

# Peer Education Model

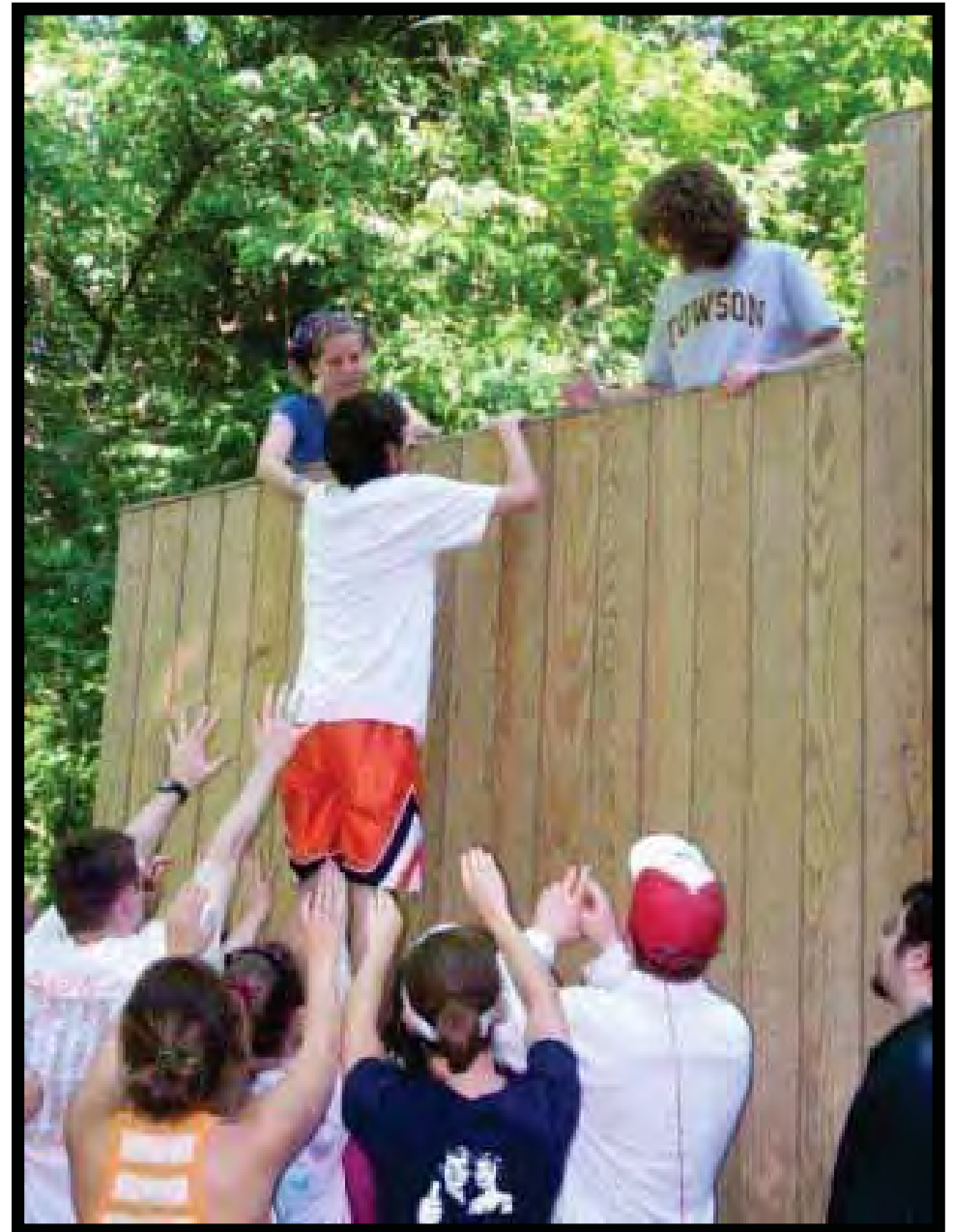


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Services & Supports Across the Lifespan  
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# Challenges to Full Participation for Adults on the Autism Spectrum

- Communication
- Social context
- Initiating social interaction
- Intimacy and social connectedness
- Contributions to the community
- Recreation and leisure pursuits



“What disables people with autism...  
is the contextual barriers built around them”

(David, 2010, p. 53)



# Peer Education Model

Trained-peer mediated interactions are more effective at increasing social participation and generalization of social skills than interaction between non-trained peers and individuals on the autism spectrum

(Kamps, Royer, Dugan, Kravits, Gonzalez-Lopez, Garcia, et al. 2002)

# Towson University Center for Adults with Autism

- Serves as an integrated, interdisciplinary resource center
- Educates students as peer mentors through an initial orientation session and ongoing, weekly sessions facilitated by faculty
- Facilitates changing social context by changing students' attitudes and knowledge about autism
- Recruits student peer mentors through volunteer and service learning opportunities, internships, and course assignments

