

More than Just a Paycheck: Self-Employment as a Career Option for
Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

A Report

Presented to

The Faculty of the College of Education

San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements of the Course

Education 795B

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May 2006

Abstract

Although emerging research has investigated self-employment as a career path for individuals with disability, no empirical studies exist in the specific area of autism and self-employment. The current study provides results from a survey completed by 52 adults with Asperger's Disorder, autism, or PDD-NOS who had been self-employed for at least 3 months. The respondents largely represented higher functioning and relatively independent individuals with Asperger's Disorder. Results revealed that individuals had a high satisfaction rate with their self-employment work and were able to successfully access their special interests, talents, or hobbies in their work environment given this model of employment. Financial difficulties were indicated as a major disadvantage, concurrent with hardships faced by much of the disability community who are both employed and self-employed.

More than Just a Paycheck: Self-Employment as a Career Option for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

The employment climate for individuals with disabilities is entering a new era. Supported and competitive employment have emerged as viable alternatives to sheltered workshops, while the self-determination movement has helped to empower individuals with disabilities to input their choices and opinions as they relate to adult life. Individuals with autism present a unique subset within the disability culture, often displaying significant social and behavioral barriers to employment, while concurrently presenting unique interests, strengths, or talents that could be accessed in the right job. Self-employment, which has been increasingly recognized as a viable work option, offers an out-of-the box career path for individuals with autism who may otherwise be limited to jobs which underutilize their skills.

The purpose of the present study was to explore the efficacy of self-employment for individuals with pervasive developmental disorders, often referred to as autism spectrum disorders. Although emerging literature addresses self-employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, few studies target results for individuals with cognitive or developmental disabilities, while no known studies exist on the topic of self-employment and autism. As the incidence rates of autism continue to increase, a great need exists to provide employment options which assure that these individuals have the opportunity to become productive and contributing members of society.

Literature Review

Employment Outcomes for Individuals with Disabilities

High unemployment rates and low wages continue to hinder individuals with disabilities in their pursuit of financial stability. The National Organization of Disability (Arnold & Ipsen,

2005; Blanck, Sandler, Schmeling, & Schartz, 2000) reports that while individuals without disabilities have a 19% unemployment rate, 68% of people with disabilities are unemployed. Those who are employed are often faced with poor earnings, less opportunity to work, and fewer interactions with coworkers when compared with nondisabled employees (Mank, Cioffi, & Yovanoff, 1998). In fact, data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation found the median annual income for adults with developmental disabilities ages 22 to 65 to be 20% below the poverty threshold (Yamaki & Fujiura, 2002).

Adults with mental retardation face even greater barriers. Olney and Kennedy (2001) found that individuals with mental retardation had lower rates of competitive employment (15.6%) compared to individuals with other disabilities (58.4%) receiving vocational services. Instead, these individuals were more likely to work in segregated settings such as sheltered workshops, environments that have been found ineffective to enhance an individual's quality of life (Eggleton, Robertson, Ryan, & Kober, 1999). Those individuals working in the community were typically employed in jobs limited to cleaning and maintenance such as janitorial, laundry service, or dishwashing (Moran, McDermott, & Butkus, 2001). Furthermore, adults with mental retardation have a high occurrence of job loss (28%), often propagating feelings of frustration or disappointment for the individual and an additional burden of frequent hiring and training for job coaches and employers.

Based on these dismal results, recommendations have been made to improve employment outcomes. Rogan, Banks, and Howard (2000), highlight the importance of person-centered planning, staff training, and active involvement of the job seeker within a supported employment model. Despite the strong leadership and values of the 39 work sites surveyed, facilities were not well-equipped to serve individuals with more significant support needs, indicating a need for

increased funding and knowledge of assistive technology. Another key factor in employment success lies in the training of nondisabled coworkers who regularly interact with the individual. When supported employment coaches provided additional support to coworkers and supervisors at the job site, individuals with severe mental retardation were more likely to have higher wages, more integration with coworkers, and increased in equality in their role and responsibilities when compared to nondisabled employees (Mank et al., 1998).

Employment Outcomes for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Pervasive developmental disorders (PDD) include Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified. These are 3 of the 5 disorders listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) that most frequently make up what is referred to as autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Common characteristics, as delineated by the DSM-IV-TR include impaired social functioning and restricted or repetitive interests and behaviors. While individuals with Asperger's disorder have normal intelligence and intact language abilities, individuals with autism have deficits in communication and may have cognitive delays.

Summary of outcomes.

Like individuals with other developmental disabilities, adults with autism spectrum disorders struggle in finding meaningful and long-term employment. Although data varies, most studies show gross underemployment rates and a history of negative work experiences. According to research conducted by Billstedt, Gillberg, and Gillberg (2005) in a follow up study of 114 adults with autism, 78% were characterized as having a *poor* outcome, as indicated by lack of both employment and social relationships. This lack of employment is evident early on, as reported by the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) of high

school students. In their survey of students ages 13-17, 14.5% of students with autism held paid jobs in the past year, compared with 35.9% of students with mental retardation, and 60.1% of students with learning disabilities (Marder, Cardoso, & Wagner, 2003). After graduation, an increase in employment was found, at the rate of 31.5% for individuals with autism, compared with a 24.8% employment rate for adults with mental retardation and a 46.4% rate for individuals with learning disabilities (Cameto, 2005).

Many individuals with autism are placed in sheltered work settings (Howlin, Goode, Hutton, & Rutter, 2004) due to behavioral and social challenges, despite the negative impact of these environments. García-Villamizar, Ross, and Wehman (2000), found that adults with autism in sheltered employment settings showed deterioration in their skills as evidence by increased scores on the Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS) after a 3 year period. In contrast, adults in supported employment arrangements did not show any changes on their CARS score over the same period. In a follow-up study of the same 55 adults, a positive relationship was demonstrated between quality of life (QOL) and supported employment (Garcia-Villamizar, Wehman, & Navarro, 2002). While individuals in sheltered workshops did not have QOL gains, adults in the supported employment group showed increases in their global QOL including measures of environmental control and perception of personal change.

Adults with autism spectrum disorders who are of average intelligence also report a lack of opportunities for advancement in their work, and frustration of being placed in entry level positions which are far below their capabilities (Müller, Schuler, Burton, & Yates, 2003). Romoser (2000), described this phenomena as “malemployment” which he defined as “working not only far below your skill level but also at a task for which you are totally unsuited” (p. 1). In addition to poor job matches, obstacles to employment faced by individuals with autism, both

with and without mental retardation, can include lack of tolerance from coworkers, the job application process (Müller et al., 2003), social and behavioral difficulties (Hagner & Cooney, 2005), sensory problems, and organizational skills (Grandin & Duffy, 2004).

Recommendations for improvement.

The first place to look for solutions and ways to improve these poor outcomes is directly from individuals with ASD. During a focus group, four adults with autism stated their desire for paid employment, respect for their privacy, personal freedom, ability to express their preferences, the opportunity to learn skills requiring more responsibility, and lastly having access to the resources necessary to make these wishes a reality (Ruef & Turnbull, 2002).

The good news is that specific strategies have been identified to address these needs and help circumvent barriers to employment. The Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) program has found success in community job placements for people with autism, citing an 89% job retention rate (Keel, Mesibov, & Woods, 1997). Elements of the TEACCH model that contribute to its efficacy include finding predictable jobs that operate on a consistent schedule, clearly defined work tasks and work areas, minimized distractions, and a focus on long-term support services that expand beyond the hours the individual is at work. Other supports recommended in the research literature include communication supports, additional time for learning new job tasks, (Müller et al., 2003), and implementation of more structured activities during down-time (Hagner & Cooney, 2005).

Most importantly, the literature stresses a need to utilize individual's interests, talents, or even obsessions when selecting an appropriate job (Atwood, 2003; Grandin & Duffy, 2004; Keel et al., 1997; Müller et al., 2003). Mercier, Mottron, and Belleville (2000) conducted interviews with individuals with autism along with their caregivers regarding the restricted interests

displayed by the individuals with ASD. Although family members expressed a desire for the individual to reduce the time spent with these restricted interests, individuals with ASD perceived the interests as a positive part of their life, providing them with a source of validation, sense of well-being, incentive for personal growth, and an appropriate way of occupying their time. Given the many challenges faced by individuals with ASD, these results provide a foundation for transferring these interests into the vocational arena.

In a pilot study conducted by Müller et al. (2003), results of interviews with 18 adults with autism spectrum disorders revealed a need to capitalize on ASD-related strengths when approaching the vocational arena. Participants in this study felt that their service coordinators did not fully recognize the unique strengths often associated with ASD such as attention to detail, visual/spatial, or technical skills. They also reported a need to explore and utilize individual interests such as numbers, transportation, books, computers, or animals as it may relate to potential employment.

Put in practice, these recommendations have been successful. Shields-Wolfe and Gallagher (1992) provided a case study of a 21-year-old man with autism who had splinter skills in the areas of music trivia and calendar calculations. These talents were put to use in his work filling orders for a music distribution company. Job performance evaluations rated the man as average to above average in his skills when compared to typical coworkers. In addition, he established relationships with others on the job and demonstrated a decrease in maladaptive behaviors in the home environment.

In light of the high unemployment rate for individuals with autism, self-employment is an intriguing vocational alternative which allows the individual to focus on personal strengths and

talents. Although this employment option is gaining recognition, the efficacy of self-employment for individuals with autism spectrum disorders has not yet been evaluated.

