

**An Assessment of Secondary Transition to Life Programing  
For Overall Effectiveness and Identifying Areas of Improvement**

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**Part One:**  
**Introduction and Literature Review**

The Fresh Start School is located in Canton, Connecticut in the East side of Hartford County and is one of the programs connected to The FOCUS Center for Autism. The school is a state approved private special education school that operates as an out-source facility for public school districts across the state. Currently the school has students from 15 different districts. In addition to the varying districts that the student population comes from, there is equal variability in their demographics as it relates to housing and family situations. Several of the students reside in a two parent household with a middle class economic situation. A quarter of the student population live either with a single parent or with another family member. The remaining students reside in DCF funded group homes with minimal or no contact with their parental units. In general, all of the students that attend the school have autism as the primary disability on their IEPs. However, many of the students also have secondary diagnosis that equally impacts them both functionally and academically. In addition to primary and secondary diagnoses, a large percentage of the student population also have PTSD from traumatic experiences they had with attending public schools.

The Fresh Start School runs comprehensive middle, high school, and transition programs. As well, the school maintains a high staff to student ratio to manage the clinical needs of the student population. The clinical model that is used in all areas of programming is Milieu Therapy; a safe, structured, group treatment model for mental health issues that involves the use of everyday situations and activities, as well as a conditioned environment as a platform for building social, emotional and coping competencies; all of the things that get in the way of and impact the learning process. In total, the Fresh Start School currently has 17 students; 4 middle schoolers, 6 high schoolers, and 7 transition students. The school offers a flexible program aimed at meeting students where they are and helping them to build the skills needed to move forward, rather than make them fit into an existing model. With this approach the school has some students who work in independent classrooms, in small group classrooms, and a mix of both. Instruction also is varied depending on the

academic needs of each student; one on one support in a small group setting, directed one on one instruction, and highly specialized programming to meet their learning needs.

For the purposes of this paper the transition program will be the primary focus. The transition program at the Fresh Start School was first initiated during the 2019/2020 school year. Program development has been progressing slowly over the years, largely due to many changes in staff running the program and lacking a certified teacher leading the program, not to mention the impact of COVID19. Currently the program consists of a healthy mix of instructional courses (e.g., Financial Literacy, Social Thinking, Health, Advocacy), work placements, and community activities. Looking at the topics and concepts covered in the advocacy classes in the past (e.g., state issues and government) it was apparent that a shift in the focus of this course needed to be made for it to be relevant to the student population in the program, as well as to meet the core skills identified by the state that are required in a transition program.

Over the past several years the state has made a shift to requiring schools and districts to include self-determination instruction in transition program planning. To help structure and guide this planning the state of Connecticut identified a core set of skills that should be developed to the maximum extent possible in all transition aged students. One of the key skills on this list is self-determination. Self-determination in and of itself is a broad topic which has a hierarchical structure where prerequisite skills need to be mastered before the more advanced skills can be worked on (e.g. self-management, self-advocacy, self-determination, self-actualization). In reviewing current resources and materials related to the teaching and development of self-determination, even resources that are specifically aimed at teaching individuals on the autism spectrum, it was found that there is a lack of effective pedagogical structure and framework that is best suited for the autism population (e.g. visual supports to anchor understanding of abstract subject matter, mind/concept mapping to support concept development, etc.). It is well known in the world of special education that students with autism learn best and generalize skills better when instruction is anchored with visuals. Why then would visuals be removed from instruction related to teaching transition skills such as

self-determination at such a critical time in a young person's life? Given the areas of deficit that individuals with autism are impacted in, Theory of Mind, Central Coherence, and Executive Function, the use of visuals and other structural supports (graphic organizers, concept mapping, etc.) should continue to be at the bedrock of instructional materials and programming for this population.

Research in this area supports the need for transition programming for individuals with autism to be approached differently than for some other disability groups. This research supports the critical need for self-determination to be a key component in transition-to-life academics (Wehmeyer 2017). The development of self-determination skills leads directly to improved transition-to-life outcomes; leading to greater success in life after exiting school. In the article *Self-determination in Autistic Transition-Aged Youth without Intellectual Disability*, Tomaszewski describes the presence of an intellectual disability not being a contingent factor in reduced outcomes in the acquisition of self-determination skills, but rather that youth with autism with average IQs have other mitigating factors that inhibit the development of this skill set in similar and perhaps increased ways. Things such as depression and the typical deficit areas related to autism; Theory of Mind, central coherence, and executive function are all directly related to self-determination capacity.

