAT IS ASSET?

ASSET is a manualized (group-based or individualized) training program for individuals with disabilities focused on improving **soft skills, such as:**

- Disability Awareness
- Self Advocacy
- Communication
- Attitude & Enthusiasm
- Teamwork
- Networking
- Digital Identity
- Problem Solving & Critical Thinking
- Professionalism
- Time Management, Organization, and Planning
- Mental Health & Stress Management
- Emotion Recognition & Regulation
- Awareness of Self & Others
- Making Good Impressions
- Workplace Relationships

Options (Same Content, Different Pace)

50 minutes * 2 times per week (30 sessions)

90 minutes * 1 time per week (15 sessions)

EPASS

Employment Preparation And Skills Support

WHAT IS EPASS?

EPASS is a group-based or individualized training program for individuals with disabilities focused on **employment-readiness skills, such as:**

- Career interest and Goal setting
- Personal branding
- Informational interviewing
- Job search & application
- Resume & cover letter
- Job interview
- Disability disclosure & accommodations
- Onboarding
- Managing paychecks
- Workplace etiquette
- Workplace hierarchy & relationships
- Work-life balance

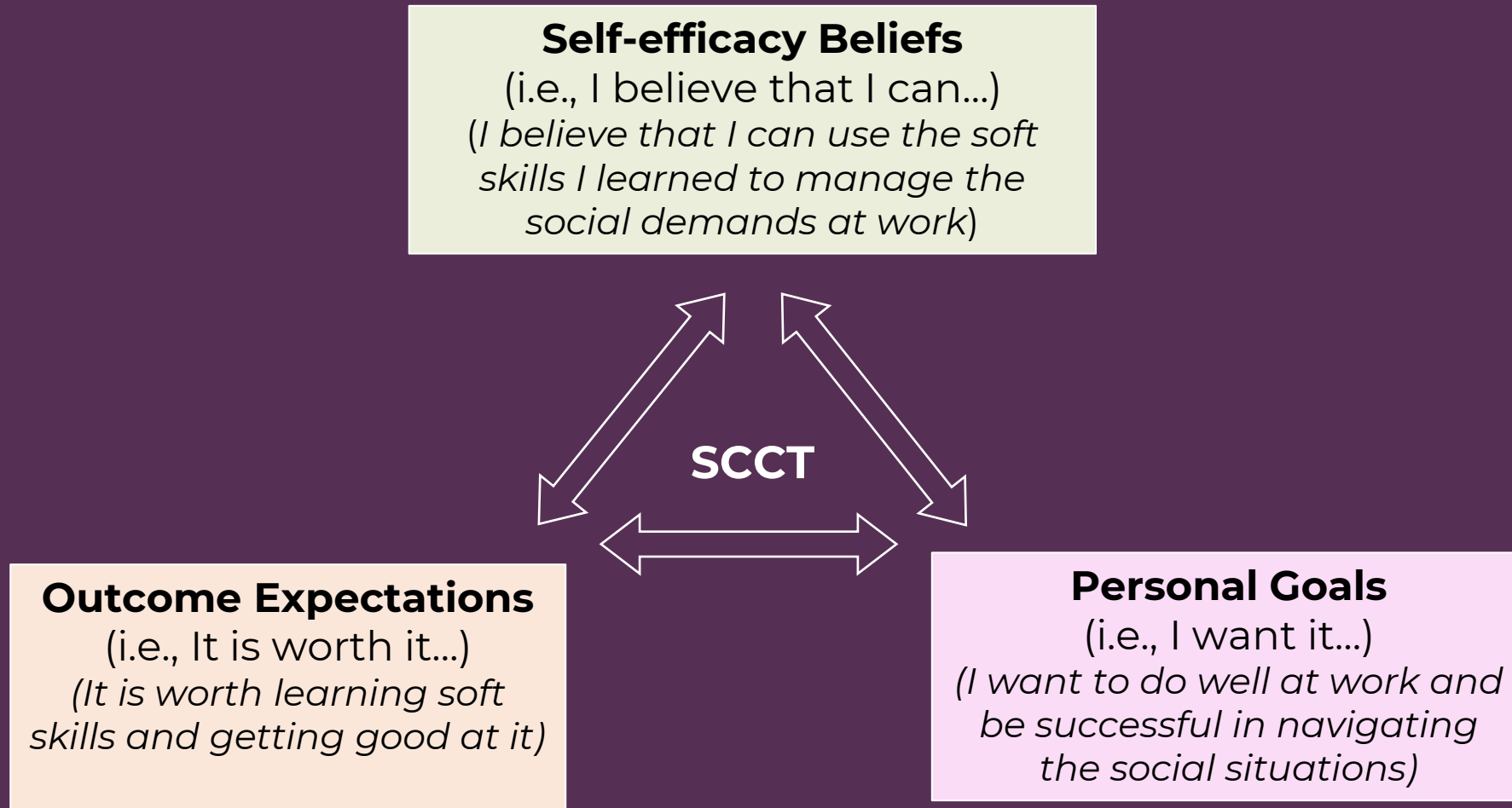
Options (Same Content, Different Pace)

