

# Autism Career Connection



## Partnership

Turning Pointe Autism Foundation has partnered with Parents Alliance Employment Project to create Autism Career Connection. This program focuses on teaching job readiness and employment skills, and training job seekers on the autism spectrum how to be gainfully and competitively employed. Participants will receive classroom-based instruction and training from Turning Pointe. Participants will also have community-based internships with the assistance and support of Parents Alliance. Through this partnership, program participants will have access to a job coach to support them and their individual strengths and needs. Autism Career Connection has developed a curriculum to specifically target employment skills for job seekers on the spectrum, and has aligned lessons and assessments with the best practices model.



**TURNING POINTE**  
AUTISM FOUNDATION

## Purpose and Scope

Our program is designed to teach employment-centered skills within the areas of independent living, social communication, and employability to individuals with autism spectrum disorder, social and communication challenges, and other learning differences. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds and ability levels.

Autism Career Connection utilizes an interdisciplinary approach that supports the core deficits of autism spectrum disorder through Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) and assists students as they grow and learn to manage everyday challenges.

Communication, socially appropriate behavior and functional living skills, with an emphasis on skill generalization to the work place, is our overall program model that guides student programming, data collection procedures and implementation of EBP's. This model uses the latest research and clinical expertise to help students develop new skills and enhance personal talents and strengths as they navigate towards independent thriving futures.

## General Program Overview

Autism Career Connection is an educational opportunity for individuals impacted by Autism Spectrum Disorder, social and communication challenges, and other learning differences. The program is open to post-secondary job seekers between the ages of 18 and 24. Students are seeking to improve their skills in the areas of independent living, social communication and employability skills, and ultimately gain successful employment. Turning Pointe partners with Parents Alliance Employment Project to provide students with community-based internships to practice skills taught in the classroom in a real-world environment.

Autism Career Connection operates from 9:00 am–1:00 pm Monday through Thursday from September to the end of January.

### Admission Process

The Autism Career Connection's admissions process is based on student-specific needs and current skill set. ACC administration uses an operational framework to assess student's wants and needs for clinical decision-making and programming. Students and families are provided an overview of the program, then participate in a virtual meeting with the Autism Career Connection team. Those interested in admissions complete an online application and may schedule a tour of Turning Pointe. If the student is an appropriate fit for the program they receive an acceptance letter and complete the registration process.

### Mission

Turning Pointe Autism Foundation creates opportunities and programs to educate individuals with autism through proven interventions to increase independence, encourage meaningful lifelong pursuits and enrich the community at large.

# Classroom Structure

The Career College classroom is structured with a fluctuating staff to student ratio based on student needs and aligned with current research. This classroom structure fosters a learning environment conducive to individualized instruction and increased independence for our students.

**All staff are certified or licensed according to their position and highly trained.**

**Our multi-disciplinary team approach includes the following qualified professionals:**

- Special Education Teacher with a Professional Educator License (PEL) and a Learning Behavior Specialist (LBSI) endorsement
- Instructor and Employment Partner Coordinator with extensive experience in this field and a degree in a related field
- Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA)
- Administrator who holds a Master's degree in a clinical field related to autism
- Registered Nurse (RN) – consult
- Occupational Therapy – consult
- Speech and Language Therapy - consult

## Related Services

Therapeutic services at Turning Pointe can be provided directly from a provider, as consult services, as well as being woven into our program throughout the day. Programming is monitored for fidelity as students' progress through the Autism Career Connection curriculum. The program has access to a full-time Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) for both skill acquisition and behavior reduction programming.

### Behavior Intervention

Behavior Interventions are founded on the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). ABA is a treatment approach that applies principles of learning theory to produce positive and meaningful changes in behavior. Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) utilize function-based interventions to decrease maladaptive behaviors, increase socially appropriate behaviors and promote skill acquisition. Replacement behaviors are taught proactively to increase student success. Interventions are customized, adjusted as needed, and created in conjunction with evidenced-based practices.

### Speech and Language Services - Consult

Certified speech and language pathologists work to help students increase functional communication and overcome other language barriers to actively participate in everyday life. Multimodal communication assessments are conducted to determine communication modalities and deficits in receptive and expressive language. Therapy programming focuses on individual students' needs to request wants and needs, initiate and respond to social interactions, and protest or comment about the environment with multiple communication partners in various settings. There's a speech and language pathologist available for consult on communication and speech issues students may have. This will be available on an individual basis.