As evidenced, the development of self-determination skills is pivotal to success in adult life. Cheak-Zamaora goes on in her article, *Self-Determination in Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder*, identifies a need for changes in transition-to-life programming for the autism population. The findings presented in this article indicate a breakdown in the acquisition and development in self-determination skills ranging from moderate to severe. The aim of this study was to identify what factors are critical to improving the development of self-determination skills in individuals with autism. The study identified the need for changes and improvements to be made in programming related to the development of self-determination skills, specifically capitalizing on how known deficit areas in individuals with autism are impacted in this area of skill development and functioning. The study did not provide any specific solutions to this issue, rather it just exposed and identified the need in this area of transition-to-life programming for improved instruction and programming for this population.

Given what is already known about skill acquisition for the autism population in general, the strategic use of visuals to structure learning and concept development and teaching skills across environments to support the generalization of skills, the process of developing improved programming and instruction for self-determination shouldn't be ambiguous or arbitrary.

## **Part Two:** **Parent Interviews**

The parents that were chosen for this portion of this paper are parents of post-transition aged young adults. Parents with young adults already in adult life were chosen, as their retrospective view of the transition programming that their young adult received would render the best insight for identifying areas of transition programming that needs to be improved and enhanced to render better long range outcomes. Each parent was interviewed in a casual manner and good conversation regarding this topic occurred with each. As the children of each of these parents are very different, the transition-to-life path that they each travel was slightly different, as were the end results.

### **Parent A**

Parent A's son is 29 years old. Parent A's son is identified as ID, his primary diagnosis is Autism, with a secondary diagnosis of Schizophrenia. Their family resides in Canton, CT where the school district does not have transition-to-life programming. Therefore, her son attended transition programming through FAVARH, the local state run ARC program which also provides young adult support such as job coaching and support services for college classes. Being an ARC and state funded program, FAVARH is therefore limited to the population they service, meaning that their clients are identified as ID. He attended their Transition-to-Life program for 4 years and then continued to be supported through their many other programs; college supports, job coaching, and supportive housing. He is currently employed part time, lives in a group home, and completed his associates degree at Tunxis Community College.

When Parent A and I sat down together I quickly learned that, although her son received his transition programming through a facility such as FAVARH, there were still many components of the program she now feels need improving. To help provide a framework for her personal reflection I posed a list of components that the state now recommends be included in transition programming; self-determination, self-advocacy, personal finance, and so on. As she looked at the list and reflected on each area, she was able to identify issues with the way that portion of instruction was given, if the area was covered in depth enough to be meaningful, and if the portion was included at all in her son's program. In some areas the instruction being given was not presented at an appropriate level. For example in the area of personal finance the bulk of the subject matter that was covered was related to taxes, more complex banking that included investments and long range savings options, here someone like her son required more day-to-day money management skills. In addition she also mentioned that much of the instruction that was given in other areas was not presented in a way that optimized his learning and acquisition of the skills being taught. The areas of programming that were completely missing from her son's transition program related to self-determination and self-advocacy. Given his age and the newness of these components being recommended by the state to be included in transition-to-life programming. I can see why they were missing from the program he attended. She did expound on the fact that the many things barriers her son struggled to overcome as he has moved away from school do relate to those missing areas.

### **Parent B**

Parent B's son is 27 years old. He has a primary diagnosis of Autism, with a secondary diagnosis of General Anxiety Disorder and Depression. Their family resides in Waterbury, CT where the school district does have a Transition-to-Life program. This program consisted of three different components; an extra year or 2 of high school where the student continues to go to the high school they had been attending where they receive some rudimentary level instruction on daily living skills

and complete self-reflective inventories, one year of programming at CW Resource, an adult service program in Naugatuck where they participate in job placements and work on developing employment skills, and then one year of programming at Naugatuck Valley Community College where they continue to work on academic skills and audit a class with the support of the transition teacher. Parent B's son is currently employed full time, drives his own car, and attended a certification program through Lincoln Tech. He presently still lives at home, but is otherwise self-sufficient and independent.