50 minutes * 2 times per week (30 sessions)

90 minutes * 1 time per week (15 sessions)

Theory-driven & research-based

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)



(Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994)

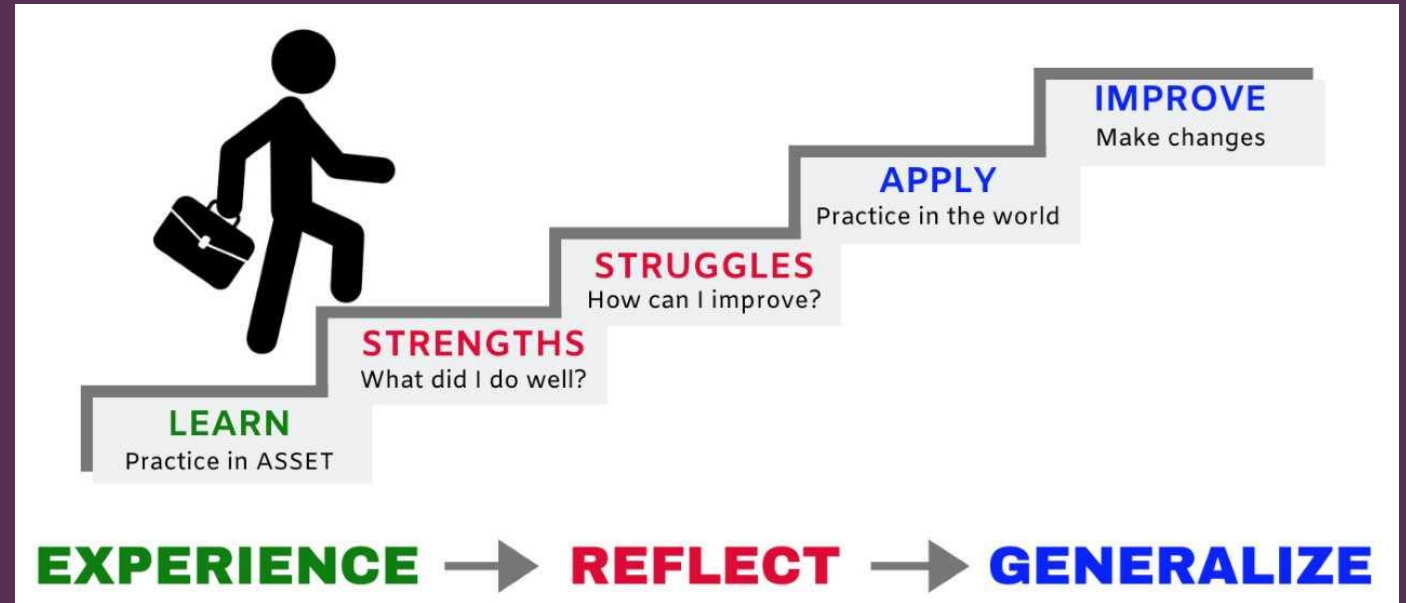
Program Structure

- Group-based (6-10 participants)
- Delivered by a facilitator (teachers/counselors/employment specialists)
- Applies a combination of teaching strategies (“Big 10”)
- Guided by universal design for learning principles (UDL)