Self-Employment as a Career Option

Statistics and policy.

As defined by the Internal Revenue Service, an individual is considered self-employed “if the person for whom you perform services for has only the right to control or direct the result of your work, not what will be done, or how it will be done.” (IRS, n.d.) An individual may also be classified as self-employed if he or she maintains a part-time business in addition to an employed job. In the disability literature, self-employment situations are also described using the terms *supported self-employment* (Hagner & Davies, 2002; Rizzo, 2002), *microenterprising* (Walls, Dowler, Cordingly, Orselene, & Greer, 2004), and *entrepreneurship* (Blanck et al., 2000; The President’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 2000).

Data shows that individuals with disabilities are self-employed at higher rates than the general population. According to the 1990 (most recent data available) United States Census Bureau, 12.2% of people ages 16-65 with disabilities earn income from self-employment compared with 7.8% of the general population (Arnold & Ipsen, 2005; Arnold & Seekins, 2002; Ipsen, Arnold, & Colling, 2005). A few of the many reasons individuals with disabilities may choose self-employment include convenience, entrepreneurship (Palmer, Schriener, Getch, & Main, 2000), lack of other available options (Doyel, 2002), and creating an individualized work environment (Griffen & Hammis, 2003). Rural areas in particular have been found to have increased rates of self-employment when compared with urban areas (Arnold & Seekins, 1995, 2002). Faced with high unemployment, transportation barriers, lower wages, and limited job availability (Arnold & Seekins, 1995, 1997; Hagner & Davies, 2002), Vocational Rehabilitation

(VR) counselors have found self-employment as a viable option in the continuum of work opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

As employment policies evolve, recognition of self-employment also continues to increase in prevalence in federal and state legislation. At the forefront is the 1998 Reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act. For the first time, self-employment was recognized as a competitive employment option for individuals with disabilities. Moreover, VR programs were identified in having a role to support this option, including the use of VR funds to support small business development (Ipsen et al., 2005). In continuation of these efforts, the Department of Labor introduced a report in 1999 entitled “Futurework: Trends and Challenges for Work in the 21st Century” (United States Department of Labor, 1999) encouraging communication and collaboration between employers, policymakers and persons with disabilities. Shortly thereafter, The President’s Committee on Employment of Persons with Disabilities (2000) released “Getting Down to Business: A Blueprint for Creating and Supporting Entrepreneurial Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities.” This groundbreaking report states:

Self-employment offers significant potential as a means to accessing the American dream for people with disabilities. The current social and economic climate is favorable for entrepreneurship, and people with disabilities should be encouraged to take advantage of the opportunities that business ownership presents. (p. 4, 49)

Areas identified in this blueprint as roadblocks to the self-employment process included poor access to technical and business assistance, limited access to capital, lack of interagency coordination, lack of buy-in from state and national organizations, concerns related to health benefits, and disincentives to work. Recurring themes in the action plans developed by the panel to address these concerns included emphasized raising awareness, increasing training for VR

counselors in business ownership, involving mainstream business development organizations, technical assistance for individuals, and continued research.

In 2001, following the release of the blueprint, Congress created the Office of Disability Employment Policy, whose legislation encourages small business ownership (Griffen & Hammis, 2003). In the same year, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) of the United States Department of Education redefined employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities as working in an *integrated* setting. This legislation deters the use of sheltered workshops and segregated employment approaches within VR programs (Wehman, Revell, & Brooke, 2003).

Shortly thereafter in 2002, Arnold and Ipsen (2005) from the Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities (RTC: Rural) evaluated the self-employment policies of state VR agencies. Compared to similar research they conducted in 1991-1992, they found that current state policies have more positive views towards self-employment. While 24% of states surveyed in 1992 did not have written self-employment policies in place, only 2% of states surveyed in 2002 did not have written policies. A reduction was also found over time in the number of negative statements the policies contained relating to self-employment. Other positive outcomes include increased acknowledgement that consumers require professional assistance in developing their businesses, as evidenced by new linkages and interagency partnerships such as the Entrepreneurs with Disabilities program in Iowa and the Exceptional Entrepreneurs of Louisiana Program.

Self-determination.

The self-determination movement has also contributed to the rise in self-employment, propelling VR programs to engage in person-centered planning in order to find appropriate job

matches (Callahan, Shumpert, & Mast, 2002). According to Kilsby and Beyer (2002), self-determination “Encompasses a range of approaches with the broad aim of enabling people with disabilities to play an active role in development their careers. These include the techniques of self-management, self-instruction, self-employment and self-determined decision-making.” (p. 125)

Self-determination has been positively correlated with success in the job setting for individuals with disabilities. Results from a pilot study utilizing The Self-Determined Career Development Model (SDCDM) found that VR consumers showed increased problem-solving capacity and goal setting in the work environment after the training model was implemented (Wehmeyer et al., 2003). The SDCDM trains VR personnel to empower and engage the consumer in decision making by facilitating dialogue relating to work acquisition. In a study by Kilsby and Beyer (2002), training packages included job tasters and protocols for job coaches to gain input and perspectives from the job seekers. Forty adults with mental retardation participated in the study, with results confirming the efficacy of these strategies in enhancing self-determination and decreasing the need for job coach assistance.

Sowers, McLean, and Owens (2002) discussed the importance of consumer-driven services as a means to reduce the high unemployment rate experienced by individuals with developmental disabilities. Aligned with a self-determination paradigm, self-directed employment maintains that the individual is able to choose from all possible career opportunities rather than limiting options to typical low wage jobs. Other characteristics of self-directed employment includes a focus on the consumer’s individualized career goals, independent control of how their funding will be spent for employment support, and the ability to contract directly with their service providers.

The most striking example of the impact of the self-determination movement on self-employment is the RSA Choice Projects. During the reauthorization of the 1992 Rehabilitation Act, disability advocates brought awareness to the lack of freedom individuals had in where their VR funds would be spent. In response, Congress authorized the Rehabilitation Services Administration Choice Projects, a 5 year demonstration which used a voucher system to increase personal control over an individuals' use of VR funds (Arnold & Ipsen, 2005; Callahan, 2001; Callahan et al., 2002). Seven project sites were selected to implement and monitor the results of this model, and funding was subsequently provided for an additional year, proving 6 total years to measure its efficacy.

Although not anticipated or planned for, self-employment was frequently chosen by consumers as their desired employment goal. United Cerebral Palsy (UCP), one of the seven national project sites, discovered that 21% of participants who were employed through the UCP Choice project selected self-employment (Callahan et al., 2002). Other alternative financing programs have also emerged, allowing for more freedom and control for people with disabilities. Virginia's General Assembly established the Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority (ATLFA) in 1995 to provide financing options for assistive technology devices and services (Scione, 2003). While drawing minimally on public funds, ATLFA has been able to provide low interest, flexible loans to individuals to help reduce barriers to daily life and work activities using these technologies. Based on the success of this model, future initiatives are being planned, including small business or microenterprise loans.

Self-Employment Outcomes for Individuals with Disabilities

Building upon these early initiatives in the early 1990's self-employment has been subsequently more prevalent in the research literature, with outcome studies targeting varying

populations. Two surveys that provided an initial foundation for demographic information and statistics about entrepreneurs with disabilities originate from RTC: Rural and Iowa's Entrepreneur's with Disabilities (EWD) program. Comparatively to other self-employment research for individuals with disabilities these are large scale surveys that provide much needed preliminary information relating to all disability categories.

The EWD survey (Blanck et al., 2000) analyzed existing data from 509 program applicants between the years of 1995 and 1999 in addition to interviews conducted with a sub-set of participants. Key findings from this survey uncovered that the typical applicant for self-employment was male (67%), had a mean age of 46, was married (52%), white (96%), and had some college experience (41%) or ended their education at the high school level (49%).

EWD participants most frequently reported orthopedic impairments, such as back injuries (47%) as their primary disability and no mention of mental retardation, autism, or developmental disabilities was made in the demographic results. Major concerns expressed by the participants once they entered the self-employment arena included ability to obtain health insurance, encountering employment discrimination, demanding work hours, and physical challenges relating to their disability.

In the 2001 RTC: Rural survey (2001), 330 business owners with disabilities responded. Results showed that the typical self-employed individual was male (66%), between the ages of 40 and 59 (67%), white (88%), and had some college level education (30%). The main reason cited for choosing self-employment was to *work for myself*, while 91% stated that they enjoyed operating their businesses. The majority of respondents worked 0-19 hours a week (20%) and 30% stated that their business supplied over half of their total household income, with the most common annual gross income being under \$5000. Health care was a common concern, with 25%

of those surveyed indicating they had no health benefits. This study did not provided more detailed information on the types of disabilities participants had.

Subsequently, studies have examined the advantages and disadvantages of self-employment for individuals with disabilities (Arnold & Seekins, 2002; Doyel, 2002; Walls et al., 2004), including those with developmental disabilities (Griffen & Hammis, 2002; Hagner & Davies, 2002; Rizzo, 2002). Common advantages cited for self-employment include independence and control, being part of the community, increased self-esteem, ability to accommodate one's disability through a flexible schedule, and the potential for increased personal wealth (Arnold & Seekins, 2002; Doyel, 2002; Griffen & Hammis, 2002, 2003; Hagner & Davies, 2002).

