

Editorial

There has been literally an explosion of new information about autism in American society over the past 10 years, perhaps accelerating even more over the past several years as the national media begins to provide dramatically increased coverage on the issues and challenges facing children with autism and their families. This type of national attention on a specific category of disability has not happened for a very long time, arguably since John F. Kennedy addressed the needs of persons with intellectual disabilities in the early 1960s or James Brady, former press secretary to President Reagan, called attention to the challenges of those with traumatic brain injury.

The need for services and even a cure for autism, however, seems even more pervasive than the examples listed above, partly because we now live in an information age with the Internet, You Tube and High Definition TV, where the stories fly much faster and with much greater drama than ever before. Children and youth with autism have caught the eye of America and there is huge interest in this topic, partly out of altruistic perspectives but also fascination with understanding the myriad and complex characteristics of the person with true autism.

Clearly, the greatest attention in the research and book literature has been much more on early intervention and childhood programming with appropriately heavy emphasis on applied behavior analysis as the desired mode of intervention. However, these toddlers and young children grow up. They become middle schoolers, they become adolescents in high school, they want to go to college, they want to work and they want to live in the community. The strengths and weaknesses of autism will follow them into these community environments but they are now growing up or grown up with all of the issues that are presented with adolescence and adulthood.

In fact, this brings us to a major point that we ask readers to remember as they go through this issue of the JVR. Young adults with autism are young adults FIRST and individuals with autism second. They will have as much sensitivity as others to people being critical or

being complimentary; they will enjoy the benefits of earning money and job promotion like anyone else; they will value friendships and romantic relationships like anybody else; they want to be independent and free to move around like all Americans.

Therefore, this JVR issue on Autism Spectrum Disorders: Transition and Employment will focus on HOW this can happen. We believe that competence leads to self confidence and self esteem. We believe that competence leads to empowerment. We know that competence will not just happen without structured interventions. We also know that competence in work settings, home, college, and the community can best be developed in those settings not in an isolated classroom engaging in pretend activities.

This issue of the journal is about the potential of persons with autism. It's more a message of what we can do to empower people to take full advantage of their potential than about random hope. While we acknowledge the importance of hope and faith in all ventures we believe that these young people will prosper most in highly organized and planned programs which facilitate their progressively greater independence and interdependence.

The articles in this issue provide a number of case studies, programs, and ideas for use by practitioners with emphasis on what we know that works.

In conclusion, this issue is an important step in the direction of bringing together some of the current knowledge that is accruing on transition for youth with disabilities. We know in 10 years there will be much more but we need to begin now.

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