Instructional Pedagogy



- 1) Didactics
- 2) Modeling
- 3) Discussion
- 4) Videos
- 5) Experiential Activities
- 6) Role Play
- 7) Self-Reflection
- 8) Reinforcement
- 9) Performance Feedback
- 10) Generalization



Session Structure

General format:

opening

- Welcome, recap, review, & agenda






middle

- Warm Up Activity
- Discussion
- Videos
- Handouts

closing

- Group Activities
- Wrap Up and Let's Practice Activity
- Self-Reflection
- Tell Me What You Remember

ASSET Session 4 – AGENDA

	Activity Type	Activity Theme
	Welcome & Review	a. Recap last session b. Preview this session c. Review Let's Practice activity from last session
	Warm Up	d. Birthday game
	Video & Discussion	e. Communication and Idioms
	Wrap Up	f. Wrap up
	Self-Reflection	g. What I learned and what I can improve

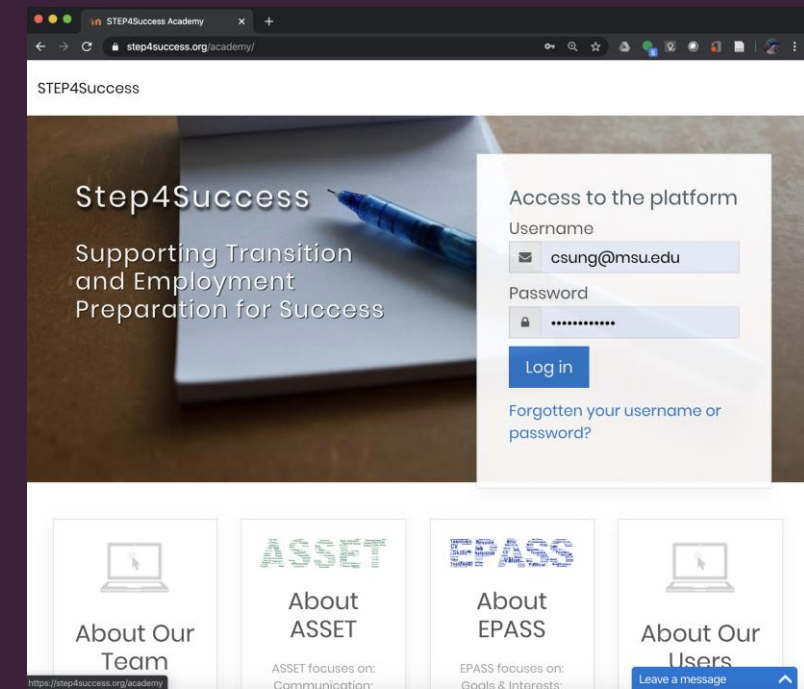
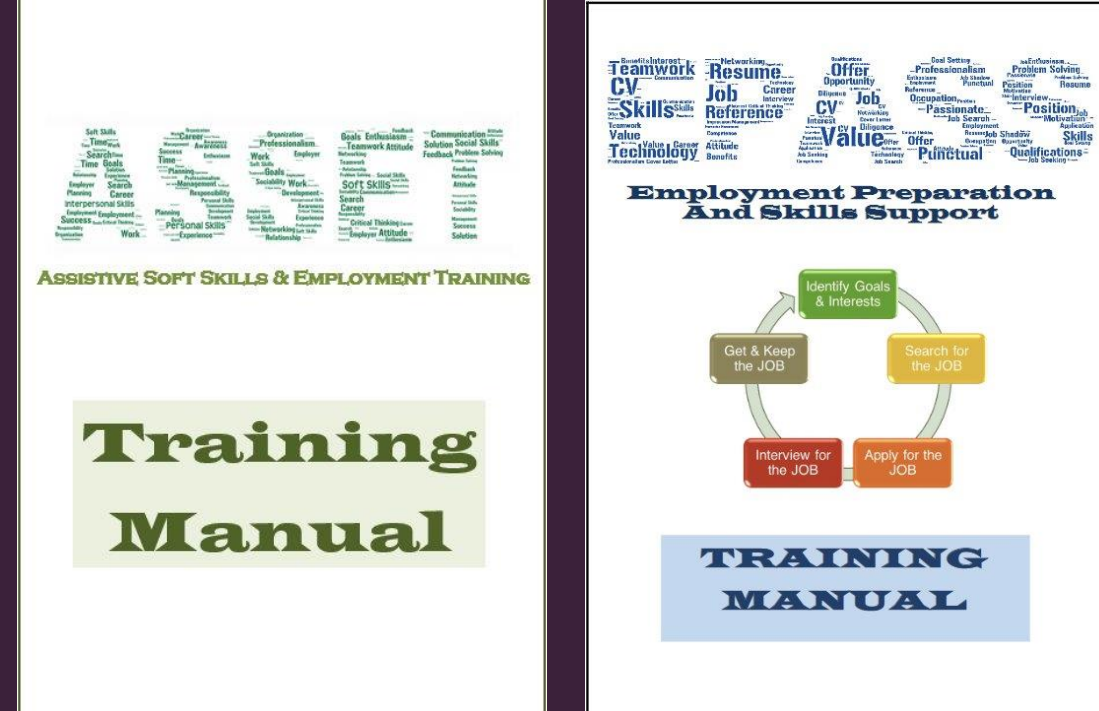
Interdisciplinary and Stakeholder Involvement

