

Empowering Autistic Youth and Adults to Advocate for Mental Health and Social Connection Goals as They Transition to Adulthood

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“That is what makes me happy. Yes, when they are able to vouch for themselves, when people deny them the opportunities where people don't see any good in them, and they are able to prove that I can do this despite the fact that I have the disability. That is where I believe that that is my happiness.” -A professional

Empower autistic youth to advocate for their needs and offer educational initiatives to support autistic youth and their caregivers.

“I struggle a lot with feeling like I've been heard like I feel like I don't know, one because I'm still like a teenager. And then also because of just the way that, like I communicate verbally. I feel like they don't totally listen or like I feel like I'm not taken seriously when I talk about like concerns, so I really just try to go to the doctor as little as possible” -Autistic teenager

Help autistic individuals to feel heard and create a safe space for conversation.

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) have a role in bridging the communication gap that often occurs between autistic youth, their health care providers, and their community.

Providers do not have a background in autism and need more training.

Facilitate community engagement by (1) increasing awareness of the current services available and (2) offering new additional opportunities.

Autistic individuals need accessible means for communication and feel comfortable and respected for the information they provide in conversations with new providers.

Increased access to mental health services and autism-informed counseling.

Demographics of the Multi-Stakeholder Healthcare Transition Project Team

Total team members N=16 (100%)

Autistic	5 (31)
Family Member	5 (31)
Clinician/Researcher	11 (69)

Note: Because some team members have multiple identities, the total percentage does not equal 100%.

Methods

- **What:**
 - Identify the research gaps to improve healthcare transition for autistic youth and young adults
 - Specific focus on mental health and social connection
- **How:**
 - Participatory action approach and qualitative method
 - Literature review
 - Focus group discussions
 - Interviews with professionals
 - Surveys

Participants n=56	Autistic n=20	Non-Autistic n=36
Youth 16-25 years	9	0
Autistic adults 26 years and older	11	0
Parents/caregivers	5	12
Clinicians	4	7
Interviews of clinicians	0	17

[1] We are using identity-first language in place of person-first language, as this is the preference of our team and Board members.

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