### Occupational Therapy – Consult

Our certified occupational therapists are available to the Autism Career Connection team on a consultative status to provide insight and functional programming within all areas of functional/independent living, Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) and sensory regulation related to the work place and job readiness.

# Curriculum & Program

The following skill domains make up the Autism Career Connection Curriculum. Content within each of these domains is modified to meet individual student needs. Each domain has prerequisite skills that are added to instruction when students display deficits in these areas. When students excel they are given enriched instruction to advance their current skill and knowledge base.

## Independent Living

This skill domain promotes students' ability to live and function as independently as possible in the home and in employment settings. Students will develop skills in the areas of pre-employment attire and hygiene, employment-related housekeeping, time management, basic transportation, money management, health and work safety, prioritizing, and schedule flexibility. Students are exposed to behavior skills training both in simulated environments and within naturalistic work environments to ensure skill generalization.

## Social Communication

Students will develop skills in forming and maintaining appropriate relationships inside and outside of the workplace. This domain covers topics ranging from how to ask and answer questions in the workplace, make choices in the workplace, make a first impression in the workplace, use social etiquette in the workplace, collaborate in the workplace, accept feedback in the workplace, give feedback in the workplace, identify skills and interests in the workplace, and adapt conversation formality to communication partners. Students will have the opportunity to practice these social skills during pre-employment interview preparation and job exposure.

## Employability Skills

This skill domain is designed to prepare students for independent employment. Students receive instruction to increase the following skills related to the workplace setting: on the job skills, job expectation, teamwork, job accommodations, being prepared, self-advocacy, co-worker relationships, dependability and problem solving. Hands on training opportunities will be provided for students throughout the second portion in various settings within Turning Pointe and community-based internship opportunities in collaboration with Parents Alliance.

# Curriculum Resources & Assessments

Turning Pointe uses a wide variety of materials to accommodate every student's individualized needs. Materials, lesson plans, and community-based instruction are all adapted to fit the needs of each student.

**Essentials for Living (EFL)** — The Essential for Living assessment tool and curriculum is one of the resources used to determine current levels in the areas of communication, behavior, and functional skills.

**The Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills (ABLLS-R)** — This assessment tool and curriculum guide assists in identifying language and other critical skills that are in need of intervention in order to develop an educational program that helps the acquisition of new skills.

**The Assessment of Functional Living Skills (AFLS)** — The AFLS assists in evaluating, tracking, and teaching functional skills to help individuals become more independent at home, school, and in the community. This system assesses the following skills: basic living, home, community participation, school, vocational, and independent living.

**PEERS for Young Adults (PEERS)** — Social skills training for adults with autism spectrum disorder and other social challenges. This is used as an evaluating and teaching tool for individuals in the areas of social communication. Teaching strategies and step by step guides for students are provided by PEERS.

**PEERS Curriculum for School Based Professionals** — Social skills training for adolescents with autism spectrum disorder. This is used as an evaluating and teaching tool for individuals in the areas of social communication. Teaching strategies and step by step guides for students are provided by PEERS.

**TEACCH Transition Assessment Profile (T-TAP)** — Comprehensive formal assessment that assesses strengths, interests, and abilities in the areas of: vocational skills and behaviors, independent functioning, leisure skills, functional communication, and interpersonal behavior both in the home and school environment.

**Social Skill Checklist** — Qualitative checklist completed by multiple communication partners to help evaluate social skills, such as: conversation skills, problem solving, understanding emotions, complimenting, and flexibility. Functional Communication Profile (FCP-R)-Inventory of an individual's communication abilities, mode of communication (e.g., verbal, sign, nonverbal, augmentative), and degree of independence. Examiner assesses communication through direct observation, teacher/caregiver report, and one-on-one testing.

**Autism: Attacking Social Interaction Problems:** — A Pre-Vocational Training Manual for Ages 17+ (AASIP) — program provides a comprehensive yet practical approach to teaching social communication skills across the life span incorporates current issues such as autism as a label, texting and social media, cyber dangers, personal safety, workplace culture, and idioms and conversations.

**Interest Determination, Exploration and Assessment System® (IDEAS™)** — Self-scored inventory that helps students and adults develop an awareness of possible career choices.

**Turning Skills and Strengths into Careers for Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder** — Curriculum helps students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to begin to make the transition to their career with detailed personality and skills profiling, job-hunting strategies, and interview preparation.

**Brigance transition kit** — Assess key transition skill areas — academic, post-secondary opportunities, independent living, and community participation.