# Social Group & TU Crew

## Social Group

- Targeted supportive socialization with peers, providing opportunities for young adults to interact and socialize in supportive atmosphere on campus
- 37 peer mentors doing service learning



## TU Crew

- Addresses challenges of transitioning to college life for students on the autism spectrum
- 4 students assigned 30-hour class project



# Adventure Pursuits

- 28 young adults on the autism spectrum paired with 25 Towson University student peer mentors to participate in outdoor obstacle course and rock climbing activities
- Participants practiced problem-solving, communication, decision-making and stress management strategies
- Towson University students learned firsthand about the unique learning styles and challenges of adults on the autism spectrum
- Originally funded with a Family Services Community Grant from Autism Speaks in 2008-2009





# Individualized Wellness Program

- Program developed in partnership with the Wellness Center at Towson University
- 40 community adults worked one-on-one with 60 kinesiology student personal trainers to identify individual goals and develop a customized fitness plan
- 3 experienced Towson University student interns provided guidance and support for social interaction
- Faculty from kinesiology, occupational therapy and speech-language therapy departments supervised the program





# Adult Language and Pragmatic Skills (ALPS)

- Pragmatic language competency program led by a speech language pathologist and supported by graduate students from speech therapy and occupational therapy
- 29 adults on the autism spectrum paired with 16 student peer mentors



# Women's Group



- Developed by occupational therapy graduate students in close collaboration with young women on the autism spectrum
- Located in and supported by the Women's Center on campus
- Addresses women's issues of health, relationships, and self advocacy

# Data Collection

## **Pre- and Post-Assessments**

- Mentor Perceived Knowledge Assessment  
[12-item Likert scale]
- Attitudes Towards Persons with Autism Scale  
[30-item Likert scale]
- Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (Neill, Marsh, & Richards, 2001)  
[24-item Likert scale]
- Program Evaluation Questionnaire  
[qualitative questionnaire]



# Results: Mentor Perceived Knowledge Assessment

Statistically different at  $p \leq .05$  for

- Social Group (all 12 items)
- Adventure Pursuits (all 12 items)
- Wellness (all 12 items)
- TU Crew (6 items)
- ALPS (3 items)

Potentially influenced by graduate students previous knowledge and experience

# Perceived Areas of Knowledge Change

- Knowledge of autistic characteristics (5)
- Strategies to support improved social skills (5)
- Strategies to support improved communication skills (5)
- Visual supports (4)
- Emotional needs (4)
- Goal setting (4)

# Results: *Attitudes Towards Persons with Autism*

Statistically different at  $p \leq .05$  for

- Social Group (5 items)
- Adventure Pursuits (1 item)
- Wellness (4 items)
- TU Crew (0)
- ALPS (5 items)



# Areas of Perceived Change in Attitudes

- Employment
- Marriage
- Parenthood
- Self concept
- Self confidence
- Level of happiness
- Friendliness
- Needed level of support
- Range of emotions
- Ability to lead normal lives
- Perception of having a diagnosis of autism
- Impact of severity of autism on relationships

# Results: Participant LEQ

Statistically different at  $p \leq .05$  for

- ALPS
  - time management skills
- Wellness Program
  - time management
  - emotional control
  - active initiative
- Challenge Course
  - social competence
  - task leadership

# Peer Feedback

- “Being a mentor for these wonderful adults really opened my eyes and **gave me a lot of tools** to come back with when I teach special education.”
- “It was great interacting with the participants – we **learned from each other.**”





# Peer Feedback

“I had an opportunity to learn a lot about autistic adults. Now I’m much more passionate about putting forth efforts to **serve as an advocate for autistic people.**”

“After the first session, I began to recognize that what I saw as limitations – utilizing scripts to initiate conversation, fiddling with an object to restore calm – were in reality **resources to problem solving.** I stopped focusing more on ‘doing for’ him or her, and **began to enjoy ‘doing with’.**”

# Participant Feedback

- “I enjoyed the activities. It was nice to get to know people and work together. I also liked how the participants were involved in the planning.”
- “I enjoyed teaching the mentors about autism from an inside perspective.”



# Participant Feedback

- “I think the mentors learned as much from me about autism as I learned from them about improving my own skills.”
- “It is important to have group and work experiences to prepare individuals”



# Participant Feedback

- “Some of us communicate our thoughts with greater struggle than others, but we all have something to say. The true test of any program or organization aiming to support autistic people is the approval of the autistic people being served.”
- “To have an outlet to interact with people who have similar issues is great.”

# Parent Feedback

- “I knew from the look on his face. I knew from the way he talked about it. He was psyched up, happy, had energy”
- “He was talking to the mentors. He doesn’t do that”
- “When he got in the car after the first session, he said it was fun. I cannot remember the last time I heard him say anything was fun.”



# Final Words

As a community of diverse individuals, we can all make a difference in how young adults on the autism spectrum feel accepted, included, and supported.

Each of us can assist them in leading productive and fulfilling lives as integrated members within their communities.

(Lisa Crabtree, PhD, OTR/L, 2010)

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