



## ADULT/ADOLESCENT VOCATIONAL AUTISM INITIATIVE OF LEHIGH

### Program Overview

Keystone Autism Services (KAS) drew on its experience implementing highly successful programming for adults with autism to create the **Adult/Adolescent Vocational Autism Initiative of Lehigh (AVAIL)**, an innovative approach to support young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families. Designed to specifically meet the needs of young adults age 14-25 with ASD living in Lehigh County as they pursue employment, higher education, and increased independence in their home and community. Family members will also be supported and mentored in the development of ongoing natural and community supports for their adult child. AVAIL programming was developed based on identified need for services in Lehigh County by Lehigh Area Special Education Teachers as well as nationwide feedback from people with ASD and their families/caregivers regarding their needs as adolescents and young adults.

Included in this document are answers to commonly asked questions concerning the Adult/Adolescent Vocational Autism Initiative of Lehigh.

**If you cannot find the information you are looking for here, please call 610-841-1949, email [Avail@keystonehumanservices.org](mailto:Avail@keystonehumanservices.org) or visit us online at: [www.keystoneautismservices.org](http://www.keystoneautismservices.org).**

### What is the Adult/Adolescent Vocational Autism Initiative of Lehigh (AVAIL)?

AVAIL provides integrated supports to young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) age 14-25 years and their families as they transition to young adulthood. Through assessment and implementing a foundation of *LifeCourse Framework*, a person centered service plan (PCSP) will be developed to work toward successful outcomes for employment or continuing education. Goals for independent living, as well as accessing, participating and socializing in the community will be addressed as they relate to successfully obtaining and maintaining employment.

### What is the goal of AVAIL?

AVAIL's overarching goal is to support young adults with autism in planning, preparing, and achieving employment and/or post-secondary education while developing increased independence as part of a meaningful, everyday life. AVAIL focuses on collaboration with the existing transition supports of individuals enrolled in school in order to keep young adults engaged as they exit from high school and develop new supports in the early years of adulthood.

### What are some of the other important characteristics of AVAIL?

Recognizing that families encounter difficulty in developing natural supports and accessing services, AVAIL also partners with families, assisting them to develop the skills and knowledge required to help their young adult transition successfully into adulthood. AVAIL supports the individual and their families in developing a vision and a plan for a full life as they transition from the entitlement based services received in high school to the eligibility based services of adulthood, utilizing elements of the *LifeCourse Framework* (Missouri Family to Family Life Course Network). AVAIL staff will provide guidance to families to begin using the *Charting the*



*LifeCourse* tool and will participate when appropriate. The implementation of the *LifeCourse Framework* is an important feature of the AVAIL program as the goal is to support families and the individual in taking the lead on planning the everyday life they want to live, rather than having support services dictated for them.

### What is the LifeCourse Framework?

The LifeCourse framework was originally developed BY families FOR families by the staff and stakeholders of Missouri Family to Family. Missouri Family to Family is housed within Missouri's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Services (UCEDD) at the University of Missouri–Kansas City Institute for Human Development. The *LifeCourse Framework* was developed to help individuals with disabilities and families at any age or stage of life think about what they need to know, identify how to find or develop supports, and discover what it takes to live the lives they want to live (Missouri Family to Family, UMKC Institute for Human Development, UCEDD).

*Charting the LifeCourse* is a tool to assist families and the individual in creating a vision for the future. *Charting the LifeCourse* focuses on supporting positive life trajectories while preventing negative life events; the plan is organized within the domains of Daily Life and Employment, Community Living, Safety and Security, Healthy Living, Social and Spirituality, and Citizenship and Advocacy, and utilizes integrated supports in the categories of Personal Strengths and Assets, Technology, Relationships, Community Based and Eligibility Specific. Individuals and families will use the tool to focus on their current situation and stage of life as well as to look ahead to think about life experiences that will help move them toward an inclusive, productive life in the future.

**To learn more about Charting the LifeCourse and to download free tools please visit the link below:**

<http://www.lifecoursetools.com/>

### What types of services does AVAIL offer?

**Career Planning:** Career planning is a service that provides support to the participant to identify a career direction; develop a plan for post-secondary education and/or plan for achieving job placement in competitive, integrated employment at or above the minimum wage.

**Activities may include:**

- Assessment to identify vocational skills, abilities, and career likes and dislikes
- Identification of career goals and individualized plan for employment
- Development of interest, preferences and needs for post-secondary education
- Identification of experiential learning opportunities, internships or post-secondary education and requirements associated with continuing education
- Support to apply and enroll in post-secondary education program
- Identification of personal challenges/barriers to maintaining enrollment in post-secondary education and development of personal improvement plan
- Support of the participant to negotiate reasonable accommodations and in post-secondary education
- Onsite campus support when appropriate and not offered by the postsecondary education institution

**Job Finding:** Job Finding is a service that provides assistance to the participant in developing job skills and securing competitive, integrated employment that fits the participant's needs and preferences as well as the





employer's needs. Job support consists of assistance with learning job tasks, periodic follow-up and ongoing support with individuals and their employers.