Disadvantages may include less free time and long hours fluctuating income, finding the appropriate supports and services, increased stress, finding start up financing, record keeping, managing the complex skills involved in the business, and the length of time it takes to generate income (Arnold & Seekins, 2002; Doyel, 2002; Hagner & Davies, 2002). Another deterrent to self-employment for individuals with disabilities is the lack of knowledge and awareness of this career option early in their vocational development. According to NLTS-2 results, only 1% of students in special education receive training in entrepreneurship, of which no students with autism took part (Cameto & Wagner, 2003).

Hagner and Davies (2002) conducted interviews with eight business owners who had cognitive disabilities. All of the individuals were engaged in business that related to their own personal interests and cited the main reason for choosing self-employment as a lack of other options. Most of the owners worked part time and all received additional income through other sources (other jobs, Medicaid, Social Security), due to the minimal income received through

their self-employment ventures. Half of the individuals were able to conduct their business under the umbrella of their adult service agency, which assisted with their day to day operations. However, support providers reported that they did not have the requisite skills or experience in business management prior to working with the individual business owner.

Although no empirical research exists in the area of autism and self-employment, several case examples do lend positive support including an individual with Asperger's disorder providing computer consultant services (Fast, 2004) and a man with autism who runs a greenhouse (Griffen & Hammis, 2003). In their book "Careers for Individuals with Asperger Syndrome and High-Functioning Autism", Grandin and Duffy (2004) encourage individuals to consider freelance work as a way to adapt the work environment for optimal outcomes and integrate their talents into their career choice. They also warn that self-employment can cause stress for individuals if they are not prepared for this mode of work.

This initial exploration warrants further probing into the prevalence and efficacy of self-employment as it relates to individuals with autism spectrum disorders. Additionally, it is relevant to examine whether self-employment offers accommodations to the unique characteristics of the disorder. The purpose of this pilot study was to descriptively investigate this relatively new phenomenon by answering the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of individuals with ASD who are self-employed?
2. What are the characteristics of the work environment for these individuals?
3. What are the outcomes experienced through self-employment?

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were individuals with autism, Asperger's disorder, or PDD-NOS who were at least 18 years of age and had been self-employed for a minimum of 3 months. If the individual was not able to complete the survey independently, a parent, guardian, caregiver, or other adult knowledgeable about the individual's self-employment was able to provide any level of assistance needed to complete the survey. Fifty-two individuals completed the survey.

Survey Instrument

This survey was adapted from questions asked in interviews by Hagner and Davies (2002) and the survey conducted by RTC Rural (2001). Questions were modified to target a 6th to 8th grade level of understanding and added specific questions relevant to the autism diagnosis such as mode of communication and the integration of special interests and talents in the work arena. The survey was comprised of 26 questions, 23 of which were provided in a multiple choice format. Three questions required open-ended responses from the individuals. Additionally, 11 of the 23 multiple choice questions allowed the individual to check "other" and write in a different response. The survey format was broken down into three parts: "Information about You", "General Questions about Your Self-Employment", and "Questions about Your Job Satisfaction". See Appendix A for the complete survey.

Procedures

Information about the survey (see Appendix B) was distributed by phone or email to 107 organizations, web groups, and individuals within the United States who were involved in the areas of autism or employment for individuals with disabilities. They were provided with a description of the study, consent information, and instructions to complete the survey which they were asked to disseminate to relevant individuals who may meet the study criteria. The survey was available to participants in both an online and postal mail format, although all of the 52

participants completed the survey online via Survey Monkey, a web-based survey host. Survey responses were collected between the dates of January 10, 2006 and May 13, 2006. Due to the small sample size, results were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results

Participant Characteristics

Overall, the majority of participants (90.4%) completed the survey independently, without assistance, while a small number (7.7%) had someone else (specifically, a parent, guardian, caregiver, or spouse) complete the survey for them. Demographics of the survey participants, represented in Table 1, indicated that over half (59.5%) of the respondents were male and Caucasian (82.7%) with many falling in the age range of 38 to 47 years old (36.5%). Asperger's disorder was the diagnosis of most participants (78.8%), with autism and PDD-NOS also represented. Three individuals indicated atypical diagnoses with autistic tendencies, but without an official diagnosis of autism.

Participants primarily communicated through verbal means (96.2%) and considered their disability to be moderate (46.2%) or mild (30.8%). In regard to education and living environment, over a third (40%) had their graduate or doctorate degree, with a total of 82% of all participants having at least some college level education. Nearly half (48.1%) lived independently with no assistance (See Table 2).

Self-Employment Characteristics

The overwhelming majority of individuals indicated that their self-employment was a service-based business (90.9%) comparatively to a products-based business (34.1%) although individuals were able to check both categories if their business included both services and products. Two themes emerged from the responses of the participants when asked to provide a

description of their self-employment work. Of the 46 individuals who responded to this question, 11 listed computers as one aspect of their self-employment work, while 13 were involved in some form of the arts or writing (music, acting, photography, visual art, journalism). Other occupation areas listed included taxi driver, dog trainer, architect, carpet cleaner, caterer, mechanic, acupuncturist, copy service, electrical work, education consultant, housepainter, respite provider, and sales.

Approximately 89% of respondents expressed that their self-employment work incorporated a special interest, talent, or hobby. Many noted that the nature of their occupation (computers, writing, photography, art, teaching, etc.) directly correlated with their special interest area. One individual noted the following when asked how a special interest was incorporated into the work environment: “My ability to put pieces together- designing a house is like putting together a puzzle, everything has to fit, and fit where (the) client wants it to fit. I can see these ‘puzzles’ in my mind and how to work them out.” Another provided feedback that “Since I and my children have autism, I am able to use my knowledge of coping strategies, accommodations and resources to help the technical assistance project help other families. This uses two of my special interests- autism and research.”

When asked to check all that applied from a list of seven potential reasons for choosing self-employment (See Figure 1), participants also noted that the ability to use their special talents or interests for their work was a main reason why they chose self-employment (63%). Other popular reasons for selecting this career path included accommodating their disability (56.5%), the difficulty in finding a job (47.8%), and the desire to work for his or herself (37%). These were followed by the desire to make more money (23.9%), the need for their type of business in the community (21.7%), and the desire to own a business (13%). Four respondents gave

additional feedback that their difficulty in the social arena drove their decision to become self-employed, while 3 individuals noted that they chose self-employment because they were not able to function in a typical full time work schedule. One family member completing the survey for their adult child expressed that the school had underestimated the abilities of their child and had predetermined that the individual would go to a sheltered workshop. Self-employment was an alternative way to build on this individual's capacities and gifts.

Further data collected on the nature of the participants' self-employment work showed that just under half had been self-employed for at least 11 years (46.7%), and only 1 participant had self-employment experience limited to 3-6 months. The hours per week worked in a self-employment setting varied, with 19.6% working 11-15 hours per week, 17.4% working 41 hours per week or more, and 15.2% working either 0-5 hours per week or 21-30 hours per week. It should be noted that this solely reflected the number of self-employed hours worked per week, which was not reflective of any other hours the individuals may have worked in an employed position.

Sixty percent of participants made \$1000 or less per month from their self-employed position, while only 13.3% made \$4001 or more per month. Although 24.4% stated that self-employment was their only source of income, other financial sources listed by participants included social security (26.7%), employed work (22.2%), spouse's income (13.3%), and family (11.1%). Descriptive comments on this topic indicated that welfare, pensions, investments, royalties, and child support were other sources of additional income.

When asked to list areas of their self-employment they required assistance with, the most frequent responses were record keeping (37.2%), finances (37.2%), communicating with customers or clients (32.6%), and marketing (30.2%), followed by scheduling (25.6%),

transportation (18.6%), carrying out the actual work (11.6%), and purchasing supplies (9.3%). A sample of need areas indicated under “other” were organization, learning about social conventions, time management, motivation, and filing tax returns.

Some of the participants did not have any medical insurance (19.6%), while others were covered under their family’s insurance (15.2%), Medicare/Medicaid (15.2%), private insurance (13%), or insurance from an employed job (10.9%). Six respondents indicated that they lived in a country such as Canada or Australia which provided universal healthcare or other form of insurance other than those listed.

Job Satisfaction

The majority of respondents expressed a moderate to high rate of job satisfaction as represented by 52.2% of individuals who were “very happy” with their work and 30.4% who were “somewhat happy”. While 10.9% felt “neutral” about their self-employment, only 4.3% were “somewhat unhappy” and 2.2% “very unhappy”. These results were also paralleled by 84.4% of participants indicating that they hoped to stay self-employed in the future.

Major advantages to being self-employed (See Figure 2) included independence (89.1%), control over the environment (84.8%), allowing the individual to do things he or she was good at (82.6%), using the individual’s interests or talents (73.9%), and personal enjoyment (67.4%). Higher pay was only recognized as an advantage for 19.6% of respondents, while none of the respondents indicated that “there are no advantages” to self-employment. Based on additional responses provided under the “other” category, 7 individuals referenced that working alone or avoiding social contact were positive aspects to being self-employed. Other advantages submitted in this category included flexibility, improved self-confidence, productivity, and feeling valued.

