

Putting People With Autism To Work, Now

Each Thursday evening six young adults gather around a large table in an office off Ventura and Reseda boulevards and work to hone their employment skills. Because these individuals have autism, their chances of finding meaningful employment aren't great. While 50,000 18-22-year-olds with autism graduate from public schools in the U.S. each year, the employment rate among people with disabilities is only 10 percent.

This is why Joanne Lara and Susan Osborne created Autism Works Now!, a program designed to help people ages 17 and older who have autism and related differences improve their workplace readiness. "We are addressing employment too late in this country for individuals with autism," says Lara, who also created the Autism Movement Therapy program.

Autism Works Now! participants learn to polish their resumes, develop social skills that will help them interact with future co-workers, and consider important questions that will help them land a job:

- How do I research my dream job?
- What do I wear to an interview?
- How do I sync my daily, weekly and monthly schedule to my smart phone?

The program includes three class meetings and one field trip per month to local businesses where participants meet hiring managers. Autism Works Now! also acts as a temporary job agency to help place individuals with autism in meaningful jobs in their communities.

The endeavor got its financial start following a star-studded fundraising event last year at the Club Nokia Theatre featuring national autism icon Temple Grandin. The program has also just garnered an Autism Speaks Community Grant, and Lara and Osborne are participating in a short documentary film about autism and employment, and are working on a book on the subject, due out in 2017.

Autism Works Now! classes meet from 6-8 p.m. Thursdays at 5567 Reseda Blvd., #108, Tarzana and from 1:30-3 p.m. Saturdays at the Culver City Senior Center, 4095 Overland Ave., Culver City.

To learn more, visit www.autismworksnow.org or call Joanne Lara at 323 240-0361 or Susan Osborne at 310 569-9308.

— Christina Elston



A fieldtrip to FX Studios is part of a recent session of Autism Works Now! Pictured are, from left, Autism Works Now! Director Susan Osborne; job seeker Jacob Levy; FX COO Chuck Saftler; job seekers Luke Rose, Lacey Brink and Chris Grayson; and Autism Works Now! Executive Director Joanne Lara.

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