

**BRIDGING KNOWLEDGE GAPS:
RESEARCH INTO THE TRANSITION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH ASD FROM YOUTH TO
ADULTHOOD IN ONTARIO**

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Objectives

The level and type of supports that are available to persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) dramatically shift when they turn 18 years old. No longer covered by supports by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, adults turn to the Ontario Passport Program, a fund available to those over 18 years old with a developmental disability under the Ministry of Community and Social Services. The transition from youth to adulthood is a particularly challenging time that is frequently met with frustration, confusion, and inadequate supports/guidance for caregivers and persons with ASD alike. Four community-based organizations (Kerry's Place Autism Services, Community Living Toronto, Geneva Centre for Autism, Autism Ontario), along with the Centre for Community Based Research, joined efforts to determine how to make missing or hard-to-find information on this important transition period more accessible to caregivers, persons with ASD, and service providers.

Method

Online surveys were collaboratively developed, piloted, and distributed to three target groups across Ontario: adults with ASD (18 years and above) (n=96), caregivers (N=336), and professionals working with youth/adults with ASD (N=101). Once surveys were completed, focus groups were held with each of the three target groups in Kitchener, Toronto and Thunder Bay to explicate and expand on topics that were identified in the online survey (n=48).

Results

Caregivers indicated that during the transition period they sought supports from community organizations (28%), other parents (26%), family members (22%), school teachers (21%), social workers (18%) and support groups (12%). Only 24% of adults agreed that they had "helped to plan for changes" when they turned 18. 85% of caregivers agreed that planning for adulthood was stressful and 82% agreed that it was time consuming.

It is important to note that a total of 52% of adults with ASD and 29% of caregivers had never heard of the Ontario Passport Program, and most (74%) of the professionals were not involved in any aspect of the application process.

Topics that were identified as requiring further resources included: independent living skills, housing, social skills and relationships, information on post-secondary education and employment.

**All authors are primary authors.*

Discussion/Conclusions

We will discuss the implications that this research has in identifying gaps in adult supports across Ontario. Recommendations include the importance of highlighting and finding community connections for adults with ASD, the need for clarity around the Ontario Passport Program and the need to share success stories of adults with ASD who had found success in post-secondary education and employment.

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