



## **Unlocking Potential of Autistic Youth: A Strength-Based Approach to Empowering Employment Readiness through ASSET and EPASS.**

**A webinar presented by Dr. Connie Sung on November 13, 2024.**

00:00:00:08 - 00:00:25:05

Corena

Most of you are here now. Let's go ahead and get started. And I'd like to invite our presenter today to Dr. Connie Song. If you can turn on your webcam. And to those of you who just joined us...good afternoon, and welcome to today's webinar, Unlocking Potential of Autistic Youth: A Strength-based Approach to Empowering Employment Readiness through ASSET and EPASS.

00:00:25:07 - 00:00:53:13

Corena

My name is Corena and I'm your host for this event and it's great to have you all today. And I have the distinct pleasure of introducing today's speaker, Dr. Connie Sung. And Dr. Connie Sung is a professor at Michigan State University. Dr. Sun's research focuses on developing and evaluating community based interventions for advancing career development and improving psychosocial adjustment of autistic individuals.

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Corena

She has authored over 90 publications and secured more than 20 million in research funding. Her work involves global collaborations extending to European, Asian, and African countries. And Dr. Sung's efforts are recognized globally, including presentations at the United Nations General Assembly's Science Summit. So with that, I'm going to hand things over to Connie. Go ahead and take it away.

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Dr. Connie Sung

Thank you so much Corena. It's an absolute pleasure today to share with you all some of the work that we have done with and also for individuals with autistic individuals. So the topic is Unlocking Potential of Autistic Youth: A Strength-based Approach to Empowering Employment Readiness through ASSET and EPASS. And I'm one of the presenters, my co-presenter Katie Kinde,

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Dr. Connie Sung

unfortunately, we were at a conference together last week and she came down with...really ill so she won't be able to make it today with us for the presentation. I was really hoping she could share her journey and how she was able to unlock her potential. However, Katie is more than happy if individuals would like to reach out and learn about her experience after the presentation.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So my name is Connie Sung. I use she and her pronouns. In today's presentation, I'm going to share some of the statistics. And I promise I won't be overwhelming you with a lot of numbers. But it's just some of the important statistics, that why we, it's important for us to use strength based approach and also tap into the different kind of employment related training to help autistic individuals reach their potential.

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Dr. Connie Sung

And I will also introduce two of the programs that myself and my research team have developed in the past decade. The first one is Assistive Soft Skills and Employment Training, which stands for ASSET that we are hoping the program will be able to help individuals to become an asset to different companies and businesses. And the second program, we call it Employment Preparation And Skill Support, which stands for EPASS.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So basically is a path to get into the employment door. So, I'm going to talk about, first of all, based on a 2017 study, it has shown different outcomes of autistic individuals and including their employment and also their health and mental health. So based on the report, the National Autism Indicators report, it shows about 14% of autistic individuals had a paid job in the community working in the community for different paid employment.

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Dr. Connie Sung

And 42% were in unpaid activities in facilities including like volunteering in like day programs, etc. and 27% had no work or activities in the different community or facilities based settings, which is really concerning because the number is significantly lower than individuals with other type of disabilities. Let alone the people without disabilities. And in as we know have getting an employment, being employed in an integrated settings is not only about a paycheck, but it has a lot more than that, a lot more meaning than just a paycheck including the social interaction, the sense of belonging, the sense of contribution.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So employment has a direct relationship with people's physical health and employment and mental health. So according to the report, about 51% of individuals had co-occurring health conditions and 54% have co-occurring mental health conditions. And 64% of them took medication or other treatment to treat their mental health condition. So with that, I'm going to talk about why the research that I do and the work that I do with different community stakeholders visits this focus on breaking the cycle.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So as I mentioned earlier on, employment and or the other way to think about it is unemployment or underemployment has a lot of negative impact on self-efficacy. If somebody is an employee, they may still have self-doubt. They may not have to believe in themselves that they could do certain things. And that lead to the social isolation and poor mental health.

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Dr. Connie Sung

And also no income, health benefits, lack of independence, and lower quality of life. So how do we break this cycle? Several ways to do it is to improve their different skills and abilities, finding opportunities that match the interest to help them recognize some of the strengths that they have. What they can do instead of focusing on what they cannot do, and helping individuals to build their confidence.

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Dr. Connie Sung

Having the self-efficacy. And through employment opportunities that not only could increase the confidence, have them apply the skills getting into something that they're interested in doing that will also lead to better mental health outcome and quality of life. So to start with, why focus on ASSET? So according to different studies, soft skills is a very important skills for all individuals.