As displayed in Figure 3, financial difficulty was clearly the major disadvantage to self-employment as indicated by 60.9% of the respondents. Less than half reported business management (45.7%), start-up (41.3%), health benefits (37%), and finding assistance (37%) to be disadvantages to self-employment, while accommodating the individual's disability was only listed as a disadvantage by 13%. Additionally, 13% of individuals answering this question felt that there were no disadvantages to self-employment. Outside of those listed, individual disadvantages experienced by participants included finding work and trustworthy staff, procrastination, conflicts with others, communication with clients, organization, and staying motivated.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the outcomes of self-employment for individuals on the autism spectrum. Individuals who responded to the survey largely represented a high functioning and independent group as indicated by the primary diagnosis of Asperger's disorder, use of verbal communication, college education experience, and ability to complete the survey by themselves. However, it is interesting to note that just under half of the respondents still considered their disability to be "moderate" which may suggest that despite their relative independence they still faced significant barriers in their daily life. The low rate of individuals with more severe forms of autism completing the survey could be reflective of the difficulty in creating self-employment opportunities for these individuals due to their functioning level or may also be attributed to the difficulty in recruiting individuals in this category who are self-employed.

The correlation between special interests, talents, hobbies and self-employment was evident throughout the survey results. Most individuals not only developed their business from a

special interest, but also stated that their ability to access their talents in their work was a definite advantage. As aptly put by one participant “Self-employment can be the perfect fit for a person with autism. A business is carved to your unique strengths. It creates value to who you are therefore creating a business community around you, rather than trying to fit you into someone else’s work that you may have no interest or choice in. “ While computers and arts emerged as common special interests in the type of employment they were involved in, respondents represented a highly diverse range of professions.

These positive results were further reflected in the high job satisfaction rate of participants and additional self-employment advantages cited by participants as independence, control, and personal enjoyment. The lack of office politics, bullying, and social dynamics was also a noted benefit for individuals on the spectrum, concurrent with the social deficits found in the disorder. As summarized by one participant “Self-employment allows you to go in, do a job, make friends and contacts, and leave before long-term office politics set in.” These advantages may also provide further support for why most respondents had been self-employed for a number of years, with close to half having been self-employment for over a decade.

Despite the overall positive feedback, there were also drawbacks to self-employment. Financial troubles were expressed by participants as a significant challenge, as further evidenced by the fact that most individuals made \$1000 or less per month from this work. It should be considered, however, that gaining competitive income continues to be a challenge for all individuals with disabilities regardless of whether it is employed or self-employed work. Other disadvantages expressed by respondents included management, health care, organization, and finding assistance. Regardless of these hardships, participants still remained positive towards self-employment, with an impressive 84.4% hoping to remain self-employed in the future.

Limitations and Future Implications

Because announcements were sent to a large number of agencies and individuals who were to disseminate the information, it was impossible to determine how many potential participants this survey was forwarded to. Therefore, the 52 individuals who responded are not necessarily representative of the full range of individuals with autism who are self-employed. Additionally, some of the respondents indicated that they resided in another country although the survey questions were geared towards United States residents. This may have posed difficulties in participants answering the survey question relating to income level, which was provided in US dollars, in addition to the survey question relating to health insurance which may vary depending on the residing country. It was interesting to note, however that when researching agencies to contact for recruitment, many organizations supporting entrepreneurship for individuals with disabilities were found outside of the United States.

Future research should target a larger sampling of individuals in order to obtain more responses from individuals at varying functioning levels. This would help to determine how self-employment results may vary based on the type of intensity of the disability. Additionally, because research in this area is relatively new, it would be warranted to study the perceptions and knowledge about self-employment as it relates to Vocational Rehabilitation professionals working with individuals with ASD. Perhaps lack of information about self-employment in the early stages of vocational development for individuals with autism leads to reduced opportunity for individuals to become involved in this career path.

As summarized by a participant, “I think self-employment is a real option for many (but not all) people on the spectrum, and that many of the resources that are currently being used to

help autistic people get and hold jobs which are totally unsuited to them, could be far better used in helping them explore the possibilities of self-employment.”

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Table 1

Demographics

| Variable | % | n |
|---------------------|------|----|
| Diagnosis | | |
| Asperger's Disorder | 78.8 | 41 |
| Other | 11.5 | 6 |
| Autism | 9.6 | 5 |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 59.6 | 31 |
| Female | 40.4 | 21 |
| Age | | |
| 18-27 | 19.2 | 10 |
| 28-37 | 11.5 | 6 |
| 38-47 | 36.5 | 19 |
| 48-57 | 25 | 13 |
| 58-67 | 3.8 | 2 |
| 68+ | 3.8 | 2 |
| Ethnicity | | |
| Asian | 1.9 | 1 |
| Caucasian | 82.7 | 43 |
| Hispanic | 1.9 | 1 |
| Other | 13.5 | 7 |

Table 2

Additional Participant Characteristics

| Variable | % | n |
|-----------------------------------|------|----|
| Severity of Disability | | |
| I don't consider myself disabled | 17.3 | 9 |
| Mild | 30.8 | 16 |
| Moderate | 46.2 | 24 |
| Severe | 5.8 | 3 |
| Highest Level of Education | | |
| Some High School | 8 | 4 |
| High School/ GED | 8 | 4 |
| Trade or Vocational School | 2 | 1 |
| Some College | 24 | 12 |
| Bachelor's Degree | 18 | 9 |
| Graduate or Doctorate | 40 | 20 |
| Living Situation | | |
| Independently without Assistance | 48.1 | 25 |
| With Family | 28.8 | 15 |
| Own Place with Help | 15.4 | 8 |
| Other | 7.7 | 4 |