- Interdisciplinary expertise
 - Rehab Counseling, Special Ed, OT, Psych, Ed Tech, Human Resources
- Community-based participatory action research
 - Stakeholders engagement throughout design and implementation
- Rooted in implementation sciences
 - RE-AIM framework

ASSET/EPASS Implementation

Materials and resources available for participants, teachers, job coaches, caregivers

- Session PowerPoints
- Training Manual
- Handout Booklet
- Program Activity Kit
- Training Videos
- Online platform





National & International ASSET Studies

- Across the US

- Michigan (tested with RCT)
- Illinois (tested with RCT)
- Florida (tested with RCT)
- California (piloted virtually)
- Louisiana (ongoing)

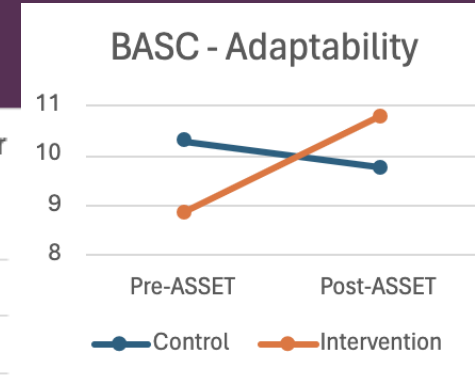
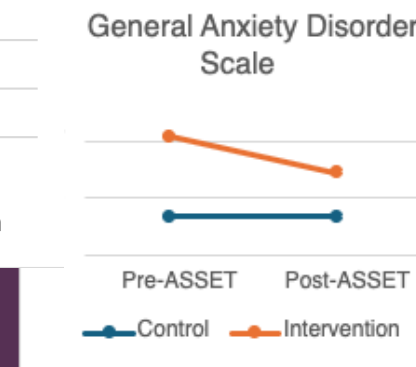
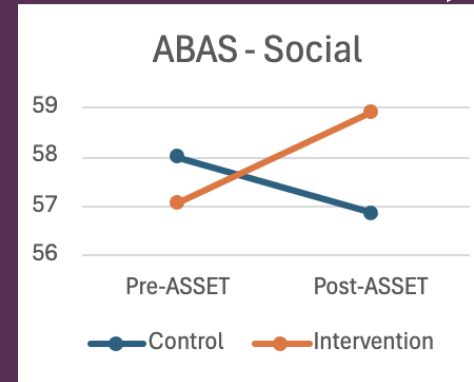
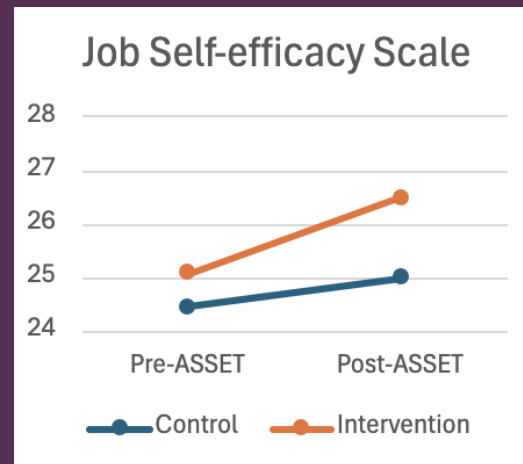
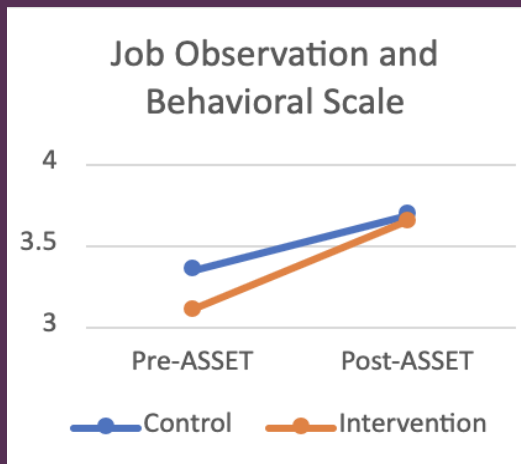
- Around the globe