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Dr. Connie Sung

And 63% of all jobs will be soft skills incentive by 2030. And 92% of executives say that soft skills are equally important or more important than the technical skills which sometimes people refer to hard skills. And 89% of executives say that it is difficult to find people with good soft skills. And according to the recent Department of Labor statistics, over 95% of jobs that are calling it as essential skills as part of the soft skills.

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Dr. Connie Sung

And we also have seen in the studies as many of individuals struggle or have difficulty maintaining their employment or obtaining the employment is due to the soft skills instead of the hard skills. So that's one of the main reasons that we focus on the soft skills intervention.

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Dr. Connie Sung

And I'm going to play a short video to introduce what soft skills are and what ASSET is. And some of the program participants who have gone through the program speak a little bit about it. And then I will go more in depth to describe what the program is really all about.

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Dr. Connie Sung

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Dr. Connie Sung

00:09:03:24 - 00:09:38:07

Video

My name is Connie Sung, and I'm an associate professor in rehabilitation counseling at Michigan State University. I'm also the co-director of the STRIDE Center, which stands for Services, Training, and Research for Independence and Desired Employment. I initially trained as an occupational therapist, and I receive training in rehabilitation psychology, and I found the transition H youth is the most interesting, exciting, but also challenging period that I want to focus on. The things that really inspire me to start creating a training program on soft skills.

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Video

According to the Department of Labor, over 90% of people, they lose their job because of soft skills, not because of hard skills. A lot of people would ask, what's the difference between hard skills and soft skills? Hard skills basically is very job specific. Like, if I'm a programmer, I know how to like do the coding, how to do the programing.

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Video

But soft skills is more the interpersonal skills. How people interact and navigate a social situation in the workplace. Soft skills is always taken for granted that when you grow up, you start working. You know how to interact with people in the workplace. But that is not the case for a lot of the people, even without disabilities. We believe that is something that is trainable, that they can learn, they can get better, and help them to keep their jobs.

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Video

I have learned soft skills that are important to employers, such as networking, communication skills, teamwork, critical thinking, and analytical skills. I become more social in the workplace, more professional and have learned many lessons that will help me. If you want to improve your soft skills, join this program. You will not regret it.

00:10:54:02 - 00:11:28:03

Video

During the pandemic, a lot of people find it really difficult because some people feeling like isolated, they're working remotely from home. We have worked with four different school district to implement it virtually. We provided support for students to engage in those kind of activity in a virtual format, and technical support to make sure they can get online. And also we make modifications to the curriculum to make sure some of the things that we implement in person could be also adapted for the virtual format.

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Video

My name is Hung Jen Kuo. I'm currently an assistant professor in Rehabilitation Counseling Program. And my involvement with the program is I manage the technology deployment and implementation. Some of the challenges that we face is the individual that we serve not necessarily have the skill to assess technology.

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Video

Over the past 5 to 6 years, we realized that soft skills training is very important. We started funded by the Department of Defense. They have a training program specifically focused on autism research. After that, we were able to receive funding from the Institute for Educational Sciences.

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Video

As of now, we are serving individuals with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disability. But down the road, we can expand it to different disability type and into different population. The reason why we integrate technology in this program is that we want to enhance the accessibility for individual disability across different area. The way we try to make it all in one technology and integrate that with our learning material is we want to allow more flexibility.

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Video

Technology, nowadays, there are a lot of variety and sometimes that variety can really be confusing to individuals. And we try to streamline it so that you can use just one platform and you can get help from there. You can get learning material from there, and you can practice from there. Everybody can use soft skills training.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So that was just a brief video to show to illustrate what ASSET is and how we integrate some of the technology to make it more accessible and reachable for individuals. All individuals, including autistic individuals.

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Speaker 6

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Dr. Connie Sung

Okay, so, in a video we kind of mentioned ASSET, Assistive Soft Skills and Employment Training, is a manualized group based or individual training program for individuals with disabilities. So we started with the autistic individual population when we received the funding from the Department of Defense. And within the program, we have covered a variety of topics and how we came up with the topics...

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Dr. Connie Sung

we started with the skills to pay the bills that was introduced by the Department of Labor, the OSAP Department. And we have invited different stakeholders, including special education teachers, transition coordinators, employers, individuals with disabilities, including autistic individuals, to help us understand what are some of the soft skills that are important at the workplace. So we have made a significant modification based on the skills to pay the bills

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Dr. Connie Sung

manual and incorporated different topics that were deemed important, including disability awareness, self-efficacy, communication, attitude and enthusiasm, teamwork, networking, digital identity, problem solving and critical thinking, professionalism, time management, organization and planning, mental health and stress management, emotion recognition and regulation, awareness of self and others, making good impressions, and workplace relationships. And all of these topics, it wasn't us,

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Dr. Connie Sung

our research team, came up. It was actually getting input through different focus groups, through a different survey. And the community stakeholders let us know these are the things that typically they were not cover comprehensively in both community, rehab organization or in school settings. As you heard in the video, we have collaborated with different school districts and also community partners.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So we have two different program options for them to choose from. We started with a 90 minute 15 session and individuals will attend one session per week. But as we go we were getting the feedback is soft skills, it's never too late to to learn about it. So schools would like to adopt the program into the school system.

