Running Head: E- Learning: Project Transition Plan for Autistic Students in a Boys and Girls Club Setting

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**Introduction**

A Community of Love and Acceptance (ACLA) is a local not for profit focusing on a broad range of issues concerning the autistic community. One of the messages it focuses on is the fact that 500,000 autistic students will become adults with autism in the next decade. Developing strategies that deal with that reality has led the organization to play an increased role in helping organizations transitioning students with autism to adulthood. ACLA has recently been approached by a local Boys and Girls Club to provide services under its federally funded 21st Century Technology Grant. One of the eligible grant activities is serving students with disabilities and their families. The Boys and Girls Club wants ACLA to develop an E learning transition program for their growing population of disabled, especially autistic students. Students in the program will attend the club from 3:30-6:30 weekdays during the school year and 9:30 to 12:30 pm for ten weeks in the summer. In addition to using the clubs Tech Lab equipped with VR headsets, they will be given Chromebooks to work from their homes with their family members. One of the most serious problems students on the autism spectrum face are social interactions and looking for employment/post-secondary opportunities. ACLA will develop and administer this program that will rely on an extensive eLearning program to benefit the students that will include social and life skills training, VR simulations, assessment of strengths, and mock interviews. The current document sets out a vision, eLearning plan, and funding proposal towards this endeavor.

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**Vision Statement**

E-learning is the use of electronic technologies to create learning experiences (p1 Horton 2012). Innovation in technology offers E learning opportunities for receptive, directive and guided discovery can aid the young adult in mastering’s the skills and competencies to successfully navigate the transition to adulthood. At the Boys and Girls Club Project Transition, 30 students will have the opportunity to participate in this pilot project. The Boys and Girls Club has committed to advance the program for a three-year period and then reevaluate the plan for effectiveness.

This vision is to prepare students for the transition into adulthood by allowing them to maximize their strengths and potentials to lead the most independent fulfilled life possible. The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guarantees disabled students access to educational services from 3-21. The focus on autism has been the young child and early interventions. For a lower functioning student on this spectrum turning 21 is characterized as falling off the cliff The reality is society is not ready with services beyond school either in employment or housing. However, for students in the middle to higher end of the spectrum, college and post secondary employment should be feasible with supports. Statistics from Autism Speaks show adults among autistic adults 70% are unemployed/underemployed and 86% live at home with their parent’s .in adulthood. These figures are staggering and call for a directive to respond to a national crisis. The Director and staff of the Boys and Girls club recognizes there

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autistic club members have unique challenges apart from the rest of their teen mentor program for disadvantaged students. Following a SWOT analysis done as part of their business plan they saw an opportunity to design a program that can be adapted to meet many more students in the community. This eLearning program fits in with the mission of the Boys & Girls Club that states...

“To enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens.”

This program called Project Transition will have several core components. In the planning stage ACLA will conduct a needs assessment as outlined in Brown and Green (2016) in order to guide the instructional design an E-learning program. The change that is required is that autistic students need preparation for their post secondary life. An inventory of what are particular skills the students need will be conducted by talking professionals dealing with this population. An advisory board will be created for the program consisting of a college professor, a job coach, a special needs teacher/expert, a disability specialist, an IT professional and students currently looking to be part of the program as well as a student who has transitioned into adulthood. An assessment of participant’s skill levels using a student centered design for an evaluation of the student level and needs. Using the Marquette Strengths index identify to identify which of four broad categories the student will fall into after graduation. Independent–Independent, Interdependent with Supports Level A Interdependent –

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Supported Level B —Interdependent – Participatory Level — a design will be directed towards the level of support the E learning management system will deliver. Depending on the results of this assessment a particular module will be assigned from the Learning Management system (similar to a Blackboard system) to guide these students’ activities in the program. Throughout the project the Addie Model will be used to analyze who the audience is, identify the behavioral outcome, the learning constraints, the delivery options and the timeline for implementation, review of best practices, create the curriculum, document the evaluation method, development create the content, train the teachers, train the students on using the technology, and throughout conduct formative evaluation and in the last phase create summative evaluation of the program for the Boys and Girls Club Director.

A common area given is part of the preparation must be directed to social skills. It is well documented that students with autism have weaknesses with social skills and social learning theory defined by Albert Bandura says that people learn by observing others. This method can be used through helping those with autism with things such as peer mentoring to help them during their transitional period that can be delivered through online programs.

