

the **DIGEST** Book Corner by Lyn Dunsavage Young

Teaching Pre-Employment Skills to 14-17 Year-Olds: Autism Works Now! Method

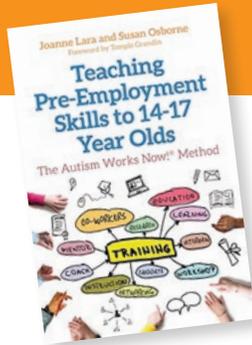
Joanne Lara and Susan Osborne

This is not a book for pansies that wilt in the heat.

The book lays its foundation about job training/search by citing the staggering statistics about unemployment of those on the autism spectrum, in which fully 80% of the 50,000 young adults turning 18-years-old annually not only aren't getting jobs, but most of them return home from their efforts to remain unemployed for a lifetime, creating an untold-amount of stress financially and emotionally on their parents. Others who do find "jobs" are often underemployed, underpaid or, worse, not paid at all for the jobs they're doing under the supervision of coaches. Once those on the spectrum get a job, unfortunately they tend to lose them, unless they are understood or supported by others.

The statistics and verbal pictures of how devastating this waste of talent is on so many are sobering. The authors, Joanne Lara and Susan Osborne, reveal how this wasteland has been created, focusing primarily on the systematic changes in education, which began in the early 2000s, when "No Child Left Behind" was created.

Since then, vocational programs—in which many of these visual thinkers and detailed, engineer-like minds could have been saved and trained for employment—were obliterated. Shop, auto mechanics, home economics, typing and stenography (which now would have been transformed into computer science), agricultural science, drafting, printing, orchestra, music, art, design, and so, so many more "vocational subjects" have almost all been wiped out. The educational mandate has been to focus on passing math and English tests for all students. As a result, the traditional academic expectation (i.e. graduate from high school, go to college, then to get a job) became much



more a one-size-fits-all educational imperative.

The authors' point is to get parents and young people on the autism spectrum to face the statistical and historical reality that

has basically trapped them. The authors' thesis is that it's imperative that they as well as educators think "outside that box" when it comes to jobs for those on the autism spectrum. Essentially, the book offers an alternative curriculum to what presently exists.

The authors' program begins by re-categorizing those looking for jobs. They are not "unemployed." They are called "candidates," because they are viable individuals with talents and capabilities working to find the right opportunity to "work." Work is defined not by degrees or positions but by levels of talent an individual can give to gain satisfaction because "doing any job satisfactorily makes us happy" and, by-the-way, it also provides a daily structure of productivity.

Because most jobs statistically are secured through referrals, the co-founders of the Autism Works Now! program that the book defines is focused on the candidates' developing enjoyable dialog with others so they can overcome their problems in social communication. They're even tested on what they've learned about others, so listening skills become fine-tuned and imperative. They are required to create questions to initiate discussions.

Lara and Osborne provide skill set assessments to ascertain what kind of job fits each candidate; dress codes (even including body measurement requirements so candidates will not only wear appropriate clothes but well-fitting clothes); time management exercises; computer program training (providing

sites to use for job search, assessments, and research; as well as basic rules of behavior online); and an entire chapter on interviewing, the nemesis of most people with ASD.

The Autism Works Now! Program is big on field trips. Candidates visit businesses that are of interest in order to practice their social and professional skills as well as provide both candidate and business employers the opportunity to assess the potential of work in those industries for both.

They offer information on how to interact, be impressive, behave, and handle stress, once in the workplace. They even inform about the role of human resources, employment and labor law, and how to resolve conflict resolution.

The last quarter of the book is filled with forms, questionnaires, discussion points, exercises, schedules.

The authors' enthusiasm about the talents and capabilities of people on the autism spectrum as well as work itself is evident throughout the book and their program, which is a refreshing breeze and is reported by others as evident also in the candidates' attitudes themselves.

Ultimately, the success of their program—as with others—will come down to how many of the candidates get jobs and keep them, which only time and the numbers will tell. ■

Disclosure: Lyn Dunsavage Young and JoAnne Lara in the last year and a half have co-authored several articles in the Autism Asperger's Digest on the subject of work. The book by Lara and Osborne about their program is published by Jessica Kingsley Publications and will be released in September 2017. JoAnne Lara will be speaking on the subject of work at a Future Horizons' conference on June 23 in Albany, New York with Dr. Temple Grandin, who wrote the foreword in the book. Britt Collins will also be speaking at that conference.