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Dr. Connie Sung

However, 90 minutes is really hard to carve it out from a daily school schedule. So we have another version that we created that go alongside with the 90 minute is only 50 minute....that will go well with the school structure, but it will be two days a week and then last for one semester. So the content, they are pretty much very similar.

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Dr. Connie Sung

It's just the pace. And we have also started doing some research in terms of the choice of the different options. What we have learned is certain individuals they benefit from each time less content, but they have time to digest and learn about it. So for those with maybe higher, support needs, they will benefit from a 50 minute version versus in the community setting or in clinical, even college settings...

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Dr. Connie Sung

we had test out the 90 minute work really well for them.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So next I would like to introduce EPASS. So and then because the two program are very similar in a way that we design it, we use the strength based approach and it's theory driven. So EPASS we call it is a sibling program for ASSET is after they learn about the social interaction and then now when they need to go apply for a job, prepare for interview,

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Dr. Connie Sung

how do they use it for getting the job? So the way that I conceptualize it is EPASS helping people to obtain employment and ASSET help people to maintain employment. So EPASS is a group based and individualized training program...focus on employment readiness skills, including identifying the career interests and goal setting, personal branding, informational interviewing. How do you search for jobs and submit job application?

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Dr. Connie Sung

How do they build resume and cover letter? And how do they prepare for a job interview? Have different job interview practices with the HR professionals and disability disclosure and accommodation. When to disclose, what to disclose, how to request for accommodation at the different phase of the job search process. And also onboarding, managing paychecks, workplace etiquette, workplace hierarchy, and also work life balance.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So with EPASS, we have particularly focused on not only having like the helping professionals to help, including myself to develop this. We actually have a team of HR professionals help to develop the content of the EPASS. So for example, in the personal branding and also when they are in the job search, we have a specific section related to personality test or how do we use the problem based interview questions.

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Dr. Connie Sung

How do you answer problem based interview questions? And also how do we incorporate impression management techniques to during the interviews? And again, as I mentioned about ASSET, we also have different options to accommodate the different needs of individuals when they go through the program, including the 50 minute session and also the 90 minute session. So how the way that we develop the two programs, both ASSET and EPASS, we really...they are really driven by the social cognitive career theory.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So as I mentioned at the beginning is the confidence of the person, whether they believe in themselves, whether they can do it or not is very important. And we have the...theory is if somebody can believe that, I believe that I can use the soft skills, I learned to manage the social demands at work, then they will be more inclined to be eager...to learn the soft skills and get good at it.

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Dr. Connie Sung

And then they will want to do well at work and be successful in navigating the social situations. So we are basically the program. A lot of the components is driven by the SCCT social cognitive career theory to really amplify their self-efficacy and what is needed to get to where they want to be in terms of their personal goals. So we use the theory to develop both the ASSET and EPASS program.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So in terms of the program structure, this is a group-based program primarily. We have tested it out in community and school settings that's somewhere between 6 to 10 participants and typically delivered by a facilitator. We have had teachers, counselors, implement specialists deliver it because we have the menu. We have all the PowerPoint to go along with like videos and the digital platform.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So we have gotten a lot of feedback in terms of how do we make it more practical and accessible through our research. And we also apply a combination of teaching strategies. As Michigan State is one of the Big 10, we call it a "Big 10" strategies, which I will be going more in-depth. And we also developed a program, including the digital platform, using the guided by the universal design for learning principles.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So here are the Big 10 pedagogies that we have used. So in the program we have the menu guiding the didactic portion of delivering the content helping individuals building their skills. And we also incorporated different modeling techniques and we have videos incorporated and which sparked a lot of different discussion. And we have different experiential activities including let's practice an activity that they will need to do it within the session and outside of the session.

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Dr. Connie Sung

We also have different role play self-reflection. We have different kind of positive reinforcement and providing different performance feedback, not only by the facilitator, but we also encourage a lot of peer feedback in order to help the individuals to be more, recognizing their strengths and also room for growth. And finally, we have different activities to help them generalizing some of the skills and knowledge that they learned during the session.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So the way that we are implementing it both or at it, you pass it, they learn it, they practice it, and they recognize what are their strengths, what are their struggles, and how are they going to apply it in the real setting. Real world settings. So in terms of the session structure, we use a lot of visuals and a lot of different handouts for the different activities.