As I talked with Parent B, I picked up a lot of similarities to some of the feedback I had received from Parent A. Like Parent A, Parent B felt that there were skills areas not covered at all in her son's transition programming (e.g. self-determination, self-advocacy). Likewise there were aspects of the instruction that was given that were either not appropriate or adequate enough to 'own' the skill. In order to 'own' a skill, you must be able to independently perform across multiple settings. Where their feedback and experiences change is with regard to the structure of the programming itself. Parent B's son, having attended Transition-to-Life programming through the public school district, the structure of the program itself was very different. Although this parent did not have anything to compare her son's transition program to, still felt that there were things missing from it and that overall, it seemed very fragmented and not flexible enough to meet individual students' needs. As a result, he son ended up exiting from the school district a year earlier than he could have due to the redundancy of the programming that was being offered. For example, had her son stayed for extra years at his high school he would have taken the exact same instruction and content two years in a row. She stated that the content was already much too low and simplistic for him in many ways and to have him do that for two full years made no sense. She felt that there could have, should have been a progression to the instruction and programming being offered in this portion of the transition program. The other two components of the program she felt were better, but was surprised that the only postsecondary exploration or exposure that was provided was an audited college experience. Her son was not strong academically, so traditional college classes easily overwhelmed him. It was years later when she was finally able to get him to try going to a tech school for training in a field that

interests him and that had a high ‘hands-on’ component. Even getting him his driver's license took years and was something that the instructors in his school never thought he would be able to do.

### Reflection

In reflecting on the feedback gained from these two interviews, I found the similarities between the two interesting. In spite of each young adult having gone through transition-to-life programs that were very different, both parent’s views identified the same areas as lacking from their son’s programs (e.g. self-determination and self-advocacy), as well as there being an in appropriate level of instruction being given; one parent’s experience was that instruction was too high in some areas and the other parent’s experience that instruction was too low in some areas. The areas of instruction and programming that these parents have identified as either being incipient or lacking are all indicated as needed components of secondary transition planning according to the Connecticut State Department of Education. On the state website there are several documents listing necessary components of secondary programing, specifically including self-determination skills, and outlined plans of action for successful transition programing.

Based on the feedback that was obtained from both parents the following Transition Programing Effectiveness Parent Questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire is set up in two parts; the first being 10 questions on a 4 point Likert scale response and the second portion is a short answer containing 4 questions.

### Transition Programming Effectiveness Parent Questionnaire

<b>Questions</b>		<b>Scale Ratings:</b> 1-Strongly Agree, 2-Somewhat Agree, 3 Somewhat Disagree, 4 Strong Agree			
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1</b>	Do you think the skills that the transition program focused on were adequate to prepare your child/young adult for life outside of school?				



2	Does your child/young adult's transition program include development of daily living skills to an adequate degree?				
3	Does your child/young adult's transition program include specific instruction directed at developing self-determination skills?				
4	Does your child/young adult's transition program include effective programming for postsecondary opportunities other than traditional college options?				
5	Does your child/young adult's transition program include effective programming for employment and workplace skills?				
6	Does your child/young adult's transition program include effective programming in the area of goal setting and problem solving?				
7	Does your child/young adult's transition program include effective programming for personal advocacy?				
8	Does your child/young adult's transition program include effective programming for personal finance?				
9	Does your child/young adult's transition program include effective programming for improvising social competencies across multiple areas?				
10	Does your child/young adult's transition program include effective programming in the area of health (e.g. understanding body changes, drugs and addiction, personal habits, etc.)?				

Short Response Question:	Response:
What things do you think could be included in Transition-to-life Programming for today's young adults that would better prepare them for life after school?	
What specific skills do you think Transition-to-Life Programming needs to include to better prepare young adults for life?	
Do you think the manner in which skills are taught impact how well	

skill development occurs in young adults on the autism spectrum?	
What changes in the instruction could/should be made to improve the acquisition skills for independence in young adults with autism?	

**Part Three:**  
**Community Stakeholder Interviews**

The Community Stakeholders that were chosen for interviewing are all well versed in the needs of young adults with autism. Two of the stakeholders are professional and licensed social workers. Community Stakeholder One has been active in the autism and transition to life service community for over 30 years. Although she has filled many roles over the years, she is currently the Young Adult Support Service Coordinator at the FOCUS Center for Autism where she works closely with the directors of the several group homes that FOCUS runs. Community Stakeholder number two also works for the FOCUS Center for Autism at the Fresh Start School as the Transition Coordinator, Autism Service Director, and Clinician. The other two stakeholders that were interviewed are the founders of The FOCUS Center for Autism. They have been and continue to be involved in every aspect of the programs that FOCUS runs, but specifically with the group homes and young adult housing programs.