Figure 1

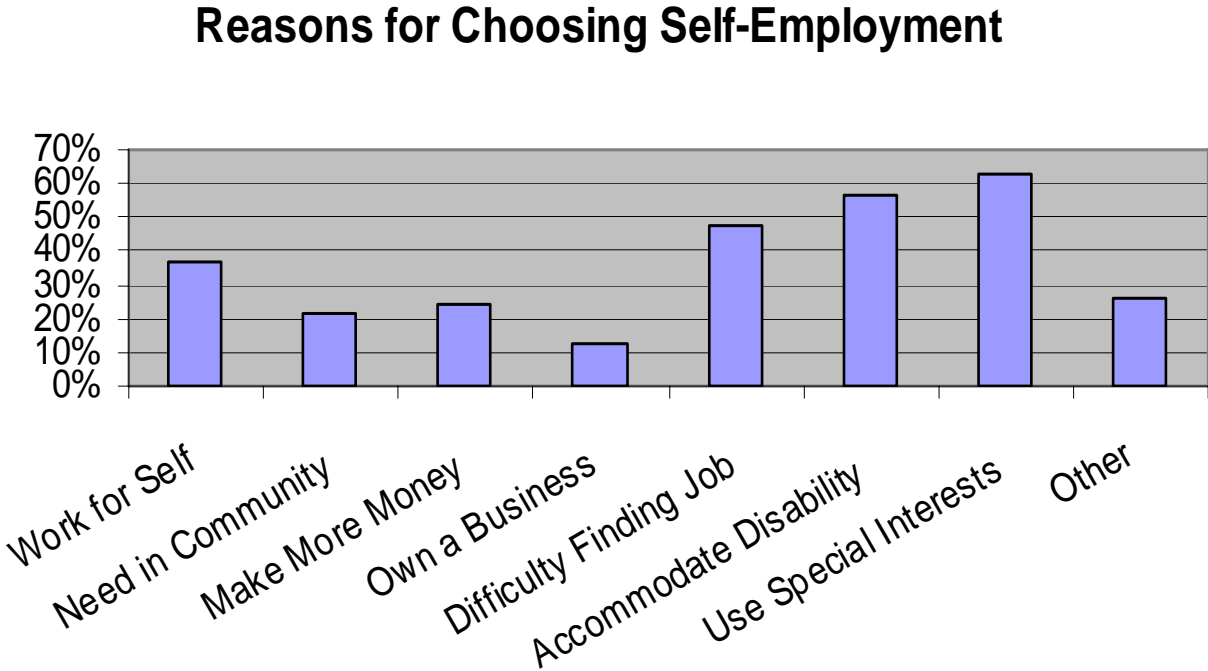


Figure 2

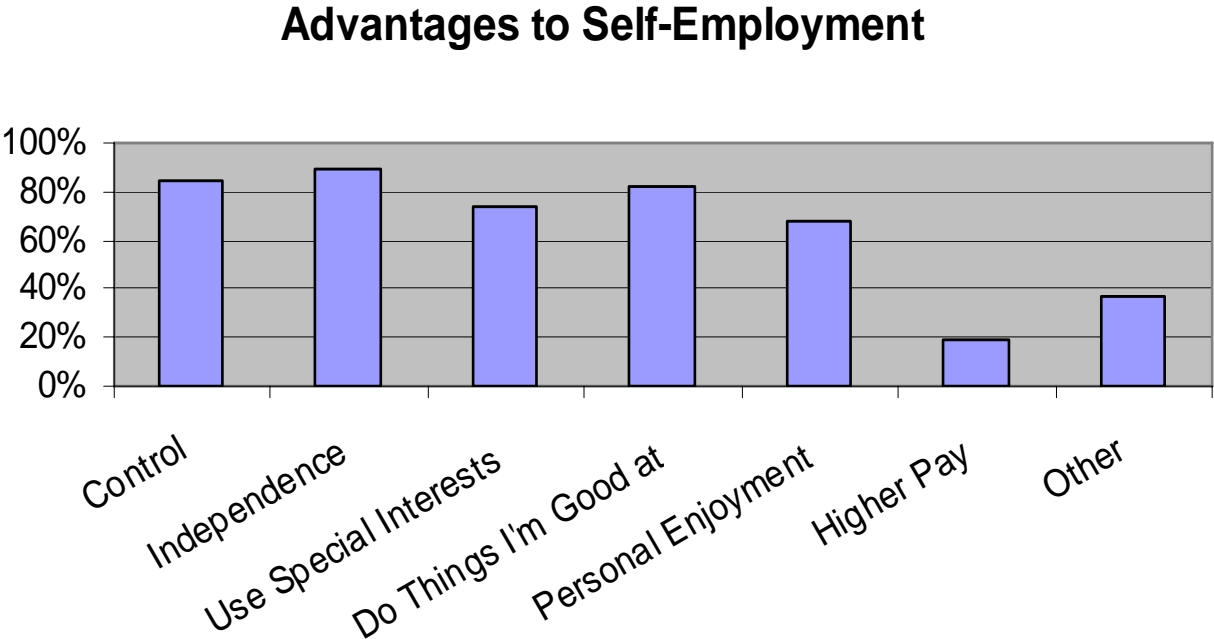
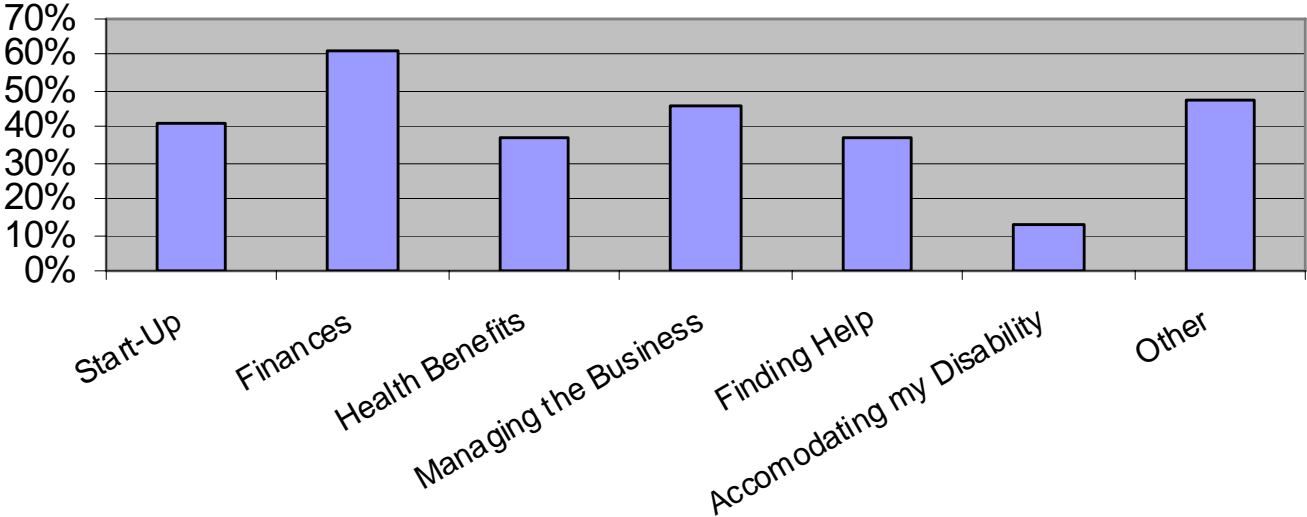


Figure 3

Disdvantages to Self-Employment



Appendix A

San Diego State University**Consent to Act as a Research Subject**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a part of the study, carefully read the following information. If you have questions, you can email the researcher at the contact information provided in this form.

If you are under legal guardianship of a parent or caregiver, your parent or guardian may read this consent form and complete this survey with you if they are knowledgeable about your employment. You may also enlist the assistance of a knowledgeable adult such as your parent, caregiver, or job coach in completing this survey if you are not able to complete it independently.

Investigators

Michelle Lazar, graduate student and Bonnie Kraemer, Ph.D. assistant professor at San Diego State University.

Purpose of the Study

We are interested in learning about self-employment as a career option for adults with autism spectrum disorders.

Who Can Participate?

You can complete this survey if you are at least 18 years of age, have been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (Asperger's Syndrome, Autism, or PDD-NOS), and have been self-employed for at least 3 months. You may still participate in this study if you are an "employee" of a company but also conduct self-employed work part time.

You may also complete this survey if you are the legal guardian or caregiver of an individual who meets the above criteria. The parent or guardian should only complete this survey if the individual is not cognitively or physically capable of completing it on his or her own.

Description of the Study

This is a survey to learn more about people with autism who are self-employed.

In the survey, you will be asked questions about your background, your work, and your level of satisfaction with your employment.

The survey has 25 questions and should take about 20 minutes to complete.

Benefits of Study:

Potential benefits of this study include an increased awareness of self-employment as a career option for individuals with autism. We can't promise however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

Risks or Discomforts:

There are no known risks in completing this study. You have the right to only complete the questions you are comfortable with. You can stop the survey at any time.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

Your participation in this study is completely anonymous. In no way will your name be linked with your responses. In order to make sure your information is confidential, do NOT write your name or address on the survey. Do NOT include your name or other confidential information in the comments section on the online survey. Survey responses entered into our online survey are confidential and are not in anyway linked to your email address.

Voluntary Nature of Participation:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may end your participation in this study at any time. You will not be penalized for ending your participation.

Questions about the Study:

If you have questions about the research, you may contact the following investigator: Michelle Lazar at 619-665-3381 or mlazar2@san.rr.com

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at San Diego State University at 619-594-6622, or at irb@mail.sdsu.edu.

Consent to Participate: The San Diego State University Institutional Review Board has approved this consent form. The consent form must be reviewed annually and will expire a year after it has been approved.

By continuing on to complete the survey you agree that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study.

Completing the survey also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and decide not to participate at any time. Please print or keep a copy of this consent form for your records. You have been told that by completing the survey you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

How to Complete this Survey:

You may completed the attached paper survey or complete the survey over the internet.

SURVEYS MUST BE RETURNED BY MAY 1, 2006.

By Mail:

Complete the attached survey and mail back to the investigator. Do not write your return address on the envelope in order to maintain confidentiality.

Mail your completed survey to:

Michelle Lazar
5962 Erlanger St.
San Diego, CA 92122

Online:

Go to the following link

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=698841663000>

Follow the directions on the screen to complete the survey.

AUTISM & SELF-EMPLOYMENT SURVEY**PART A: Information about You****1. Did anyone help you fill out this survey?**

- No, I completing the survey by myself
- I had some help
- I had a lot of help
- This survey is being completed by a parent, guardian, or other adult knowledgeable about my self-employment

2. If someone helped you complete this survey, please check who it was:

- No one helped me
- Parent or Legal Guardian
- Caregiver
- Job Coach or Employment Support Person
- Other _____

3. What is your diagnosis?

- Asperger Syndrome
- Autism
- Other _____

**4. How do you communicate with others?
(check all that apply)**

- Speech/ Verbal Language
- Sign language and/or Gestures
- Pictures
- Communication Device
- Other _____

5. How would you describe your disability?

- Severe
- Moderate
- Mild
- I don't consider myself disabled

6. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

7. How old are you?

- 18-27 years old
- 28-37 years old
- 38-47 years old
- 48-57 years old

- 58-67 years old
- 68 years or older

8. What is your ethnicity?

- African American
- American Indian
- Asian
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Other _____

9. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Some High School
- High School or GED
- Trade or Vocational School
- Some College
- Bachelor's Degree
- Graduate or Doctorate Degree

10. What is your current living situation?

- I live independently with no assistance
- I live in my own place with help from others
- I live with family
- I live in a group home
- Other _____

PART B: General Questions about Your Self-Employment

11. Why did you choose self-employment?

(check all that apply)

- I wanted to "work for myself"
- There was a need for my type of business in the community
- I wanted to make more money
- I wanted to own a business
- I had difficulty finding a job
- Self-employment helps accommodate my disability
- Self-employment allows me to use my special interests or talents
- Other _____

12. What type of business do you have? (check all that apply)

- I sell products
- I offer a service

13. Provide a short description of what type of self-employment work you do:

14. Does your self-employment incorporate a special interest, hobby, or talent you have?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

15. If your self-employment does incorporate a special interest, hobby, or talent, please tell us what your interest or talent is and how you use it in your work (if not, leave blank):

16. How long have you been self-employed?

- up to 6 months
- 7 months-1 year
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 21 years or more

17. How many hours per week is your self-employed work?

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41 or more

**18. How much do you make per month from self-employment?
(not including income from other employed jobs you may have)**

- Less than \$250
- \$251-\$500
- \$501-\$1000
- \$1001-\$2000
- \$2001-\$3000
- \$3001-\$4000
- \$4001-\$5000
- \$5001 or more

19. Do you have other sources of income outside of your self-employment work?: (check all that apply)

- Self-employment is my only source of income
- Spouse's income
- SSI
- Additional job (employed)
- Family
- Other _____

20. What areas of your self-employment do you require regular help with? (check all that apply)

- Transportation
- Communicating with customers or clients
- Finances
- Marketing
- Carrying out the actual work
- Scheduling
- Purchasing supplies
- Record keeping
- Other _____

21. What type of medical insurance do you have?

- I don't have medical insurance
- I'm covered under my family's medical insurance
- Medicare/Medicaid
- Private Insurance
- Insurance through another job I have
- Other _____

PART C: Questions about Your Job Satisfaction

22. How happy are you with your self-employment work?

- Very happy
- Somewhat happy
- Neutral
- Somewhat unhappy
- Very unhappy

23. Do you hope to stay self-employed in the future?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

24. What are the advantages to being self-employed? (check all that apply)

- Control over what I do
- Independence
- Uses my interests or talents
- Allows me to do things I'm good at
- Personal enjoyment
- Higher pay
- There are no advantages
- Other _____

25. What are the disadvantages to being self-employed?

(check all that apply)

- Difficult to start up
- Financial difficulties
- Health benefits
- Managing the business
- Finding people to help me
- Accommodating my disability
- There are no disadvantages
- Other _____

26. Please provide any other comments you think would be helpful in regards to autism and self-employment:

From: Amy McDaniel
To: mlazar2@san.rr.com
Sent: Monday, January 23, 2006 3:37 PM

Dear Michelle Lazar:

The project entitled "More than Just a Paycheck: Self-Employment as a Career Option for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders" (# 1605) was reviewed and approved in accordance with SDSU's Assurance and federal requirements pertaining to human subjects protections within the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46). This review is valid through **October 25, 2006**, and applies to the conditions and procedures described in your protocol. If any changes to your study are planned or you require additional time to complete your project, please notify the IRB office. Additionally, notify the IRB office if your status as an SDSU-affiliate changes while conducting this research study (you are no longer an SDSU faculty member, staff member or student).