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Dr. Connie Sung

And in general, we start with opening including welcoming recap, review, and the agenda. And then in the middle of the session, we have different warmup activities, discussions, videos, and handouts. And then at the end, we have the group activities and wrap up and let's and complete the last practice activity. And we also have the self-reflection, basically encouraging each individual in each session...

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Dr. Connie Sung

identify what they have learned, what are they good at in terms of the topic that they have learned, and what are some of the things that they could do to improve? Things that they see room for growth. And tell me what you remember is basically a short quiz to see how much they have learned during the session.

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Dr. Connie Sung

And again, input from the community partners is people don't like to hear the word homework. People don't like to hear the word quizzes. But how do we make it less intimidating as they are going through the program? So even like things like, how we word things, we got a lot of input from the community. So speaking of community, the program truly have incorporated interdisciplinary expertise.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So as we develop and also implement a program, we have involved expertise from rehab, counseling, special education, occupational therapy, psychology, educational technology, and human resources. All of these disciplines we work together to develop it so that we are coming from different angles. And we also have the community based participatory research approach incorporated in the program development, design, and implementation.

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Dr. Connie Sung

And they include like H.R. or professionals, teachers, coordinators, parents, families, individuals as who have the lived experience to help us refine the program, to really make it practical and useful. And we also wrote the evaluation of the program in a implementation science framework. So in terms of the implementation, we got a lot of different suggestions from our community partners.

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Dr. Connie Sung

What would be helpful and as we know, a lot of the practitioners or educators, they are bombarded and overwhelmed with a lot of things that they have to do in their day to day job. So what we have learned from them is if we have the session that is really structured, have the instructions in within the menu and have the slides, videos all encompassed in

within the program, then typically the facilitator let us know it won't take them more than 30 minutes to prep it.

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Dr. Connie Sung

They read through the menu and each of the participants, they have a handle booklet and they have all the slides ready. So they are able to put more time into really facilitating the program session to help individuals learn rather than trying to put different things together and piecemeal and without the standardization. So within the program, we have the session PowerPoint, the training menu for the facilitator.

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Dr. Connie Sung

Basically we have the different plan for the session, the handout booklet, program activity kit, and the training videos and the online platform.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So we have collaborated with a range of different communities, including the schools and other community rehab organizations providing employment related training. So here is one of the partners that we have collaborated with, which is in the Upper Peninsula in the northern Michigan, which we know, quite often they have very limited resources. So let's here what they have to share about ASSET and EPASS.

00:27:05:10 - 00:27:20:02

Video

At Marquette-Alger RESA, something remarkable is unfolding through implementation of programs developed by Michigan State University STRIDE Center. We're paving the way for students with disabilities to achieve their dreams and career aspirations.

00:27:20:04 - 00:27:29:02

Video

They gave me more prepared for the future, which I'm going to need if I want to...if I want to graduate in a job...like a good job.

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Video

Thanks to the pioneering curriculum developed by MSU and delivered by our trained STRIDE facilitator, our students are thriving, building essential skills every day.

00:27:39:23 - 00:28:21:06

Video

STRIDE is divided into two, two sections. ASSET is our social skills...are people skills. So the main things that we talk about there...our communication, teamwork. We talk about problem solving and critical thinking. We talk about positive attitude and enthusiasm, time management skills, professionalism. EPASS is more of our hard skills where we focus on actually applying for a job.

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Video

Cover letters and resumes. Interviews. So more of those hard skills to help students prepare for what's after high school.

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Video

Our teachers that have observed it, our aides that have observed it, and the students all seem to buy into this and think that it's a great program.



00:28:42:02 - 00:28:54:23

Video

At Marquette-Alger RESA, these programs are more than courses. They are pathways to independence crafted by MSU STRIDE Center to foster confidence, communication, and career readiness.

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Video

I really like how how she teaches it, how she makes it more fun. And she'll also like explain like what we should do and like in work environment what we shouldn't do. And especially because I never had a job yet, it's really beneficial to me.

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Video

The success stories of our students are a testament to the power of partnership and the impact of expertly designed education on real lives.

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Video

So I think it's important for schools to get back to grabbing on to programs and curriculums that are teaching students those basic job skills and those soft skills that students need to make them successful after high school. The ASSET program helps kids just be ready to be employed. And I think it's really important.

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Video

Thanks to MSU STRIDE Center's guidance and our dedicated team at Marquette-Alger RESA, we're not just preparing students for jobs. We're opening the doors to futures filled with possibilities. Discover more about how MSU STRIDE Center...