**The DISABILITY EQUALITY INDEX® (DEI)** — Joint initiative of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) and Disability: IN™. The DEI is a national, transparent, annual benchmarking tool that offers businesses an opportunity to receive an objective score, on a scale of zero (0) to 100, on their disability inclusion policies and practices, and identify opportunities for continued improvement. Coursework is aligned to this benchmarking tool for ties to corporate businesses that strive for disability inclusion

## Evidence-Based Practices

Evidence-based practices (EBPs) include empirically supported techniques found within research journals, textbooks and accredited education programs. EBPs utilized by Turning Pointe may include but are not limited to:

- Antecedent-based
- Differential Reinforcement
- Communication Systems
- Task Analysis
- Visual Supports
- Prompting
- Video Modeling
- Precision Teaching
- Functional Communication Training
- Structured Teaching
- Behavior Skills Training
- Behavior Contracts
- Decision Tree

## Clinical Model

Turning Pointe utilizes an interdisciplinary approach that supports the core deficits of autism spectrum disorder through Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) and assists students as they grow and learn to manage everyday challenges. Communication, functional living skills, and socially appropriate behaviors, with an emphasis on skill generalization to the workplace, is our overall program model that guides student programming, data collection procedures and implements EBP's. This model uses the latest research and clinical expertise to help students develop new skills and enhance personal talents and strengths as they navigate towards independent thriving futures.

**Communication** — A variety of communication skills are targeted to maximize student independence and social etiquette across all environments. Skills are taught within structured lessons and maintained using reoccurring generalization probes. Students will have the opportunity to practice social communication skills within the structured school environment, through community-based instruction, and during internship and employment opportunities throughout the program. Communication programming is driven by current research and interventions within the field of Speech Language Pathology.

**Functional Living Skills** — This clinical domain covers skills that will promote and support functional living skills, independent living and Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) linked to independent employment. Skills are taught within structured lessons at the beginning of the program and maintained using reoccurring generalization probes. Functional living programming is driven by current research and interventions within the fields of Occupational Therapy and Applied Behavior Analysis.

**Socially Appropriate Behavior** — Behavior analytic programming is utilized to impact skills and skill deficits within the area of socially appropriate behavior(s). Programming focuses on skills that directly affect the specific student, their families, and/or peer and employment relationships. Programming may focus on but is not limited to: accepting/giving feeding, self-advocacy, motivation, etc. To promote skill generalization, students are exposed to a variety of setting and situations in which to practice these skills in both structured settings and within a naturalistic teaching environment. Socially appropriate behavior programming is driven by current research and interventions within the field of Applied Behavior Analysis.

## Programmatic Outcomes

All students that have attended Autism Career Connection for one year will maximize independence by mastering 80% of skills trained. Independence will be measured based on current level of performance and subsequent skill mastery in the following three areas: social communication, independent living, and employability skills based on program course outlines.

**Student data will be collected at the beginning and end of training and analyzed with respect to the program and per individual student**

**Data Collection** — Continuous student specific data is taken for all Autism Career Connection students on program outcomes and skill domains. Data collection procedures may be outlined by specific curriculum resources and/or assessments or created by Turning Pointe specialists. Data collected in all area is analyzed regularly to maximize instruction and behavioral interventions and also used to make adjustments to student programming as necessary.

**Certificate of Completion** — Upon completion of the program, students will receive a certificate of completion for the training portion of Autism Career Connection. Students will have completed training and community-based internship work throughout the program to work towards the goal of gainful, competitive employment.

**Job Coaching** — While enrolled in the Autism Career Connection program and participating in community-based internships, students will receive the support of a job coach from Parents Alliance. The job coach is on-the-job support for students transitioning to the work force with the goal of structuring independence, as needed. Job coaches will facilitate communication between students and employers while offering opportunities for students to work more independently while on-site.

**Employment Planning Meetings** — Employment Planning Meetings (EPMs) are held once a month with the student, parent/guardian, the instructor, the youth program specialist, job coach, and other important members of the students' team (i.e. social workers, psychologists, etc.). These meetings discuss student progress in the program and on job sites, as well as areas of growth for the individual student. These meetings serve as a touch point so that each part of the student's team is informed of everything the student has accomplished and the ways in which the student can be challenged.

**Family Partnership** — Family partnership is a key component of the Turning Pointe philosophy. The involvement of parents and families in the education process is critical to students' success. Parents are active participants in their student's education through meetings and student conferences, and on-going collaboration. Staff communicate with students and families via email and newsletters on a regular basis. Remaining connected is essential to maintain program consistency and work together towards student progress and accomplishments.