Abstract

The transition to adulthood is a critical and stressful time period for individuals with autism and their families. Young adults with autism face vulnerabilities that can make it difficult to plan for a career or find and maintain a job. Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are in desperate need for services that would aid in post-secondary employment and education. However, only few evidence-based transition programs exist for young adults with ASD, which are (1) longer term, (2) not tailored towards young adults with high functioning autism, and (3) do not use individual strength and weaknesses profiles for matching skill level with post-secondary placement. The *objective* of this *innovative* pilot study is to close this gap in knowledge and service by studying the efficacy of a brief career development program, which will focus on an individualized strengths and weaknesses profile in combination with a short term (i.e., 12-week) educational transition training for young adults with ASD. The *central hypothesis* is that a brief individualized strengths and weaknesses profile plus a 12-week educational transition program increases confidence and hours of engagement per week in post-secondary activities (e.g., college courses, jobs, internships, education programs). Twenty young adults with high functioning ASD, 16-22 years of age, will participate in two intervention modules: (1) an individualized strengths and weaknesses profile and (2) a 12-week transition training. The primary outcome measures are confidence and hours of engagement per week in post-secondary activities (e.g., college courses, jobs, internships, education programs) before versus after each intervention module. The *proposed pilot project is significant* because it examines the preliminary efficacy of evidence-based strategies for career counseling commonly used in neurotypical adults in combination with an educational 12-week program for high functioning individuals with ASD. The project will set the stage for future NIH grants on the use of tailored programs that identify neurophenotypes to improve transition to adulthood and foster greater independence for high functioning individuals with ASD.