**Virtual Reality**

VR programs are being used successfully for social skills, learning to drive, social interactions and more. Bellini & Brambilla (2011) discuss VR as a promising tool in the rehabilitation world

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that offers children a safe environment for learning. The realism of the simulated environments allows them to learn important skills and the probability increases to transfer to their everyday lives. Strickland et al 1996 (Brambilla 2011) showed marked improvement in skills after a few trials Using desktop tools children were taught how to behave in social domains and the consequences of their behaviors, Children learn to improve social interaction who communicate through avatars. Autism Speaks (2014) funded Dr. Yang’s Virtual Reality Training program effect on brain activity pre treatment and post treatment, which showed Dr Yang’s results are being taken to a new level by showing how virtual skill training, can impact the brain. Best practices from research along with the vision of this program are to supplement the school day to advance and prepare students. Bellini catalogs in a literature review eight clinical studies of VR impacts on patients with autism. The types of technology equipment used will be reviewed. The 21st-century program complements learning opportunities that traditionally have not met the needs of disabled students in the area of transition. One of the eligible activities is servicing students with disabilities and their families.

The vision is to adapt the existing Teen Tech Center to include Project Transition. The Boys and Girls Club currently operates a publicly funded Charter school in the same building so the Tech lab space will be available during these hours. The instructional designer will develop a curriculum that addresses basic administrative skills, financial literacy, driving, taking mass transit and college readiness depending on the needs of the particular student.

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**Goals**

My goal is to implement an effective learning program for the students in the Project Transition. Goals are important for any E learning plan. The purpose of this endeavor is to better prepare disabled students to achieve their full potential and take their place in society as adults. The learning goal is to establish a learning lab for students with autism. By designing courses including VR simulations that will assist them with self-advocacy, self -determination, effective communications, and fitness. By using simulations such as for skills training and mock interviews students will show proficiency in acquiring skills. The measurable outcomes would be skills assessed; some real interviews attended, measured improvement in social skills, etc.

Goals for teachers will be professional development (training) as they are the cornerstones of implementation of this e-learning plan. Each staff member will undergo a credentialing process to become a certified autism professional through IBECESS. As part of the their training they will become familiar with Individuals with Disabilities, Education Act, and the role transitional services play in the student's Individualized Education Plan.

Goals for students will include using innovative learning techniques to engage students in Transition planning. Transition planning starts with preparing for a transition IEP meeting. This will be included social eLearning for both educators and students. Online resources will be

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provided for educations while students will receive online peer mentoring from students who have already gone through this transition meeting.

**Living skills**

Students will receive online resources to become familiar with the skills they will need as they go to college, live in dorms, and live on their own. Students will participate in VR driving readiness programs. Free online guides such as Autism Speaks Housing Tool Kit and Rutgers Transportation Guides will be provided.

**Self-advocacy**

Each student will have its own Personalized learning programs dashboard evaluation and tracking Living skills will include personal finances and personal fitness. The Lacey school system explained the value of tech programs for disabled students:

“We’re not just talking about remediation,” Handschuch says. “We want to push students to the next level and challenge them to succeed in different areas—graduate, get a good job or further their education. All of us in society will win in the long run.”

Finally, self-advocacy will look at Social learning will help support the diversity mission of the Boys and Girls Club in helping make a difference for students with unique needs.

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Social networking platforms will be used to help support the vision statement including have students interact with one another and mentors via Facebook groups and other online forums.

**ELearning Plan**

As mentioned above a Need Analysis was the first step. A committee was formed. A learning consultant, a Ph.D. from a local university, the director of the Boys and Girls Club, the Direct of ACLA, a parent, a student, an IT professional. Setting the goals of the program within that context a student-centered program will be designed addressing the unique needs these students have. Online learning can help them overcome these challenges. The skills levels of the students will be accessed and individual learning plans developed.

Staffing dealing with these students require specialized training. All staff hired will be certified by IBCCES during their first year in the program,

**Leadership issues**: ACLA director Kevin Halas is a leader in the autism Community. Having successfully navigated into adulthood and currently pursuing a doctorate in educational technology he ascribes to Northhhouses transformational leadership style believing that this vast group of autistic students can be prepared for adulthood. Since The Boys and Girls Club is committed to servicing these students a more situational leadership approach may be warranted.