- Ireland (tested with RCT)
- Slovakia (translated, piloting)
- Hong Kong (translated, piloting)
- China (translated, piloting)
- exploring with other countries

Major Quantitative Findings (3 RCTs - 2 in US and 1 in Ireland)

Vocational Findings:

- Improve job-related skills (e.g., personal presentation)
- Increase job-related self-efficacy
- Reduce support in behavioral performance on the job



Psychosocial Findings:

- Improve social functioning
- Improve mental health functioning (e.g., anxiety)
- Improve adaptive functioning (e.g., adaptability, resilience)

Qualitative Findings (From Participants)

Soft Skills:

"Helped me with my soft skills that often it's hard. We often forget, just try to catch up and develop hard skills what employers essentially want."

"Communication, enthusiasm, and professionalism; those are the three things I learned from ASSET."

Goal Setting:

"Made me think about what kind of job I want to have and whether or not it pays."

Employment Readiness:

"Definitely helped me improve my ability to building and preparation for interviews, work well with others in job environment."

Networking:

"I am going to try to keep in contact with people I have worked with such as peers, teachers."

Teamwork:

"Nice to be able to see how different personalities can work together."

Mental Health:

"I am not as stressed and my smiling is more appropriate."

Sense of Belonging:

"I felt a little connected to the group members. The activities helped me feel connected to the group."

Qualitative Findings (From Facilitators)

Soft Skills:

*"I could see the students every week becoming **more comfortable socially**. It's a group where that's not a strength for them, and they all had kind of admitted that. But I was able to see them each week really **opening up and feeling more comfortable with interacting with each other**, with me, with **getting involved in activities**, and **really having more conversations**."*

Employment Readiness:

*"One of the things I like best is **how applicable it is**, and students were able to make that connection. The **activities that we did** and some of the information we talked about, they right away were **making that connection**. They could really **see how this was important** for them to know as far as getting a job."*

Teamwork:

*"One student at the first, he just was worried about getting through the program and the material. Then [he] **became a team player**. He is saying in the classroom, 'You guys, we gotta go help with the chairs. Let's go and do this as a team.' He's **making that connection with other areas of his life about teamwork and working with others**. So I think it is **making an impact** because I don't know if he would've done that before."*

Objective	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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Standards Alignment: National Career and Technical Education Standards:

- Alignment to national standards for career and technical education have been made throughout the program according to the Advance CTE: The National Career Clusters Framework.
- The Framework is used in some form by all 50 states and each of the U.S. territories to organize CTE programs at the state and local levels

ASSET

Implementation & Evaluation

Rooted in implementation science

- Translating research into practice
- Understanding and addressing barriers
- Evaluating implementation processes
- Developing and testing implementation strategies
- Multidisciplinary approach
- Evaluating outcomes
 - Vocational outcomes
 - Psychosocial & mental health outcomes
 - Cost-benefits



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Thank you!

Questions?

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