**Community Stakeholder #1**

With over 30 years of experience and over such a varied array of roles and positions being held during that time, this Community Stakeholder had a lot of insight into state policies, programs, reforms and supports for young adults with Autism. Much of her feedback related to the fact that at the state level there are policies, recommendations, and reforms that do not match what is being implemented in transition-to-life programming in most locations across the state. One example of this is the state's recommendation that transition programs focus heavily on self-determination. From her

experience, young adults that are no longer in a transition program are severely lacking in this set of skills. It is also her experience that young adults are exiting transition programs also lacking self-advocacy skills. Studies show that before an individual can be autonomous, self-directed, self-determining, and able to self-advocate, that they first must be able to self-regulate. She postulates that either transition programming is either not targeting the building of these higher level skills in this area of functioning, or they are not using effective methods of instruction. We also discussed how the CT CORE Standards for Secondary Transition Programming are not well defined, which makes developing goals and objectives more difficult on the curriculum development and program delivery side.

## **Community Stakeholder #2**

The second Community Stakeholder that I spoke with also works for the FOCUS Center for Autism, but at The Fresh Start School as the Transition Coordinator and Autism Service Director, as well as being a clinician at the school. During our interview a distinct theme quickly emerged; Community. Stakeholder #2 described a wrap-around model for transition programming where the students are engaged in Social Thinking and Self-Advocacy classes on an ongoing basis and then are routinely taken out into the community in a variety of different settings and situations (e.g. shopping, leisure activities, work placements, volunteer).

This Stakeholder described the therapeutic model that is utilized in the program that he runs; Milieu Therapy. Milieu is defined as 'Life Space'. As a therapeutic model the 'Life Space' or Milieu is designed, structured and strategically manipulated to create an environment where students can learn in 'real world' situations what is being taught in classes. For example; students are taught self-advocacy skills in class and then are provided with an environment where they can directly practice those skills in a realistic and supported way. At this Stakeholder program there is a high staff to student ratio to make this model work effectively. Likewise, students are given opportunities out in the larger community in a variety of different situations with the same level of support, encouragement and guidance. This model helps students to better generalize taught skills across

environments, something that is typically very difficult for individuals on the autism spectrum to do. But even more importantly, individualizing these skills as much as possible.

### **Community Stakeholders #3**

Stakeholders #3 are the founders of The FOCUS Center for Autism. From its inception this program has grown and expanded, from a simple therapeutic outpatient program, to an extended school day therapeutic program, to opening group homes for young adults with autism, and to starting the Fresh Start School. Collectively they are very aware of the need for change in the area of Transition-to-Life programming for individuals with autism. They see and work first hand with the young adults who have aged out of transition programming and are still struggling to merge into a fully functional adult life. They Pointed out that in a state that has very little effective adult programming and support resources for this population, improvement in transition-to-life programming is vitally important.

Through our discussion we touched on how the delivery of instruction, as well as the content needs to be accessible for this population given their areas of deficits. Like the other stakeholders and parents that I have spoken to some consistent themes regarding areas of need and improvement have emerged: A focus on generalizing skills through wrap-around education models; Curriculum and instruction that supports the key deficit areas for student with autism; Theory of Mind, Central Coherence, and Executive Function; Community based programming - varying types of exposure with intentional purpose.

We also discussed a need for this wrap-around model of programming to extend into the home environment. One of the group homes that FOCUS runs houses three students who attend the Fresh Start School. They have noticed a difference in the acquisition of skills (e.g. self-regulation,

self-advocacy, etc.) has increased compared to other students of similar age that they know and have worked with. They believe that this is due to the use of a 'common language' being used between the school and the group home staff. The use of common language helps the student to better generalize skills being taught, such as self-regulation and coping strategies. We talked about how there is a hierarchical structure to the development of the self-autonomy skill set that begins with self-regulation and builds up to self-advocacy and self-determination. Where all of these skills take so long to develop and then effectively embed into everyday practice, they said that these skills and transition type programming should begin as early as possible.

### Review

There were several consistent threads that ran through all of the conversations I had with community stakeholders that were interviewed; the need for improvements in programming in certain skill areas and the involvement of community and families to best generalize acquired skills across environments and situations, and a broader scale for the Connecticut Standards in the area of Secondary Transition Planning to have be better defined, have a trajectory that evolves over time, and can better drive the development of Transition Program curriculum.

