

## Nexus: Autistic Adult Micro-Clubhouse to Support Transitions

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### Background and Problem

- 50,000 people diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder transition into adulthood each year, and encounter challenges in crucial aspects of transitioning, such as: postsecondary employment, higher education, healthcare, social integration, and independent living<sup>1</sup>.
- Transition skills (e.g., meal planning, managing living spaces) are needed to establish or maintain independent living.
- The city of Newark has very limited resources for autistic adults, particularly around transition services.



### Approach

- Nexus, a micro-clubhouse, adopts the work-ordered day concept of the Clubhouse model. This empowers individuals to choose activities, contributions, and daily decisions<sup>4</sup>.
- Members and staff collaborate as colleagues to manage the clubhouse demands (e.g., prepping and cooking meals for members, cleaning)<sup>3</sup>.



### Purpose

- With high depression rates among autistic individuals, <sup>5-7</sup> positive social interactions are buffers against depression<sup>2</sup>.
- The purpose of this project was to create a pilot transition/social program (Nexus) with autistic adult input (see table 1), which supported building community.

Table 1.

Area Suggested by Member	Our Approach
Cooking (n=10)	Making smoothies, making tea and coffee, trying new recipes, cleaning areas used
Cleaning (n=6)	Re-organizing an unorganized room; vacuuming
Creating a resume/searching for jobs (n=6)	Identifying strengths, problem-solving what to include
Making a recipe book (n=1)	Trying new recipes of interest and designing a book
Organizing a to-do list (n=6)	Color-coded template to prioritize responsibilities
Washing and folding clothes (n=6)	Experienced members guide inexperienced members
Making friends (n=12)	Conversation about interests and daily life, having members work together
Practicing an interview (n=4)	Mock interviews with student members
Creating a shopping list (n=3)	Using grocery store circulars to find recipe ingredients
Learning new games (board games, card games) (n=11)	Implementing new games for members to play

### Sample and Setting

- Participants were acquired via a Qualtrics Survey and screened via phone call/zoom.
- 5 participants attended Nexus, with a varying amount of participants present each week.
- 3 rooms were used at Rutgers SHP including: a classroom, kitchen, and mock apartment.

### Findings

- 1.) Including autistic adults in research is necessary, including recognizing their strengths.
- 2.) Building community and belonging among autistic adults before working on improving transition skills is essential.
- 3.) Autistic adults should be included in designing interventions.
- 4.) Positive relationships support the facilitation and acquisition of transition skills.

### Significance

- Providers can enhance the sense of belonging, connection, and transition skills of autistic adults by prioritizing their strengths, positive attributes, and positive relationships.
- Sustainability has been achieved through designing a micro-clubhouse and transition-based intervention manual at a state university for accessibility in Newark, NJ.

### References