00:30:12:18 - 00:30:58:15

Dr. Connie Sung

So I just want to highlight, this program we have the intention to develop not only to help people getting a job or finding a job, but more importantly is to help them find the career pathway and excelling and reaching their potential because we believe there are a lot of potential that people can bring to the table and can contribute to the society is how do we use the different tools to help them get there. And also the importance of partnership between university and also different community partners, how we can bring all of these to really translate what we do in our research projects, to turn it into a more practical,

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Dr. Connie Sung

translatable, practices in the field. So, right now what we have done is we have implemented the program across different states in the United States including Michigan, Illinois, Florida, California, and Louisiana. We also have done different translation into other languages, including Slovak and Chinese. We have done different RCT, randomized controlled trial, study to look at the impact and also the efficacy of the program, which I'm going to briefly talk about it next.

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Dr. Connie Sung

So we have so far we have done three randomized controlled trial, two in the United States and one in Ireland. And what we have found is the first main finding is the program has improved the job related skills for individual autistic individuals and also other individuals with disabilities. It significantly increased the job related self-efficacy, helping individuals really recognize their strengths and also belief in themselves, in their ability to be more motivated and ready for employment.

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Dr. Connie Sung

And it also showed a reduction in the support in behavioral performance on the job as they learn about the knowledge and the skills that they are able to apply and generalize in their real world work setting. And the second category of findings that we have seen is number one, we have seen improvement in the social functioning of participants and also improve in the mental health, particularly the anxiety because many of the individuals we interview and also receive their surveys, the data is when they're not sure what to do sometimes is very anxiety provoking. But now they feel like they have the tools, they know how to respond,

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Dr. Connie Sung

how to react in some of these social interaction situation. They feel a lot more ease in handling those situations. And we also have seen significant improvement in their adaptability and also resilience. And here is some of the qualitative findings that we heard from the participants. Participants mentioned the program helped them with the soft skills that often it's hard.

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Dr. Connie Sung

We often forget just try to catch up and develop hard skill. What employees essentially want so that the program help both ASSET and EPASS, help them to develop both the soft skills and the hard skills. And participants also mentioned communication, enthusiasm, and professionalism are the top three things that they learned from ASSET.

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Dr. Connie Sung

Participants also mentioned that programs help them think about what kind of job they want to have and whether or not it pays because that lead to a more a career pathway beyond just having a job. And employment readiness is helping them improve the ability to building and preparation for interviews, and work well with others in job environment.

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Dr. Connie Sung

And participants also mentioned the program, "I'm going to try to keep in contact with people I have worked with such as peers and teachers." And, "It's nice to be able to see how different personalities can work together." And participants also stress about the importance on the, of the program, on the mental health. "I'm not as stressed and my smiling is more appropriate."

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Dr. Connie Sung

And they also mentioned I feel a little connected to the group members, and the activities help me feel connected to the group so they don't feel like they are alone and they have the sense of belonging and learning and helping each other to grow. And we also have feedback from the facilitator, including, "I could see the students every week becoming more comfortable socially in a group where there's not a strength for them."

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Dr. Connie Sung

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." And that another facilitator said, "One of the things I like best is how applicable it is, and students were able to make that connection."

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Dr. Connie Sung

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." And finally, is the teamwork that the facilitators are seeing.

"One student at the first he was just worried about getting through the program and the material.

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Dr. Connie Sung

Then, he became a team player. He's saying in the classroom, 'You guys, we got to go help with the chairs. Let's go and do it as a team.' He's making that connection with other areas of his life about teamwork and working with others. So I think this is making an impact because I don't know if he would have done it before."

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Dr. Connie Sung

So some of those comments that we heard from the individuals really reinforce the importance of these soft skills and employment readiness skills. A learning...teachable. And people can learn and grow from it. So we have had both programs actually align with the national and national career and technical education standards in order to help not only using the framework to help the program to be more aligned with the expectation from all 50 states, to at both the state level and the local level.

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Dr. Connie Sung

When we first started developing the program, we didn't even think about that and how important it is. It was actually some of the administrators at the community. We have organization and also school setting saying if we could have it connect with some kind of standards and matrix, it would be so much easier for them to implement it.

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Dr. Connie Sung

And embed it as part of their program. All their curriculum. So as I mentioned earlier, the program, when we developed it is grounded in the social cognitive career theory. When we

evaluate it, we're also grounded in the RE-AIM framework. So basically we have been asking ourselves as we developed the program is how do we reach the target population in this case for as an impact, we have done it within the autistic community.

00:38:08:19 - 00:38:36:01

Dr. Connie Sung

And then we also have done it with developmental...intellectual developmental disabilities population. We also have specifically piloted with individuals with traumatic brain injury. And right now we are...one of our projects actually is working with justice involved youth. Because a lot of time they have the hidden disabilities or undiagnosed disabilities.

