

Summer Jobs



Article *Submitted** by:
Pat Schissel, AHA President
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Article *Written** by: Carole Kalvar,
AHA Board Member

For most of us a first summer was a kind of rite of passage. Motivated by making some money and by trying on a more adult role way we were ready to take on the responsibilities of work. Knowing we had to commit ourselves to a set work schedule, to learning and performing unfamiliar tasks, to interacting with new people and to meeting the expectations of our employers, we were willing to step away from the familiarity of childhood and over the threshold into young adulthood. Most of us were able to overcome feelings of uncertainty and insecurity in order to seek out a position, be sized up by a potential employer and even risk rejection.

If you are the parent of an adolescent with high-functioning autism you probably face the prospect of summer without the structure of school with a little angst. Your son or daughter may do their best when their time is structured and certainly a job would provide that sense of organization. In addition, we are so mindful of orienting our children on the spectrum to the wider social world, to foster their independence and self-reliance. We appreciate that getting and working at a job is a wonderful opportunity to learn and practice new social skills but we

recognize that those with an ASD will probably require more encouragement and support to achieve this important milestone. If your child attends college they may be interested in summer internships in their specific career area but may still face the social learning challenges and executive function deficits that are associated with their ASD.

I don't know anyone who relishes the prospect of job hunting. It takes lots of energy, motivation, planning and organizing. Those adolescents and young adults with high functioning autism have the same motivations for attaining the rewards of real work but the tasks involved in finding employment are very likely even more daunting for them. Notwithstanding the significant challenges, getting and keeping a job are among the most important goals for individuals on the spectrum. These goals should be an intrinsic part of any transition plan for students on the spectrum. Realistic employment goals should be set and a specific plan for meeting the goals should be implemented. Find out more at this Department of Labor Site:

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/categories/youth>

Working Papers and Employment Regulations

While there are many Federal Laws governing the employment of youth under the age of 18 each state is responsible for implementing the regulations. Therefore, depending upon where you live you may have to obtain working paper (also known as an Employment Certificate or Age Certificate). In the tri-state area, New York, New Jersey and Connecticut require the any individual under the age of 18 obtain an Employment Certificate before beginning to work, only Connecticut requires the commitment of the employer for a specific

position before the individual's Certificate is granted.

Working papers assure the employer that the young person has presented proof of age and is in good health. Usually, a proof of a current physical exam is required. To view a sample application for an Employment Certificate go to the following website:

<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/employmentlaw/a/employcert.htm>.

Generally, the certificates are obtained through the student's school guidance office or the local Department of Labor office. When the teen obtains a job he or she will have to present the Employment Certificate to the employer.

Any advocate for young individuals seeking employment would be wise to learn some basic child labor law. Knowledge is our best protection against the rare exploitative employer. The following comprehensive Department of Labor website details youth labor laws and has presentations directed to parents, students, employers and educators: <http://www.youthrules.dol.gov/>.

The Job Hunt: Use Those Executive Function Skills

Here's where teaching and practicing executive function skills will pay off. I would strongly suggest that your young job seeker take the time for a self-assessment. They should inventory their skills and interests. What types of environments are comfortable and what environments need to be avoided. Are noise levels a problem? Would he or she prefer to work indoor or outdoors. Will she/he be looking for summer placement in their future career area? These questions will narrow the search and go a long way to assure that the job experience will be a pleasant one. A self-assessment

course for those with developmental disabilities can be found at:

<http://www.partnersinpolicymaking.com/employment/>.

As the job hunt gets underway, encourage your youngster to keep records of who he has contacted about jobs and what their responses were. He/she should note when follow-up is required. If interviews are scheduled, the date, time and place. What will they need to bring to the interview: Social security cards, working papers, resume etc.

If interviews are scheduled, ask or encourage your youngster to practice interviewing skills. Share your own interview experiences and give them lots of support.

Where Are the Summer Jobs

Given our economic hard times summer jobs may be harder to find this year. It's good to remember that looking for a job is a job in itself. Many executive functions and social skills need to be used to obtain employment. Definitely reward your young job seeker for going through the job seeking steps even if they do not result in employment. Here are a few suggestions for finding summer employment.

- **The career placement office or guidance office.** Don't pass up the obvious; this should be the 1st stop on any student's job hunt. This is certainly the place to inquire about summer internships for college students.
- **Summer camps:** If your child has attended camp and has now aged out, consider asking the camp administration if they would consider summer employment for your child. These are people who are already

familiar with your child's strengths and challenges. A counselor position may or may not be a good fit but there are many other jobs at camp which would be appropriate for your child. Help with taking care of the grounds for instance, help in the dining room, help in the office. Consider asking for positions at other special needs camps. After all, these are organizations that foster independence for their campers and what better way to prove that independence is an attainable goal than to hire those with special needs.

- **The friends and family network.** The 1st rule of job hunting is to tell everyone you know that you are looking for a job. Our individuals on the spectrum may have to be taught to use some discretion but they should be encouraged to share their job hunting activities with friends and family. Networking is the most important tool for the job seeker.
- **Hotels, restaurants, beaches, parks, baseball stadiums.** If you are fortunate to live near a resort or vacation area look into jobs at local hotels, beaches, parks and other recreational facilities. Contact the recreation departments in your area for their list of summer jobs. For instance, the Town of Hempstead, in Nassau County, Long Island is currently seeking lifeguards and ticket takers. (Personal note: My son worked for the City of Long Beach for several summers as a beach ticket taker and beach cleaner. He will start his fourth year as the fry chef at the Long Island Duck's City Field. My daughter worked at local restaurants, as delivery person and counter clerk)
- **Newspapers, employment agencies, state unemployment offices.** The employment offices may even have specialists who work with special needs job seekers.

- **Creating Jobs and Volunteering.** Creating a schedule for your youngster to do extra chores or volunteering can bring the same benefits as regular paid employment. It must be understood however that the job be approached with the same level of responsibility as a salaried job. If your youngster has special interest and is motivated to work in a specific environment but paid employment is not a possibility ask if an internship or volunteer position would be considered

Other Job Hunting Tips

You'll find a slew of websites offering job listings and opportunities, Be very selective. However, I did find some good advice and tips for young job seekers and their parents at the following sites:

<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/teenstudentgrad/a/parentguide.htm>

and

<http://www.myfirstpaycheck.com/advice>

GOOD LUCK

Pat Schissel, LMSW

President AHA

Autism Science Foundation

<http://www.autismsciencefoundation.org/home.html>
