



# Advancing Opportunities for Employment of Young Adults on the Autism Spectrum



The Research Support Services for Employment of Young Adults on the Autism Spectrum (REYAAS) Project will identify promising practices and policies to support employment of young adults (ages 16 through 28) on the autism spectrum. The project is funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) within the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). Mathematica leads the project in partnership with ODEP.

## Recent estimates suggest that about 100,000 youth on the autism spectrum turn 18 years old each year.

Young adults on the autism spectrum can face many challenges to entering the labor force. They often experience a sudden drop in services when they exit high school, which is called the services cliff. A majority of young adults on the autism spectrum have one or more co-occurring health or mental health conditions; for example, 1 in every 3 has an intellectual disability. They also face financial barriers—young adults on the autism spectrum are more likely than young adults without disabilities to be living in households with income below the federal poverty level. After leaving high school, they are less likely to participate in vocational or technical education and employment than young adults with other disabilities.

Moving the needle on employment outcomes for young adults on the autism spectrum will require more evidence on a diverse array of approaches, including policy and systems-level interventions. It will also require input from stakeholders including parents, advocates, researchers, policymakers, and young adults on the autism spectrum. By working together, we can create better pathways to gainful employment and a higher quality of life for young adults on the autism spectrum.

## Challenges for young adults on the autism spectrum



**4 in 5** have one or more co-occurring mental health conditions



**3 in 10** live in a household with income below the federal poverty line



**1 in 4** receives no services to help them become employed, continue their education, or live more independently during their first few years after leaving high school

## Get involved with REYAAS

We invite you to get involved with REYAAS and be a part of our mission to identify promising practices for supporting the employment of young adults on the autism spectrum.



The project team will be conducting listening sessions with young adults, families, and other key stakeholders, and sharing findings to understand barriers to achieving employment outcomes and promising strategies to address those barriers. To learn more about the REYAAS Project, [visit our project webpage](#). For questions about REYAAS, email us at [reyaas@mathematica-mpr.com](mailto:reyaas@mathematica-mpr.com).

## Key REYAAS project activities

This project will identify specific factors, approaches, policies, and practices that contribute to successful employment for young adults on the autism spectrum. Throughout the project, we will explore issues of equity and intersectionality to gain new insights into employment challenges and solutions for diverse groups of young adults on the autism spectrum.



**Review literature** on existing strategies to support employment of young adults on the autism spectrum and the evidence of their effectiveness. This includes:

- / Documenting the range of programs, models, and strategies being used to support the transition to competitive integrated employment for young adults with developmental disabilities, including autism.
- / Identifying where evidence is growing, lacking, consistent, or divergent.
- / Summarizing findings in two reports.



**Assess and analyze existing data** to

examine the current state of affairs and improve programs and services. We will develop a series of policy-focused data analyses and products that can inform future research.



**Hold listening sessions** with a range of diverse stakeholders, including young adults on the autism spectrum, their families, employers, advocacy organizations, educators, and direct service providers. This includes:

- / Gathering insights to better understand what research is needed to achieve meaningful improvements.
- / Synthesizing findings from the listening sessions in a report.

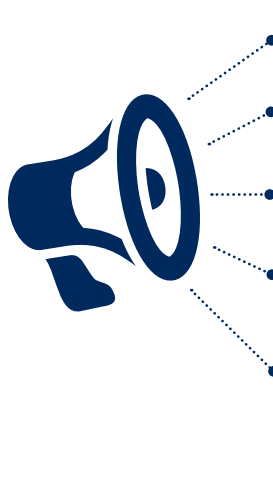







**Develop evaluation designs and recommendations** for future efforts to build evidence. These suggested evaluation strategies will address a

broad set of research questions that focus on challenges or limitations associated with existing research on the employment outcomes of young adults on the autism spectrum. We will highlight the most promising designs and recommendations in a report.

## Sharing our findings

The REYAAS project will share our findings and lessons learned through these tools:

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-  **Email blasts and social media posts** that provide regular updates on the project.
  -  **A podcast episode** to be aired on Mathematica's *On the Evidence* podcast—focused on employment for young adults on the autism spectrum.
  -  **Special topic briefs** that closely examine issues related to improving outcomes for young adults on the autism spectrum.
  -  **Spotlight summaries** that synthesize key takeaways from our reports so that busy practitioners and other stakeholders can quickly review and share visually engaging, useful information.
  -  **A capstone webinar** to publicize key findings and encourage dialogue between policymakers and program administrators. We will strive to include perspectives from direct service providers, members of advocacy organizations, and young adults on the autism spectrum.

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