The approved consent form has been uploaded to your protocol file within the vIRB system, within the Supporting Documents section. This document bears the IRB's stamp of approval. Please print and copy this stamped form to use when documenting informed consent from research participants. Changes may not be made to the consent document(s) without prior review and approval of the IRB. The requirements to document voluntary participation via a signed assent form may be waived for full committee protocols as per 45 CFR 46.117 (c) when the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written assent is normally required outside of the research context.

For questions related to this correspondence, please contact the IRB office ((619) 594-6622 or irb@mail.sdsu.edu). To request a renewal or modification of your protocol, use the "Protocol Maintenance" section of your protocol file within the vIRB system. To access relevant policies and guidelines related to the involvement of human subjects in research, visit the IRB web site at <http://gra.sdsu.edu/research.php?areaid=2§ionid=10&subsectionid=19>.

Graduate Students: This message may be used to verify approval by the SDSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) for enrollment in Thesis 799A. If you are not presently enrolled in 799A, attach the enclosed copy of this letter to your *Appointment of Thesis/Project Committee* form prior to submitting the completed form to Graduate and Research Affairs – Student Services Division. If you enrolled in 799A using the IRB e-mail notification, please forward the enclosed copy of this final approval letter to the Graduate Division for completion of your record.

Sincerely,

Jeanne F. Nichols, Chair
SDSU Institutional Review Board

Amy McDaniel
Regulatory Compliance Analyst

Appendix B

**RESEARCH ANNOUNCEMENT:
More than Just a Paycheck:
Self-Employment as a Career Option
for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders**

I am a graduate student at San Diego State University, studying special education with an autism emphasis. I am investigating **self-employment outcomes for individuals with autism spectrum disorders**. The purpose of this research is to increase awareness of self-employment as a career option, and provide more concrete data on outcomes relating to financial viability, supports, funding, benefits, and personal satisfaction.

In order to recruit potential participants for my study, I am contacting national agencies such as yours who work with individuals with disabilities. **I have enclosed a consent form and survey for you to distribute to individuals who meet the criteria listed below.**

The research will involve completion of a 26-item questionnaire which can be completed by hand or online via SurveyMonkey. The questionnaire will be completed by the individual with a disability or by a legal guardian/ parent. If the individual is not able to complete the questionnaire independently, he or she can receive any necessary level of assistance to complete the survey by another knowledgeable adult such as a family member, caregiver, or job coach.

Eligibility for subject participation is as follows:

- 18 years or older,
- Self-employed for at least 3 months
- Has been diagnosed with autism, PDD-NOS, or Asperger syndrome
- Participant can also have “employed” work in addition to their self-employment

You may distribute the survey in the following ways:

- Notify me of the number of photocopies and stamped return envelopes you require, which I will mail directly to you. You may then distribute these to eligible participants.
- Forward the email invitation and consent I have sent you to eligible participants via email.
- Post or distribute the enclosed advertisement which directs eligible participants to contact me to receive the survey information directly.

Thank you for your support!

**Michelle Lazar
(Graduate student, San Diego State University)
619-665-3381
mlazar2@san.rr.com**

Seeking adults with AUTISM and ASPERGER syndrome who are SELF-EMPLOYED to complete a survey



Michelle Lazar, graduate student at San Diego State University, is conducting research to determine the outcomes of self-employment as a career option for adults with autism spectrum disorders. Self-employment is also referred to as freelance work, contractual work, sole-proprietor, or owning your own business.

This could include selling greeting cards or artwork you have made, providing professional services as a contractor such as computer repair, teaching music lessons in your own studio, selling things over the internet, and many other types of work.

This survey is composed of 26 questions and can be completed by hand (and mailed back), or on the internet. Questions relate to your background, the type of work you do, and your satisfaction with your work. A knowledgeable adult can help you complete this survey if needed

YOU CAN TAKE THIS SURVEY IF YOU:

- Are at least 18 years of age
- Have been diagnosed with autism, Asperger syndrome, or PDD-NOS
- Have been self-employed for at least 3 months (it is OK if you also have “employed” work in addition to your self-employment)

IF YOU'D LIKE TO RECEIVE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPATING IN THIS RESEARCH, PLEASE CONTACT:

Michelle Lazar
619-665-3381
mlazar2@san.rr.com

Provide a short description of what type of self-employment work you do:

- 1.** I'm a dog trainer/animal behaviorist who offers weekly group classes (4 nights a week) as well as in-home consultations and running of dog shows and judging of dog shows
- 2.** In my self-employed job as a computer technician I offer many services to my clients covering a wide range of issues. On-Site Service and Repair Are you tired with the headache of disassembling your PC and hauling it to a repair shop every time it needs service, only to wait a week or more to get it back? Seek Tech Support Services will come directly to your home or business to fix your computer troubles right on the spot. Just give us a call to select an appointment time to fit your schedule. Upgrades Is your computer slow to start up? Are you running out of storage space on your computer? We can rejuvenate new life into your PC by upgrading some of its key components such as a video card or increase your memory to improve performance.. Even though, your system is fairly new, you may need a few enhancements to accommodate your growing collection of digital photos, movies, files, or games. Iff you have any questions about whether or not you should upgrade your hardware? Call us! Virus/Spyware/Ad-ware Detection and Removal Does it seem like you have no control over your computer? It might be a virus. No matter what kind of computer you have, you always need the latest antivirus software and updates. Antivirus programs protects your computer from damage and prevents you from accidentally passing viruses to family, friends or coworkers when you send e-mails or share files. Are you not sure about which virus software to install or how to configure it, just ask our experts at Seek Tech Support Services Inc to help you out. Data Backup and Recovery How often do you backup [save files to external hard drives, flash drives or CD/DVD-R or RW] your computer? If your computer/laptop were suddenly damaged or stolen, would you lose your most valuable data? We recommend installing a rewritable DVD or CD burner or an external hard drive. Along with helping you learn how to backup your data safely, Seek Tech Support Services Inc. also provides data-recovery services that can try to recover lost files resulting from hardware malfunctions, software conflicts, or viruses. Custom PC's Do you need a new computer, but are you exhausted of pushy salespeople and their confusing technical mumbo-jumbo? Or do you want a computer that fits the specific hardware and software that is suitable for your needs? Then let us build a customized system just for you. One-On-One Training Have you ever purchased a software program that you have never used before and have no clue how to use it? Are you a new comer to the world of computers, the

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| | internet and e-mailing? Unfortunately it's not always feasible to take a class that doesn't fit your schedule and your budget. Instead, you might consider signing up for personalized instruction. Our certified friendly experts are thrilled to share their knowledge and love of computers. |
| 3. | I am certified to work with may computer programs. At the present I am waiting for my infection in my leg to clear up before I go back to work. My brother will not hire me back. |
| 4. | Leagl Services |
| 5. | I consult families as an advocate for kids with exceptional needs. I am working on building online service to sell products. |
| 6. | Sell email filtration services to businesses |
| 7. | PC Repair & user tutoring, Landscape/Gardening, Plumbing, Electrical, Electronics, design & implimentation, paint & paperhanging, mechanical & electronics engineering, construction, automobile maintenance/repair, 12v specialist... ect, ect, ect |
| 8. | Medical Education online web related medical publishing |
| 9. | I am a surfer and own an ocean-inspired fashion accessories company grown out of my love of surfing. I do everything, the design, operations, and art direction and marketing, which I am very good at. I need a bookkeeper because I am not good with numbers. I recently hired an assistant who helps me with organization, logistics, operations, inventory... www.bettybelts.com |
| 10. | Call-out PC support for home users and micro-businesses. My work is technical and involves dealing with people. Often I get called out to jobs where the problem is very simple but dealing with the customer requires a great deal of effort, consideration and care. I do face technical challenges as well but I don't tend to get exposed to enterprise technologies in a way that would help me land a full-time job with a larger company. I spend a lot of time trouble-shooting hardware and software problems and removing virus's and spyware. I have read the "E-myth revisited" by Michael E Gerber put unfortunately talking about the problem of being a "A manager, a technician and an entrepreneur all at the same time" may have upset other self-employed people more than it has led to actually solving the problems by setting up a properly structured business capable of employing people. I do handle Linux server deployments and more complex network integration by subcontracting (and managing) the work out to another technician that I know that used to work for a major ISP. I also am trying to get into the business of setting up and hosting online stores for retailers and wholesalers using the open source software Zencart. |
| 11. | Vacation-relief and/or consults for State-licensed genetics laboratories, one of which I directed before retirement. |
| 12. | Architect |