00:38:36:01 - 00:39:19:14

Dr. Connie Sung

So we are piloting those through research to see the impact of the program. And we do different studies to look at the intervention, whether they are effective and how do we adopt across different organizations and institutions, and how do we get support from different institution? And so with that, we work very closely with different community partners and stakeholders, helping us understand, for example, the national standard is one of the example is, we love the program, but how do we get buy in from people who have not seen the program or know the program as well?

00:39:19:18 - 00:39:54:17

Dr. Connie Sung

So we really try to take in as much as feedback and input as possible. And we also evaluate a program from different aspect, including the vocational and psychosocial and of course, from a multidisciplinary approach. So perfect. So here is all the articles that we have published, related to the study, how we develop the study, and how we evaluate a study.

00:39:54:17 - 00:40:24:23

Dr. Connie Sung

So I know the organizer have the copies of these. Some of these studies. So if you're interested, please feel free to reach out and we are happy to share with you a copy of it. And I believe everybody have access to a copy of the slides of today's presentation. So, you will have the list with you in case you want to request for student article.

00:40:25:00 - 00:40:50:02

Dr. Connie Sung

So, here it is. My contact information. And I also put Katie's information here in case you want to reach out to her. And Katie send her apology for not being able to be with us and co-presenting on this. But she's more than happy to answer any questions. And same for me. My email is csung@msu.edu.

00:40:50:02 - 00:41:09:23

Dr. Connie Sung

Feel free to reach out if you have any questions. So I think we, thank you everybody for listening to the presentation. And I will leave the next 15 minutes for questions and answers. And I'm going to stop sharing my screen.

00:41:10:00 - 00:41:38:12

Corena

Thank you Connie for your presentation. So just as a reminder, you're going to look for that questions box in the go to webinar control panel. And type those questions in there while we've got the time. And we do have a question from Coach Maureen, and she's saying, "I am presenting at a conference next week, Neurodiversity for Career Development Professionals."

00:41:38:12 - 00:41:48:24

Corena

Her question is, "How much do these programs costs?" I mean, I think those two were related. Sorry Coach Maureen if I got that wrong.

00:41:49:01 - 00:41:50:08

Corena

Did that make sense?

00:41:50:10 - 00:42:21:04

Dr. Connie Sung

Yes. So that's a great question. I always joked about when it's about statistics, those numbers I'm really good at. But whenever you put a dollar sign in front of the number, I'm terrible at it. So what I will do is if you don't mind emailing me and then I will get you in touch with our partner, Cogrounded, and they are the one who will be able to give you the information about the cost.

00:42:21:06 - 00:42:29:11

Corena

Okay. Thank you. Next question. How can we offer this program in our area?

00:42:29:13 - 00:42:32:05

Dr. Connie Sung

Area meaning...

00:42:32:07 - 00:42:36:10

Corena

I'm assuming wherever they are located.

00:42:36:12 - 00:43:11:04



Dr. Connie Sung

Okay, so, that's a really great question. So currently we have a in person version and virtual version. As I mentioned, we have a digital platform. So depending on what you're asking, is in person or virtual, we will have different information that we can share with you. And again we have partner with Cogrounded which is an educational organization helping with these types of program dissemination.

00:43:11:06 - 00:43:38:22

Dr. Connie Sung

And they will have different options. And the good news is right now we are trying to recruit different partners to help us pilot the digital platform. So if you are interested in being one of our partners to do the piloting, like if you're thinking about doing it virtually, or even in person, we would love to talk to you more about it.

00:43:38:24 - 00:43:52:06

Corena

Great. Thank you. Yeah. So I think someone was asking also maybe specifically for California. Who can I contact for more info?

00:43:52:08 - 00:44:18:00

Dr. Connie Sung

So I'm glad you asked that. We actually did a pilot with California. When? During the pandemic. I have people from California reached out. CCI is California, Career, Innovation. So because at the time it was really hard, actually. I had to thank them, thank the partner is they asked, oh, you have this in person, but we are in the middle of the pandemic.

00:44:18:02 - 00:44:43:09

Dr. Connie Sung

What do we do? We need something for our individuals. So we actually collaborated and worked together to develop that virtual format that we were able to deliver it all through online zoom platform. And we have gotten like really good feedback that we were able to modify it, to make it more sustainable.

00:44:43:11 - 00:44:56:02

Dr. Connie Sung

So again, please email me and I will be able to connect you with the organization that is helping with like disseminating the program.

00:44:56:04 - 00:45:11:24

Corena

Okay. And then we have a question from Brooke. Does the university offer any free resources related to these topics or Cogrounded? I work as a coach for autistic adults, and I'm always looking for resources.