### Transition Programming Effectiveness Community Stakeholders Questionnaire

Questions		Scale Ratings: 1-Strongly Agree, 2-Somewhat Agree, 3 Somewhat Disagree, 4 Strong Agree			
		1	2	3	4
1	Do you feel that the current models for Transition Programing for individuals with autism is adequate?				
2	Do you think that the lesson material and delivery of instruction in most transition programs includes elements designed to specifically support the acquisition of key skills for young adults with autism?				

3	Do you understand the role that self-determination plays in the overall success of a young adult entering into adult life?				
4	Do you think that the main goal of a transition program should be to make sure that students are college and career ready?				
5	Do you think that building parent involvement in program implementation would help to better generalize key skills in young adults with autism?				
6	Do you think that elements of transition programming, such as self-determination skills should begin at a younger age?				
7	Do you feel that the policies and regulations that the state currently has in place for transition programs match what transition programs are actually focusing on and teaching?				
8	Do you think that transition programs are currently building an adequate level of self-advocacy skills in young adults with autism?				

Short Response Question:	Response:
What does it mean to be college and career ready for young adults with autism?	
How do you think making community connections helps young adults with autism to prepare for adult life?	
Why is building competencies in the areas of self-advocacy and self-determination skills so important for success in adult life?	

**Part Four:**  
**Current State Regulations and Policies**

The CT CORE Standards for Secondary Transition were drafted and enacted in 2016. The CT CORE includes 17 standards that aim to address needed skills in the areas of; employment, postsecondary education, independent living, personal finance, self-advocacy, understanding their disability, understanding their rights under IDEA, social skills, community access, and self-determination. Where these standards are comprehensive in their scope as a collective unit, individually they are not well defined and lack a structured breakdown of the targeted skill to drive program development and instruction. For example: Self-determination is a sub-skill of the self-actualization skill set that has a hierarchical structure (e.g self-management, self-advocacy, self-determination, self-actualization).

In July of 2019 the state of Connecticut passed a series of House Bills and statutes relating to Secondary Transition of youth with autism spectrum disorders. These statutes relate to the following changes:

- Implementing a program review and investigation concerning transitional services for youth and young adults with autism spectrum disorders
- Summary of performance prior to exiting high school
- The expectation of the transfer of rights upon exiting public school

In Sec. 300.43 Transition Services, it states that the design of transition services is a results-oriented process that should focus on improving not just academic, but more importantly, functional achievement. This process should be based on the individual needs of the student and should take into account personal preferences, strengths, needs, and should include; instruction, related services, community experiences, development of employment and post secondary education, and the acquisition of overall daily living skills.

Throughout this time the state was also working to develop a network of resources to help with the development of transition programming. I attended a Transition Symposium in 2022 that offered a well rounded overview of transition planning and exposed me to many good resources. However, in digging into those resources I found some of the instructional materials to lack the structured, visual based components that help students with autism to better connect with and own the concepts being taught. When I tried to use some of these materials with the students with autism in the transition program I work in, I found they were not engaged... not connecting with the content or the concepts being presented. When I took the content from those materials and presented them with visuals (e.g. concept mapping) I noted that they were better engaged and connected to the concepts being taught better and the acquisition of the concepts being covered improved.

### **Addressing Areas of Need**

In reviewing the literature that I read for this paper, the conversations I had with both the Parents and Community Stakeholders, one consistent theme emerged: The need for improvements in pedagogical practices, curriculum and lesson materials, and assessments and rubrics to monitor growth for individuals with autism.

- Pedagogy - move from standard format of instruction to a wrap-around model of flexible support
- Curriculum and Lesson Materials - move from whole concept approach to breaking concepts down into manageable chunks supported by the strategic use of visuals and concept mapping
- Assessments and Performance Rubrics - include the use of rubrics so students can see and understand where they are as it relates to where they need to reach for
  - Adjustments to the content of the rubric can be adjusted to suit each individual student's needs.
  - See Figure 1A for a sample rubric