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| <u>13.</u> | I teach and remediate handwriting for children and adults with and without disabilities, using current research and techniques that proved helpful/necessary to me in my own handwriting self-remediation as a (then) illegibly writing adult going through graduate school at age 24. |
| <u>14.</u> | I was a carpet cleaner |
| <u>15.</u> | I create newsletters. I transcribe audio tapes. I write speeches. I have, in the past, created catalogs for jewelry supply companies. |
| <u>16.</u> | Electronic and embedded system design, building surveys, research. |
| <u>17.</u> | taxi driver |
| <u>18.</u> | author, public speaker, artist, sculptor, composer, consultant. |
| <u>19.</u> | I sell caravans |
| <u>20.</u> | PROFESSIONAL ACTOR, RADIO/TV/FILM LECTURER ALSO OWN RENTAL HOMES. |
| <u>21.</u> | Catering |
| <u>22.</u> | I have been doing a mobile mechanic service. Mostly do autos but also do other mechanical repairs and maintaince work. |
| <u>23.</u> | I sell books I wrote and self-published. I've given workshops and talks based on my books. |
| <u>24.</u> | I no longer have it, but I owned and operated a photography studio part-time for 16 years. Now I teach photography as adjunct faculty at a community college. |
| <u>25.</u> | Go on-site to customer's computer to and questions, solve problems and/or teach how to use Windows and/or applications installed on computer. Also do requests to create projects for customers. |
| <u>26.</u> | Train service dogs to assit children and adults with developmetal disabilities, mental illness and mobility challanges. |
| <u>27.</u> | I'm a writer. I write a weekly food column that i'm trying to self syndicate. I have had articles published in magazines and have had a book published, Employment for Individuals with Asperger Syndrome or Non-Verbal Learning Disability: Stories and Strategies, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004 http://www.jkp.com/catalogue/book.php/isbn/1-84310-766-X For more information see my web site, www.wordsaremyworld.com |
| <u>28.</u> | I am an acupuncturist and Chinese herbalist specializing in treating men and women with infertilty problems. I treat 90% of my patients nationally using the internet and telephone as our communication style. |
| <u>29.</u> | I do electrical work, gardening, carpentry, concrete work, computer consulting, plumbing, auto reposesion, repair work on houses, mechanical work on cars, document delivery, database research, programming, |

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| | networking computers |
| <u>30.</u> | Business and computer consulting |
| <u>31.</u> | I write for two newspapers, and work as a "nanny" for tourists. The latter, as I am physically able. The former, as I am mentally able. I can not afford all of my meds. |
| <u>32.</u> | Freelance web site design and development, along with some programming of non-web apps. |
| <u>33.</u> | I sell used books online and I am a freelance pianist. |
| <u>34.</u> | I sell Tupperware. I am a fine art photographer. I consult on organizational development and fundraising. I am an attorney (though mostly in remission). |
| <u>35.</u> | I own and operate Poppin Joe's Kettle Korn. I pop at festivals and events April through October. I deliever to Federal Snack Shops and convicece stores weekly product I produce. My parents offered me the opportunity to see if I could really work summer 2000. I popped at Walmart's and grocery stores on weekends. April 2005 I became owner of Poppin Joe's Kettle Korn. Poppin Joe's popped at many festivals and events through the end of 2005. Our schedule is getting finalized for 2006. I continue to deliever to the snack shops and convenience stores weekly. |
| <u>36.</u> | Writer, Photographer, Artist, Editor, Publisher Company Director - The Thylazine Foundation Pty Ltd: Arts, Ethics and Literatire |
| <u>37.</u> | Nick runs Nick's Copy Service, a supported self employment situation. It is a business within a business. Nick's business is inside of the family business. He supplies all the forms, copies needed as well as operating the biz hub by faxing and scanning to email all documents for the 5 person office in which he is located. He provides copies for our other two offices located in other towns within a 100 mile radius |
| <u>38.</u> | I used to do freelance illustration form computer games and some online publications, as well as the occasional book. I now just illustrate my own books. |
| <u>39.</u> | I I work as a consultant for a state-wide technical assistance project on autism. |
| <u>40.</u> | Electrical work,TV antennas etc. |
| <u>41.</u> | My intial self-emplment was as a street artist drawing portraits in London's Covent Garden (a popular destination for tourists). I did this for 10 years. Today I work as an artist/entertainer, making appearances to demonstrate my art at a variety of corporate and private functions all over the world. |
| <u>42.</u> | Teach autistic children how to play music instruments, present and consult internationally on autism related issues, teach college level courses on how to teach autistic children, write books and articles on autism |

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| 43. | Freelance housepainting and also computer repair |
| 44. | Professional disability advocate and paid social security claimant representative. Paid lecturer, trainer and presenter, author, mediator, special education advocate, cognitive interpreter for individuals with developmental disabilities in adult community justice system, facilitate an adult support group (8 years), co-facilitate an AS married partners group (6 years), co-moderate a clinical counselors multidisciplinary best practices group |
| 45. | I have a contract to provide respite care |
| 46. | I am an Independent Advanced Director for The Pampered Chef. I hold Cooking Shows to sell products and I train my team. I have a team of 50 people that work with me. |

If your self-employment does incorporate a special interest, hobby, or talent, please tell us what your interest or talent is and how you use it in your work (if not, leave blank):

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| 1. | I love dogs and love working with people who care about their animals |
| 2. | Computers |
| 3. | I am an artist, I have a great interest in photography and I spend most of my free time on the internet. |
| 4. | computer software and technology |
| 5. | Analyzing systems and building/changing them to solve problems. Build automated systems that separate wanted email from unwanted email |
| 6. | everything electronics, recently computers. |
| 7. | programming and development of anti-spam software |
| 8. | Surfing is my passion which changed my life at 31. I weaved surfing and everything around it (ocean, beach lifestyle, nature, environmentalism, etc.) into the soul of the company and marketed it as such. The idea of wearing something that reminds people of the ocean "seashell bling" is a very appealing one that strikes a chord among all sorts of customers. It's a very spiritual thing. The source. Customers love it. |
| 9. | Yes, obviously i'm interested in computers. I'm also very much interested in Linux and open source software and I try to work with it as much as I can but most of the time I end up supporting Windows machines that fail regularly. I'm also quite good at data recovery and end up doing it as "just part of the service" when repairing failed machines. |
| 10. | Talent: Rapid pattern-recognition and evaluation of differences. Special interest: Genetic analyses. Special interest: Computer databases. |

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| <u>11.</u> | My ability to put pieces together - designing a house is like putting together a puzzle - everything has to fit, and fit where client wants it to fit. I can see these 'puzzles' in my mind and how to work them out. |
| <u>12.</u> | My self-employment relates to my special interest in the history of handwriting and calligraphy. Studying the history of these manual skills gave (and still gives) me techniques that I used to help myself and now use to help others. |
| <u>13.</u> | I very much enjoy writing, though the only time I really can do much with it is on my own. At least I can make a buck or two extra doing my freelance work. |
| <u>14.</u> | Insight |
| <u>15.</u> | autism awareness sociology/teaching background natural medicine experience arts |
| <u>16.</u> | I am interested in making money... not sure if that is a special interest) |
| <u>17.</u> | VERBAL AND PLATFORM SKILLS. ETERNAL STUDENT, SPEAK LECTURE AND EDUCATE ON ART, CHRISTIANITY, MYTHOLOGY, HISTORY ETC. |
| <u>18.</u> | The interest I had was environmental concerns and how things work. I started out with interests in reducing pollution. I also had interests in how things work or why they are not working the way they should. I like the logic of how mechanical things work. I do have some problems doing the work since I also have dyslexia and ADD thrown into the mix. This is one reason I have not been successful doing this work in regular employment situations. Presently I am having real trouble continuing this work due to physical problems with my back and knees. I have had two surgeries on my back and surgeries on both Knees. One Knee needs surgery again. I have also come into conflict with local officials in how I do my work and I have had conflict with some customers particularly over getting payed for my work. Time management is also a problem as well as organization and losing |
| <u>19.</u> | Writing is a special talent and the writing is based on special interests. I answered the questions below about hrs per work and money generated NOW. In the past, it has been 40 hrs per week and it generated \$2000/mo. It's up and down and I've had to supplement it with other work. I'm looking for other work at the moment. |
| <u>20.</u> | I'm very creative, with skills in math, technology, and programming. |
| <u>21.</u> | Dogs, Service Dogs, Walt Disney World, non-NT people |
| <u>22.</u> | Talent is writing (language) Interest is food, cooking, history, nutrition Also other interests that i write about |
| <u>23.</u> | my special interest was Oriental Medicine and Taoist theory first and then it became a profession. |

