



# Transition

T E N N E S S E E

## Initiative for Autism, Innovation, and the Workforce

**T**he Vanderbilt Initiative for Autism Innovation, and the Workforce is creating a model employment pipeline, dubbed the Nashville Model, aimed at testing adults with autism for their talents, gifts, and passions, so we can match them to specialized business interests for meaningful, long-term employment. We're partnering with local business leaders, academia, high schools, researchers, nonprofits, and entrepreneurs to create a viable, working alternative to the traditional path that often limits or restricts those with autism from thriving in the workplace. Our long-term strategy is to provide the Nashville Model as a template for other cities, both nationally and internationally.

### **What services or resources does this agency provide?**

We have a month-long pre-employment training camp for young adults on the spectrum (age 15-20) called the Workforce Readiness and Preparation (WRAP), hosted by the Currey Ingram Academy in the summer, and in following years we hope to expand this program for college-aged participants.

We're also working with The Precisionists, Inc. (TPI) and Specialisterne, national (and, respectively, international) companies that specialize in hiring adults with autism either in their own operations center or else placing the individuals in jobs with other partner companies (such as UBS, HCA,



Walgreens, and others).

Several research groups at Vanderbilt who specialize in autism research are also developing novel methods for assessing talents and assistive technologies for helping individuals with autism get to work and succeed on the job, as well as quantifying current methods to validate their effectiveness.

Spectrum Pathways, another program at Vanderbilt that helps adults with autism set and achieve goals, works closely with our initiative.

### **What areas of Tennessee do they serve?**

We're located at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, serving the local area, but our plans are to share the Nashville Model with other communities nationally, perhaps even internationally.



### **Is there a cost and, if so, who pays?**

Our business partners (TPI and Specialisterne) are for-profit companies, so they handle all of their own hiring costs; there is no cost to applicants. All other current funding is through grants, at no cost to participants with autism.

### **For which students might this agency be appropriate?**

Anyone diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may find our initiative helpful. In the future, we hope to expand our work to other types of neuro-diversity.

### **Who is eligible to receive their services/ supports and when?**

Anyone interested is welcome to contact us, though we do focus on serving young adults and adults with Autism.

### **What is the referral process? What documents are needed?**

Our project does not require any documentation, although some of our business and research partners may require a formal diagnosis. No formal referral is needed; just reach out to us directly.

### **What is the family's responsibility?**

The family should see if their young adult with autism could benefit from the programs offered by the Initiative for Autism, Innovation, and Workforce by getting in touch with them.

### **What is the student's responsibility?**

The student should have a strong interest in seeking employment.

### **Where can I learn more?**

Visit their website at: [www.vu.edu/autismandinnovation](http://www.vu.edu/autismandinnovation)

### **What is the responsibility of an educator?**

The educator can share information about the Initiative for Autism, Innovation, and Workforce to parents so they have information about different research studies, camps, and opportunities offered to young adults with autism.

### **How (and when) do you involve them in the transition planning process?**

- Apply to the pre-employment camp offered while the student is in high school.
- Ask about research opportunities.
- Seek information about the employment specialists they partner with.

### **What questions should I ask of Initiative for Autism Innovation and the Workforce?**

- What ages of youth do you serve?
- How do I get my son/daughter involved in a research study?
- How many of your clients have been placed with a job?