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If the program is deemed effective and a good ROI after the three years the success of the program can be replicated. A situational leadership approach for actually implementing the program is warranted as the students themselves are challenged. Dr. Stephen Shore says if you've met one person with autism you've met one person with autism so the challenge may be that the diverse needs of the individual students many not be met. I n order to address this there must be flexibility within the program to prioritize the learning modules with the help of the IT director involved. Frequent interaction with the teachers and students is a key to success. Collaborative and social learning both are highly dependent on the virtual world to be successful. To have a successful learning experience, you must make appropriate decisions on the collaborative group (students), the technology, and the instructional environment (Clark & Mayer). Change issues that must be looked at include how students will adapt to learning in an online environment. Much of the management and success will be providing the appropriate technology tools. Google has partnered with those in the public school systems to provide Chromebooks for students to help them learn. To benefit twenty (20) students with autism each one of them would receive a Chromebook with programs to help them learn. Programs that would be included would be wiki’s, discussion board groups and Microsoft office.

Other programs that would be helpful, as part of the Chromebook experience would include task simulations that help students accomplish a task that could be realistic to something that may one day do for an employer. Software simulators can make this possible. Personal-response simulations can also help students learn vocational skills and money management skills. These can help students manage their time more effectively.

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**Professional Development**

The International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards seeks to ensure the highest level of education and care for individuals with special needs. We set worldwide industry standards for people to stay up to date in content specific certification.

This alignment with professional excellence will empower the teachers to motivate their students the teachers will align with servant leadership placing the goods of their students over their own self interests and emphasize follower development (Northouse 2013)

ALCA guiding the process aligns with Northouse Transformational Leadership assumed to produce results beyond expectations where the students will reach their full potential. Theory Anderson’s Theory of Online Learning (2008) lays out checklists of what will be needed. Working with the IT director and educators we will choose a learning management system designed for capturing data and designed for usability. The 21st Century Grant requires that data be captured on a weekly basis as a back up for their reporting requirements. The existing Tech Center will be available as well as the Learning Lab in the Charter school. The 30 chromebooks will be linked remotely to dial in so that the student may have availability from their homes. Things like calendars, message boards, and Google, Facebook, Microsoft Word and others to

Learn the common themes of web interfaces and copy them. The IT director will order the chromebooks and the VR headsets.

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**Funding Proposal and Financial Evaluation**: **Source of Funding and Community Support**

The Boys and Girls Club is tax-exempt and partially funded by the federal government. In 2016 Boys & Girls Clubs served nearly 4 million students from the ages of 6 to 18. Primary funds will come from the 21st Century grant to the Boys and Girls Club. Because of the co-resident with the charter school E-rate can be used for communication charges.

The Boys and Girl Club have an annual dinner that provides funds and the community routinely provides volunteer mentoring for its students. The mission for funding this program: is tied to a societal goal of helping the autistic student lead meaningful productive lives. Today in the United State the cost is $60,000 per year across the lifespan of an individual with autism. Programs such as this can have measurable benefits to society not only as an ROI but as an example of what a caring group of people can come together within an organization, seek the model and programs to effectuate transformational change for these individual students and those who come after them by providing online resources/social networks for educators and students.

**Budget Year 1 - 9/01/18-8/30/19**

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| Item | Amount |
| Certified autism teachers | $75 per hour |
| 3 hours per day - 180 days | $111,500 |
| 3 hours per day - 10 weeks summer | $33,750 |
| Professional training - $700 | $2,800 |
| Chromebooks  $359 (30) | $10,770 |
| Virtual Reality Headsets $100 (30) | $3,000 |
| Software | $5000 |
| ACLA Administrate fee | $23,364 |
| Total Program Cost | $190,118 (30 students average cost = $6,339) |

**Conclusion**

Project Transition responded to the Boys and Girls Club desire to widen its 21st Century Grant to service students with autism. Through the implementation of a vision, goals and ELearning plan funded by the 21st century grant we are able to develop an instructional design centered on students Built in will be monitoring and evaluation tools that will assess the students success as well as provide data to back up any problems or concerns from the students, teachers, administrators and parents in the program, Educational leadership theories will be applied to the program as the eLearning plan that is centered on social learning will help these students succeed is . Outcomes including living skills, independence, and self-advocacy, will benefit these students for the rest of their lives.  The Project Transition project will provide an E learning model that can be replicated and expanded into the future.

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