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| <u>24.</u> | mechanical skill, intelligence your question #17 below fails to incorporate the option of there being no set amount of time per week. #18 fails to acknowledge the sporadic nature of the situation. |
| <u>25.</u> | Marketing and business Computers |
| <u>26.</u> | Nanny work - I have a grad degree in child development. I have always been obsessed w. kids as long as I can remember. As the parents are short term employees I don't have to interact with them long enough for them to realize I am "weird." They are also absolutely thrilled about how I am with their children (in a Donna Williams autobio sort of way.) The things I write about have to do with what I chose to write about, things which have always interested me! I can't write about routine stuff, such as sports, or obituaries, or what ever. it is so boring to me that I just can't focus on it. |
| <u>27.</u> | One of my interests is computer programming. Enough said. :) |
| <u>28.</u> | Photography and my view of the world is one of my strengths. This is the business i am working to expand as it meshes better with my self. |
| <u>29.</u> | I always doing something. My business allows me to keep busy. I can change jobs - pop, screen, bag, close bags, offer bags to customers at events. The moving, lifting, carrying equipment and raw products fill my need for deep pressure. The tent provides a defined space for me. I like small spaces. The explosion of corn popping, the aroma of freshed popped corn, etc. fill huge sensory needs. Most of all I am valued. Customers love my product. They compliment me. I have become a valued community member. I pay taxes. I donate 20% of all Walmart sales to nonprofit organizations. All my customers on my delievery route speak to me as a real person. I bank my money independently. My bank gives out my kettle korn monthly to their bank guests as customer appreciation. I do fundraisers for schools. I am valued as a contributing member of my community. I love. I stand tall. I walk tall. No more hanging my head. |
| <u>30.</u> | They are too numerous to mention here. |
| <u>31.</u> | Nick is nearly savant with computers and his uncanny memory. He enjoys operating the digital copier that is linked with his computer. Nick loves to be on the computer playing games or recieving email or just surfing the web looking up medical terminology or fitness equipment, beach houses. what ever his interest is at the moment. |
| <u>32.</u> | I'm an artist, and always have been. I also enjoy writing, and have had several minor works published, but I have yet to earn money from it. |
| <u>33.</u> | Since I and my children have autism, I am able to use my knowledge of coping strategies, accomodations and resources to help the technical assistance project help other families. This uses two of my special interests - autism and research. |
| <u>34.</u> | I have always been interested in electricity etc, and understanding circuits |

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| | etc comes naturally to me. |
| <u>35.</u> | I have always been talented as an artist, and have developed a special interest in silhouette art in particular, which is now the main line of my business. If you want to know more about this see my website: http://www.roving-artist.com/ |
| <u>36.</u> | I have many special interests. My self employment allows me to employ the following passions. 1. Autism and education 2. Airplanes (to travel to distant locations) |
| <u>37.</u> | I'm extremely handy with a paint brush and even if only painting the same color over again it puts me in a meditative state. |
| <u>38.</u> | trained community organizer and large group conflicts mediator; past experience as assistant business agent to a trade labor union local prepared me for working out complex workplace and conditons of employment issues with fellow members, employers and appeals boards; appear before administrative law judges in social security and other benefits programs hearings on behalf of clients |
| <u>39.</u> | My interests are cooking and teaching. I use both in my work. |

Please provide any other comments you think would be helpful in regards to autism and self-employment:

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| <u>1.</u> | n/a |
| <u>2.</u> | I am smart but I suffer from depression and I am a loner. Transportation is a problem at this time so it limits me to what I can do. |
| <u>3.</u> | Two keys to combining autism and work: 1) Do what you do well 2) Don't do what you don't, but learn it anyway |
| <u>4.</u> | i have to think about this one. |
| <u>5.</u> | Often self-employment is the only way to support oneself when descrimination prevents a placement in the workforce. It can be quite scary for as person on the autistic sprecrum to be exposed directly to the open market and need to compete with established players. Utimately I think that an Aspie will learn more about themselves and about the world around them while they hone and develop their skills in ways that are useful to people outside the austic sprecrum that make up the bulk of society. They will find that they care about the quality of their work and the depth and accuracy of their knowledge allowing them to deliver world class service from a technician run company. In contrast to initial views of earning money by manipulating objects, the Aspie learns how to earn money by providing value, good service and relating to other people. Most of all they are competent and find that over time their skills and continued dedication open |

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| | up more doors and opportunities than their quirks and social differences could ever close. |
| 6. | I wonder about any difference(?) in self-employment success between: Those autists old enough to have *never* been exposed to "shinkery" (save diagnosis); - and - Those autists young enough to have been caught by "the system" and subjected to, ah..., interventions. FWIW, I'm 73 and dodged the bullet. |
| 7. | Many autistic people (I hate the cumbersome and distracting "people with autism") will find self-employment definitely THE way to go! - particularly in this Age of the Internet, when any special interest can find someone willing to pay for it. |
| 8. | It is important to understand that things that are easy for normal people, can be difficult for someone with ASD. We are unable to do, or have difficulty doing things that most people would not even consider an ability. Also, market. Most will say that is difficult, and they fail to understand how difficult for someone with ASD |
| 9. | It would be great if there was a way to let people know that their services were in demand, and some sort of group medical insurance policy we could buy into. That's the prime reason I stay at my 40/WK job - I have to have medical insurance for me and the kid. |
| 10. | Basic management is very hard and time consuming. |
| 11. | Those buying goods/services who are involved in any way with the autism field would do this population a service to consider employing or purchasing from those on the spectrum for whom self employment is their only long term option. Its also a way of demonstrating that equality is about actions and also spreading hope through inspiring examples. But those who are on the spectrum and self employed should also network in helping others to understand how they might do similar, at the very least whilst waiting for work or in between jobs for those who can't hold them. |
| 12. | EARLY DETERMINATION OF ONE'S TALENTS AND SKILLS. THE WIDEST POSSIBLE EDUCATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO DEVELOP THESE. |
| 13. | The real trick is to find a business that reduces the conflicts with people. |
| 14. | My business didn't do very well until after I married and my wife started handling the finances (which included hounding customers for money owed, which I couldn't bring myself to do) and the bookkeeping. |
| 15. | Vocation Rehab should be more willing to help. My parents are struggling fincailly to help me be a service dog trainer. |
| 16. | I think with the right supports it can be a great way to go for folks with AS or autism. See my book, Employment for Individuals with Asperger Syndrome or Non-Verbal Learning Disability: Stories and Strategies, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004 http://www.jkp.com/catalogue/book.php/isbn/1-84310- |

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| 17. | When you are good at something that people really want or need it doesn't matter how weird you are. The freedom to create a life that works for me is H-E-A-V-E-N...!!!! |
| 18. | I have conferred with MJ Carley of *a href="http://graasp.org"*GRASP*/a* who states that there is a small but significant population of Asperger's or HFA people that have difficulty acquiring and/or keeping a job, I find myself in that population. I am a member of *a href="http://aascend.net"*AASCEND*/a* |
| 19. | I currently did very little consulting due to time pressures in my current job, but I did a lot in graduate school. |
| 20. | People often assoc. self employment activities with independence. In my case, I can't say that holds true. Actually, I need a "Psychiatric assistent" (see Boston univ. Pyschiatric Voc. Rehab. site) but that will never happen. I'm always falling through the service cracks, and pulling my way bk up, but it gets harder and harder. |
| 21. | One of the best things about self-employment is that it does give me ample time to get sidetracked by other things (something that would probably get me fired from a 'real' job!), and I don't have to worry about navigating the social maze of the workplace. Of course, negotiating with clients can be just as difficult, particularly those who are more comfortable with phone communication than e-mail, or those who don't make their ideas for what's needed on a project clear enough. |
| 22. | I think more people should consider self-employment as an option. |
| 23. | There need to be more resources for start up funds and respectful assistance with organizing. |
| 24. | Self-employment can be the perfect fit for a person with autism. A business is carved to your unique strengths. It creates value to who you are therefore creating a business community around you, rather than trying to fit you into someone elses work that you may have no interest or choice in. The most difficult part is being certain the business you choose is truly carved to your strenths, interests and needs, not somebody else. If it is not specially tailored for you and your individual needs, it will not work. |
| 25. | I have alot of comments. But no time to answer them just now. |
| 26. | More support for writing PASS plans, understanding them. Funding for marketing would be great Some consideration such as minority businesses recieve. Nick does not qualify for either since he is a white male. |
| 27. | A person must find employment which is commensurate with his capabilities and inadequacies.I would find working in an organisation very difficult.Being self-employed means that I can work alone (mostly) and do things my way in my own time.In the past when I took "regular jobs", I did not fit in well. |

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| <u>28.</u> | I think self-employment is a real option for many (but not all) people on the spectrum, and that many of the resources that are currently being used to help autistic people get and hold jobs which are totally suited to them, could be far better used in helping them explore the possibilities of self-employment. |
| <u>29.</u> | Self-employment can be a great way for people with autism to lead fulfilling and productive lives. I know a number of autistic persons who are self-employed. Self-employment allows you to go in, do a job, make friends and contacts, and leave before long-term office politics set in. |
| <u>30.</u> | We need some kind of marketing resource for ACs to help them promote their talents and to provide customers with a sense of security when hiring them, that there's some kind of "responsible" body to which they could appeal if they have problems, or to where they can inquire as to the trustworthiness of a tradesman. |
| <u>31.</u> | One can maximize special interests through customized self-employment. I'm busier now than in any previous employment by others, and intend to stay busy. |
| <u>32.</u> | My biggest problem is making myself work now that I am no longer fascinated with what I do. My income has dropped significantly as my interest has waned. |