

# 6<sup>th</sup> European Autism Congress

## May 27-28, 2024 | Paris, France

Volume : 27

### **Addressing the vocational and community engagement needs of students with autism spectrum disorder in the transition to Adulthood in the us**

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**S**tudents with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) face daunting challenges in finding employment, community engagement opportunities, and an overall high quality of life after leaving high school. Longitudinal studies have found extremely low rates of employment, participation in higher education programs, and independent living for young adults on the spectrum in the years immediately following exit from secondary education (Roux et al., 2018). There is a substantial and well-documented need for improvements in several key areas to better support this population in the transition to adulthood. These include more effective and individualized transition planning and services to prepare students with ASD for the world of work (Chiang et al., 2012); an expansion of vocational training programs and employment opportunities tailored specifically for the unique strengths, interests, and needs of those on the autism spectrum (Wehman et al., 2014); and the development of a more robust array of community-based day programs, social skills groups, volunteer activities and other structured options for productive engagement for those unable to secure paid work (Tobin et al., 2015). Enhancing access to appropriate vocational and community integration supports is critical for promoting independence, self-determination, sense of purpose and overall quality of life as students with ASD transition into adulthood (Henninger & Taylor, 2013).

#### **Biography**

Monica Starr is deeply dedicated to supporting students with disabilities as they transition from high school. With a bachelor's and master's degree in special education, she is currently pursuing a specialist degree in the same field. Starr teaches adaptive special education, focusing on preparing students for life beyond school. Outside of teaching, she founded Inclusion Avenue, a beverage business primarily employing adults with disabilities, aiming to offer meaningful work opportunities and raise awareness. Through her work in education and entrepreneurship, Starr advocates for greater inclusion and equity. She is committed to empowering students with disabilities to achieve their potential and lead independent, fulfilling lives after graduation. Starr's initiatives blend her expertise with a passion for positive change within this community.

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Abstract received : May 1, 2024 | Abstract accepted : May 2, 2024 | Abstract published : 10-06-2024