00:45:12:01 - 00:45:23:11

Dr. Connie Sung

Just to clarify, when you mention about resources meaning like webinar type resources, document type resources or what kind of resources are you looking for?

00:45:23:13 - 00:45:37:10

Corena

All right, well, I'll get back to that when Brooke has the chance to respond. Alright, Coach Maureen, "Any organization/academic institution here in Massachusetts?"

00:45:37:12 - 00:45:39:15

Dr. Connie Sung

Sorry. Can you repeat that?

00:45:39:17 - 00:45:46:06

Corena

Any organization or academic institution in Massachusetts?

00:45:46:08 - 00:45:50:21

Dr. Connie Sung

In terms of collaborating or in terms of employment?

00:45:54:03 - 00:46:06:16

Corena

I believe that's the...I believe that's it. So, yeah. So I think one that has been piloted. So does that kind of add more?

00:46:06:18 - 00:46:39:08

Dr. Connie Sung

We haven't piloted it in Massachusetts, but if any academic institution is interested in partnering or organization want to pilot in Massachusetts, I'm more than happy to do that. So, for example, Kessler Foundation in New Jersey, they have a pretty big number population that they serve. We actually have a collaboration right now piloting it in New Jersey specifically for individuals with traumatic brain injury.

00:46:39:08 - 00:46:50:08

Dr. Connie Sung

So if people are interested in piloting and and testing, you know, please reach out. I'm more than happy to have conversation about that.

00:46:50:10 - 00:47:06:04

Corena

Great. So getting back to Brooke's initial question about the resources, she's referring to...I just saw...there it is. Educational to use with clients.

00:47:06:06 - 00:47:54:03

Dr. Connie Sung

Oh, so we have different, for if it's program specific. I forgot to mention actually is a really good question. We actually have a guide, a guide specifically developed for family members and then a guide specifically developed for providers including like job coaches. How do we reinforce some of these things that they learn in the program when they apply in their work based learning or in the community doing some of these work and if that's what you're asking about the program specific in terms of other resources, we have different resources in terms of materials. It depends on what you're looking for in like

00:47:54:03 - 00:48:20:23

Dr. Connie Sung

audience. Is it autistic individuals or is it for providers? So we have different things. If you and again I'm sorry because it's really hard to tell you all and share with you all what we have. If you could reach out, I promise we will get back to you and provide you with what you need and information.

00:48:21:00 - 00:48:40:06

Corena

Okay. A question from Brianna. "You mentioned you started your career in this field initially pursuing occupational therapy. I'm curious if you ever completed this career path along with your research. How did your career or career path change or develop?"

00:48:40:08 - 00:49:08:13

Dr. Connie Sung

Oh, I love this question. So I started as an occupational therapist, and I actually work with a wide spectrum of people in terms of age range. So I literally work with people...I work with toddler all the way through elderly with different kind of disabilities in terms of like, developmental disabilities, neurological, psychiatric, physical.

00:49:08:15 - 00:49:38:08

Dr. Connie Sung

But within that, I mostly work in medical settings. So what I have learned is in medical setting, like hospital type settings, when we are looking at all of these from a pathological or medical angle, sometimes we miss out a lot about what the person once they leave the medical setting or hospitals, how are they going to adjust to their work life?

00:49:38:10 - 00:50:05:06

Dr. Connie Sung

How do they adjust to their family? How do they adjust and like socialize with friends? So then I started wanting to learn more about the psychology of it. So then I pursued my PhD in rehabilitation psychology, and I want to study overseas. So I decided to go to...I grew up in Hong Kong. You never know if it ever know the entire city will shut down.

00:50:05:07 - 00:50:32:04

Dr. Connie Sung

Nobody will be on the street. But I decided to go to one of the coded, the code state Wisconsin-Madison and I pursue my PhD in rehab psychology. And during my training in rehab psychology, I have particular interest in the transition age individuals because what I have learned is the systems...the two systems. Education systems and the Vocational system.

00:50:32:04 - 00:50:58:09

Dr. Connie Sung

Number one, they don't communicate. They don't talk to each other. They don't really know what each other does. And it's pretty broken. So then that a lot of times these transition age individuals just fall through the cracks. And I have parents telling me is I want my kid growing up not to transition from school to my basement. I want them to transition to a productive life and contributing to the society.

00:50:58:11 - 00:51:20:10

Dr. Connie Sung

And so that really makes me wonder, what can I do to some of those? So then I started my research interest in like beyond being inspired by problems. Right? There are a lot of issues that we have to solve. Let's come up with some solutions. And one of the ways is develop different interventions and programs that people find it useful.