**Activities may include:**

- Development of interpersonal and job skills
- Resume preparation
- Mock interviewing
- Job searching
- Job analysis
- Employer outreach and orientation
- Preparation for job tasks and support to learn job tasks
- Consultation with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and/or the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) and benefits counseling agencies
- Development of self-management strategies to maintain employment
- Outreach with prospective employers on behalf of the individual including consultation on tax advantages and other benefits.
- Support of the participant to negotiate reasonable accommodations and supports necessary for the individual to perform the functions of a job

**In-home and Community Support:** Home and community-based services are provided to individuals who need assistance in the acquisition, retention, or improvement of skills related to living and working in the community.

**Activities may include:**

- Instrumental activities to develop skills essential to daily living, employment and/or education (i.e., communication, safety skills, interpersonal skills, money management, time management, and use of transportation)
- Person-centered planning and assistance with implementing the *LifeCourse Framework*
- Activities in order to demonstrate self-advocacy skills necessary for increased independent functioning.
- Identifying opportunities for social interaction
- Use of natural supports and typical community services available to all people
- Participation in education and volunteer activities

What role does the individual with play in AVAIL?

The participant is at the center of all service planning, service delivery and is the key determinate of progress toward goal attainment. During the service planning process AVAIL participants share their goals and preferences to help determine what services they will receive. Once enrolled in AVAIL, the participant works collaboratively with their assigned AVAIL staff person to achieve their vocational and daily living goals. AVAIL is a voluntary program; however, active participation is necessary in order to make progress toward goal attainment. For cases in which there is minimal engagement and the participant is not making progress towards goals, dis-enrolled from the program may be considered.

What role do the families play in AVAIL?

Families have the opportunity to provide information during the service planning process and are engaged as part of the participant's team throughout the program. Parental commitment is essential to engage the participant in the *LifeCourse Framework* as well as working on daily living goals (i.e. cooking, housework,



shopping, etc.) AVAIL staff members will work collaboratively with families in order to support participants with obtaining their desired level of independence and vocational aspirations.

#### Who is eligible for the Adult Vocational Initiative of Lehigh (AVAIL)?

- Must be 14-25 years of age at time of enrollment
- Be an individual identified as having Autism
  - Special Education identification and documentation as a student with Autism and/or medical diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Must reside in Lehigh County during application and while receiving services
- Must be willing to provide follow up data after 6 months of exiting the program
- Capacity to perform activities of daily living (i.e. bathing, eating, using the toilet)
- Not exhibit levels of extremely problematic behaviors that present a danger to self, others or threat to property or require direct supervision to ensure health and safety

#### **In order to receive the maximum benefit of services, the following criteria must be met:**

- Flexible schedule to accommodate up to six hours of services a week
- Active parental/family engagement
- Collaboration with IEP team when applicable
- Minimum four month commitment of individual and parent
- Current/future goals to obtain/maintain competitive employment and/or post-secondary education
- Not currently enrolled in a program which would result in a duplication of services

#### How do I get referred to AVAIL?

Prospective participants can be referred to the program by calling: 610-841-1949 or e-mail [Avail@keystonehumanservices.org](mailto:Avail@keystonehumanservices.org). Anyone can make a referral to the program even the participant themselves. Online referrals can be made through [www.keystoneautismservices.org](http://www.keystoneautismservices.org) by accessing the AVAIL referral form under the AVAIL program tab. Program enrollment is subject to availability. A waiting list will be developed to ensure program enrollment is continuously maintained at maximum capacity.

#### What happens after an individual is enrolled in AVAIL?

A participant is enrolled in AVAIL once the referral has been reviewed for eligibility and accepted by the Lead Employment and Integrated Supports Specialist (Lead EISS). The Lead EISS will then contact the participant and family to schedule an initial meeting to begin the intake process. Additional natural supports may also be included in the intake meetings such as school representatives, behavioral support specialists, OVR representatives, etc. At this time, the Lead EISS will also match the participant with their primary Employment and Integrated Supports Specialist (EISS), who will also attend the intake meeting.

The intake process typically takes place over two separate meetings which includes completion of the AVAIL intake questions and paperwork, general assessment of vocational, educational and life skill strengths/needs and overview of the *LifeCourse Framework*. Open discussion is encouraged during the intake meetings so that AVAIL staff may better understand the visions of the participant and their natural supports for a full life.

From the information provided at intake, a person centered service plan (PCSP) will be developed to work toward successful outcomes for employment and/or continuing education and shared with the participant as well as their team. Goals for independent living, as well as accessing, participating and socializing in the





community will be addressed as they relate to developing daily living skills and gaining increased independence. The PCSP includes goals and objectives for one year of services, however progress will be monitored every three months.