**Figure 1A:**

**Monthly Performance Review Rubric**

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Skills	1	2	3	4	5	Score
<b>Positive Communication</b>	Communication between student and other is disrespectful or negative	<b>Given feedback and reminders,</b> communication between student and others is generally positive/ appropriate - <b>inconsistently</b>	<b>Given feedback and reminders,</b> communication between student and others is <b>consistently</b> positive/ appropriate	Communication between student and others is positive/appropriate and <b>inconsistently self-initiated</b>	Communication between student and others is positive/appropriate and <b>consistently self-initiated</b>	
<b>Personal Behavior</b>	Student's behavior is disrespectful, negative, and/or disengaged	<b>Given feedback and reminders,</b> student's behavior is respectful, positive, and/or engaged - <b>inconsistently</b>	<b>Given feedback and reminders,</b> student's behavior is respectful, positive, and/or engaged - <b>consistently</b>	Student's behavior is respectful, positive, and/or engaged - <b>inconsistently self-initiated</b>	Student's behavior is respectful, positive, and/or engaged - <b>consistently self-initiated</b>	
<b>Takes Initiative</b>	Student does not follow through on tasks - requires prompting	<b>Given feedback and reminders,</b> student follows through on an assigned task <b>with direction and support</b>	<b>Given feedback and reminders,</b> student completes assigned task and <b>when done asks what to do next.</b>	Student begins task without support and when done <b>with support, identifies what to do next.</b>	Student begins task without prompting and <b>when done identifies and starts new task independently</b>	
<b>Appropriate Appearance</b>	Student does not put effort into personal appearance: looks unkept, messy, and inappropriate for setting	<b>Given feedback and reminders,</b> student <b>inconsistently puts effort into personal appearance:</b> clean, and appropriate for setting	<b>Given feedback and reminders,</b> student <b>consistently</b> puts effort into personal appearance: clean and appropriate for setting	Student <b>independently</b> puts effort into personal appearance <b>inconsistently:</b> clean and appropriate for setting	Student independently puts effort into personal appearance <b>consistently:</b> clean and appropriate for setting	
<b>Sustained effort/attention to task</b>	Student is not focused on assigned task, is wandering away from area, and/or is distracted/distracting others	<b>Given feedback and reminders,</b> student is staying in the area but is <b>intermittently</b> distracted by others - responds to staff redirection	<b>Given feedback and reminders,</b> student stays engaged in the assigned task and demonstrates good effort	Student stays engaged in the assigned task and demonstrates good effort without feedback and reminders	Student stays engaged in the assigned task and demonstrates good effort without feedback and reminders; and supports peers level of engagement in positive ways	
<b>Personal Responsibility</b>	Student <b>does not respond to given feedback or reminders</b> to make needed adjustments in order to manage self; materials, time, etc. effectively	<b>Given feedback and reminders,</b> student <b>intermittently</b> makes needed adjustments in order to manage self; materials, time, etc. effectively	<b>Given feedback and reminders,</b> student will make needed adjustments in order to manage self; materials, time, etc. effectively	Student <b>inconsistently</b> makes needed adjustments in order to manage self; materials, time, etc. effectively	Student <b>consistently</b> makes needed adjustments in order to manage self; materials, time, etc. effectively	

**Score** \_\_\_\_\_

## Barriers to Effective Change

In order for any reform or initiative to be effective there needs to be buy-in on all levels. With the work that the state has done recently with reforms and new initiatives, there doesn't appear to be a solid carry-over to implementations of these initiatives on the school level, or if there is, it is a very slow change over. The other and larger barrier lies in the need for changes in pedagogy, curriculum, lesson materials for students with autism, as well as an assessment system that is accessible to and relevant to individual students with autism. The barrier here is staff buy-in, administration and teacher level staff. The change that is needed in curriculum and instruction materials, as I see it, is a shift from a long standing practice and would require a willingness to learn a new way of instructing young adults with autism. As mentioned in Part One of this paper, the instruction of needed skills such as self-determination skills, needs to be improved and adjusted to better suit the learning needs of young adults with autism (Wehmeyer 2017).

In addition to curriculum and instructional materials changes, an overall change in pedagogical practice that builds a wrap-around system of support that is flexible and able to meet the individual needs of students. This is the area of need for improvement that came up consistently in all of the interviews I had with parents and community stakeholders. In building a wrap-around system of support, programming is building a social and cultural system that merges the transition program with the broader world. Individuals with autism inherently have a difficult time generalizing skills across environments. This where the use of a wrap-around model of support is crucial; supporting the students acquisition of skills and then flexibly supporting the generalization of those skills into real-world situations. Most transition programs today do have community based elements to their programs, but if students aren't learning and gaining the key skills needed to successfully merge into adult life to begin with, that limits the effectiveness of the community based portion of the program. The Milieu Therapeutic model that FOCUS Center for Autism uses in all of the programs they run is a good example of the type of wrap-around support that is needed to not only help young adults with autism in the acquisition of core skills, but to then better generalize those skills across environments.

## Resources

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