00:51:20:15 - 00:51:51:14

Dr. Connie Sung

And as a researcher, I admit, like we as academia researchers really need to do a better job producing things that is not just archived in the library, but we need to make those to be disseminated into the community so that they can make good use of those things that we develop. And that was part of the reason why I collaborated with the educational organization is I'm not very good at disseminating these, like I mentioned, but they are very good at it.

00:51:51:14 - 00:52:16:18

Dr. Connie Sung

So how about we create a partnership and, I can tap into what I'm good at and they tap into what they're good at so that people can really get access and to some of these programs that we develop. So it's a long winded answer, but how I switch my career is every time when I run into roadblocks, when I run into different issues, I just want to solve it.

00:52:16:20 - 00:52:39:13

Dr. Connie Sung

And in order for me to solve it, I see the value of the interdisciplinary training which embedded into my training...is like I had the perspective as an O.T. I have a perspective as a psychologist, and I'm in my current job. I train counselors working with people with disabilities. Particularly, I focus on the autism, intellectual and developmental disabilities.

00:52:39:15 - 00:53:10:05

Dr. Connie Sung

So to make good use of all the knowledge and skills that I could apply to it. And, I love it when I work with these individuals. I still have just last month, our very first cohort of an ASSET participant. He knocked on my office door because he just want to come and tell me that he's still working in his current job and how much he appreciated.

00:53:10:11 - 00:53:20:03

Dr. Connie Sung

And I love it because it has been ten years, and he's still remember all the fond memories and moments that we are learning together.

00:53:20:05 - 00:53:45:00

Corena

That's great. I'm getting a lot of comments that are saying it's really great story. Everyone loved hearing about that and about your how you got to where you are. I think we have time for two more questions. So we've got two last questions. Jessica. "I am an RC grad student doing my internship with the state in January.

00:53:45:02 - 00:53:54:07

Corena

I would love to be able to pilot this program in person during my internship. Is this something that would be feasible as a student?"

00:53:54:09 - 00:54:16:23

Dr. Connie Sung

So, that's a great question. I actually got quite a bit of, first of all, thank you. I assume you say RC meaning rehab counseling, so that make me happy and excited. Second is reach out to me. I can share because I do have some students, who are doing practice and internship and piloting some of the programs that we have developed.

00:54:17:01 - 00:54:30:07

Dr. Connie Sung

So I'm more than happy to support that. I was a...I just stepped down this month. I was actually a former program director for the RC program at MSU.

00:54:30:09 - 00:54:46:09

Corena

Wonderful. Last question. This is from Adam. "Hi Dr. Sung. Thank you for the presentation. What age range are these programs for and what would you recommend for someone around 30 struggling to get a job?"

00:54:46:11 - 00:55:17:22

Dr. Connie Sung

That's an excellent question. I'm glad you asked because when I mentioned about transition age, we actually have individuals started with 14. And then because Michigan is unique, we have individuals up to 26 to be in the school. So we initially do that between 14 to 26. However, again, getting input and feedback from the community is people who are beyond 26 could also benefit from the program.

00:55:18:02 - 00:56:12:03



Dr. Connie Sung

So in the past three years, we actually have expanded the program to individuals who are around 30...30 ish to be part of and we have seen great outcomes. So, to answer the question, like whether individuals in that age range would benefit, according to our research, yes, it does. But I don't know where you're currently located, whether the, and again, I need to consult Cogrounded because they're experts in terms of the program implementation and dissemination in the actual community. And when I receive questions from you guys, I would definitely connect with Cogrounded to make sure we have these resources for individuals.

00:56:12:05 - 00:56:36:22

Corena

Great. So I'm going to go ahead and wrap things up today. And I want to thank you, Connie, for your wonderful presentation. And thanks to everyone else who has joined us. And, you know, just still seeing lots of comments saying they're grateful, they're excited, and they've been inspired. So a lot of good stuff there. So this concludes our Fall 2024 webinar series.

00:56:36:22 - 00:57:02:03

Corena

And if you're interested in watching any of OAR's past webinars, we encourage you to check out the webinar recordings on our website. You can find these by navigating to our home page. And under the Get Involved tab, select Webinar Series. So once you close out of this event, you'll receive an exit survey. And we would appreciate if you could complete that and provide your feedback.

00:57:02:05 - 00:57:19:18

Corena

Everyone will receive a follow up email with their certificate of attendance today. And on behalf of the Organization for Autism Research. Thank you again, Connie and thanks to our audience for joining us. And we hope you enjoy the rest of your day.

00:57:19:20 - 00:57:21:22

Dr. Connie Sung

Thank you for having me.

00:57:21:24 - 00:57:23:06

Corena

All right. Bye bye.

00:57:23:08 - 00:57:24:00

Dr. Connie Sung

Bye bye.