AVAIL staff will provide up to six hours of direct services each week, (as defined by the PCSP), in collaboration with the participant's family. Participant and family engagement is critical to each young adult's success, therefore participant/family engagement and progress towards individualized service goals will be monitored continuously. Progress review meetings will be held after the conclusion of the three month authorization period. Goals progress will be reviewed and a determination will be made if the participant will continue receiving services for an additional three months.

When the participant has attained their service plan goals or is no longer appropriate to continue in the program, dis-enrollment and transition planning will commence. It is the objective of AVAIL that each participant receives service provision that directly aligns with their own person centered transition needs.

#### How long can someone remain in AVAIL?

The duration of time spent in AVAIL varies for each participant. The structure of the program is designed to provide services that directly aligns each person's needs through a person-centered approach. The person-centered approach puts the participant at the center of their services and therefore services can be expanded to fit the needs of each participant. Each individual will receive a Person Centered Service Plan (PCSP) with realistic goals to be achieved in one year. Participation continues until it has been determined that the participant has attained their desired level of independence, thus completing their service plan goals.

AVAIL is a voluntary program in which the participant may choose to dis-enroll at any time. For cases in which there is minimal engagement by the individual, the participant is not making progress towards goals, or the participant's needs exceed the level of service that AVAIL is able to provide, dis-enrollment from the program may be considered.

#### What happens if an individual is dis-enrolled in AVAIL?

All participants are offered transition planning assistance when exiting AVAIL in order to support the participant and family in continuing their efforts towards employment, education and increasing independence in the home and community. If a participant chooses voluntarily disenrollment from AVAIL they may also choose to decline transition planning assistance.

#### **Transition Planning Assistance Consists Of:**

- Identification of ongoing or new goals, potential issues impeding successful goal attainment
- Identification of resources
- Referrals made for needed services and community supports
- Review/revision of Person Centered Service Plan with a focus on continuing *LifeCourse Framework* and developing natural/ community supports
- Completion of Transition Summary



### If I am already receiving services, can I still participate in AVAIL?

Yes, participation in other services does not exclude individuals from participating in AVAIL. If currently receiving other services, AVAIL will work collaboratively to support the individual. All services should be shared with AVAIL staff at time of referral, prior to goal development so that a duplication of services does not occur. Additionally, individuals must be able to commit up to six hours of weekly programming, therefore the time commitment of current services must be considered.

### AVAIL is a pilot program, so how long will it last?

The structure of program is designed to provide services that directly aligns each person centered transition needs with support services which are gradually decreased over time to promote independence. If more extensive services are needed for a participant to reach their goals in employment, education and increasing independence in the home and community, AVAIL staff will assist with one month of transition planning to a more appropriate resource.

### How many adults can be served in AVAIL?

Maximum capacity at each given phase of the program is projected to be 35 participants. Total enrollment is subject to fluctuate based on overall program needs and availability of staffing.

### Does AVAIL provide transportation?

Transportation to the participant will be provided in conjunction with the participant's individual service plan to enhance independent living skills. These independent living skills could include, but are not limited to instruction on the use of public transportation (fixed route transit, public paratransit and private paratransit), provision of education and skill building related to obtaining a driver's license, development of a natural support (carpooling with a parent, friend, co-worker, etc.), and/or use of bike or walking routes. AVAIL staff may provide transportation as a component of Career Planning, Job Finding and Home and Community support services, however independent travel in the community must be explored first. AVAIL staff is unable to transport a participant to get to their place of employment once they become employed.

### Is there a waiting list for AVAIL?

**This program is enrolling participants.** Referrals for AVAIL are processed in the order they are received. Once the program reaches capacity, a waitlist will be developed and eligible participants will be added in order in which their referral was received. As participants exit the program, participants will be enrolled in AVAIL chronologically from the waitlist.

### What is the difference between AVAIL and other programs for adults in Lehigh Co.?

- Designed to specifically meet the needs of young adults with ASD living in Lehigh Co as they transition from high school to pursue employment, higher education and increased independence in their home and community.
- Incorporates the *LifeCourse Framework* to provide tools for families and participants when identifying how to find or develop supports for the young adult with ASD while also providing a framework to plan an everyday life for the individual after high school.



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- Encourages family engagement and person centered thinking to develop opportunities outside of the services provided by government funding or the school district that are not always easily accessible after high school.
- Flexible, person centered supports that recognize successful goal attainment in employment, post-secondary education and daily living skills are all interrelated therefore all areas are addressed.
- Enrollment in services does not require any involvement with state agencies such as the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) or the individual to be a recipient of Medical Assistance (MA).
- No income requirements in order to be eligible for services.
- No financial contribution to access AVAIL services on the behalf of the individual, their families or the referral source.

