

## ABSTRACT

While autism spectrum disorder (ASD) research and interventions have typically been focused on child and adolescent populations, they leave unaddressed the need for group support and interventions in the same population when they reach adulthood. In 2015, a study found that 54 percent of adults surveyed with autism have no vocational or life support as adults and 26 percent have no support at all (Roux, et al.). The Autism News Network (ANN) is a program which aims to provide a supportive environment for adults with ASD and guide them in the art of filmmaking. The movies and interviews created by ANN are all planned, edited and filmed by adults with ASD. The program aims to build self confidence, reduce social isolation, reduce anxiety and increase overall filmmaking knowledge with vocational and emotional support provided by experienced providers. ANN currently has eleven active participants who meet bi-weekly for editing, marketing, planning and filming. All eleven participants were surveyed after attending twelve weeks of ANN sessions. We showed that there was significant improvement in participants' social skills, loneliness, public speaking, interview skills, emailing skills, ability to develop questions, editing using Adobe Final Cut Pro, using videography equipment, interacting with peers, time management, ability to overcome obstacles, understanding boundaries, and ability to stay focused. This uncontrolled interventional study displayed the major benefits of using film making as a medium to provide emotional and vocational support in adults with ASD in a group setting and provides a framework for other programs to assist these individuals as they reach adulthood.

## METHOD

Eleven participants diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder were enrolled in a twelve-week biweekly program called the Autism News Network. The program aimed to guide participants in the art of filmmaking while building essential skills such as self-confidence, a sense of belonging, focus, future planning, and social skills.

During the biweekly meetings, participants were divided into small groups of 3-4, each led by a clinical coordinator. Groups were assigned various tasks including researching movie ideas, scriptwriting, fundraising, and social media marketing. After brainstorming in small groups, participants shared their ideas as a whole group. This fostered individual participation and increased comfort with public speaking.

Throughout the 12 weeks, participants learned to use Adobe Final Cut Pro for film editing and social media for film promotion. They then independently planned, wrote, filmed, edited, and promoted their group movie, "The Autism News Network Experience". The movie was then revealed at an in-person and YouTube movie premiere event which was attended by over 100 people.

## RESULTS

A post-program survey revealed significant positive impacts on participant well-being after 12 weeks of being part of the Autism News Network. 91% reported improved personal loneliness, and 100% reported increased social skills and time management. An increase was also noted in participant confidence levels using film editing tools such as Adobe Final Cut Pro and using lighting and sound equipment to create film clips.

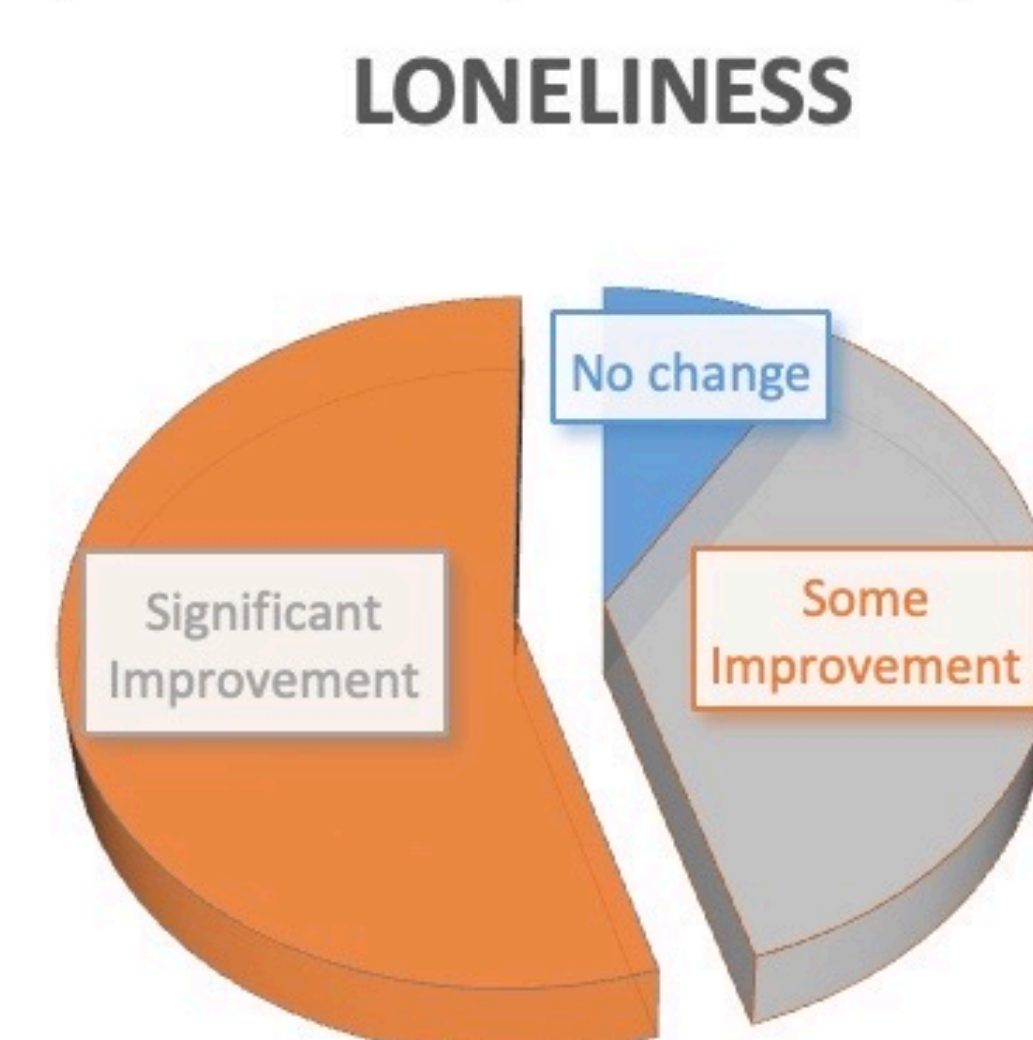
Some of the notable results are an increase in ability to overcome obstacles and an increase in being able to stay focused when feeling restless and uncomfortable.

**Table.** Results from Post 12 week intervention survey

\* Some participants reported never having tried the task

	No Change	Some Improvement	Significant improvement
Interview Ability	1	3	7
Email Ability *	2	2	5
Write Interview Questions	1	2	8
Edit Videos	2	3	6
Operate Equipment	1	4	6
Set up Video Shoot	1	6	4
Schedule Project Timeline*	1	4	4
Work with Peers	n/a	1	10
Work with third party organizations	n/a	5	6
Resolve differences with peers	1	4	6
Understand Boundaries	n/a	4	7
Time Management	n/a	4	7
Overcome Obstacles *	1	1	8
Stay focused when feeling restless *	1	2	7
Ability to Promote Movie	1	1	9
Ability to balance work and fun moments	n/a	2	9
Public Speaking	1	2	8
Socialize with Peers	n/a	6	5
Loneliness	1	4	6

**Figure 1.** Measure of loneliness after joining the Autism News Network

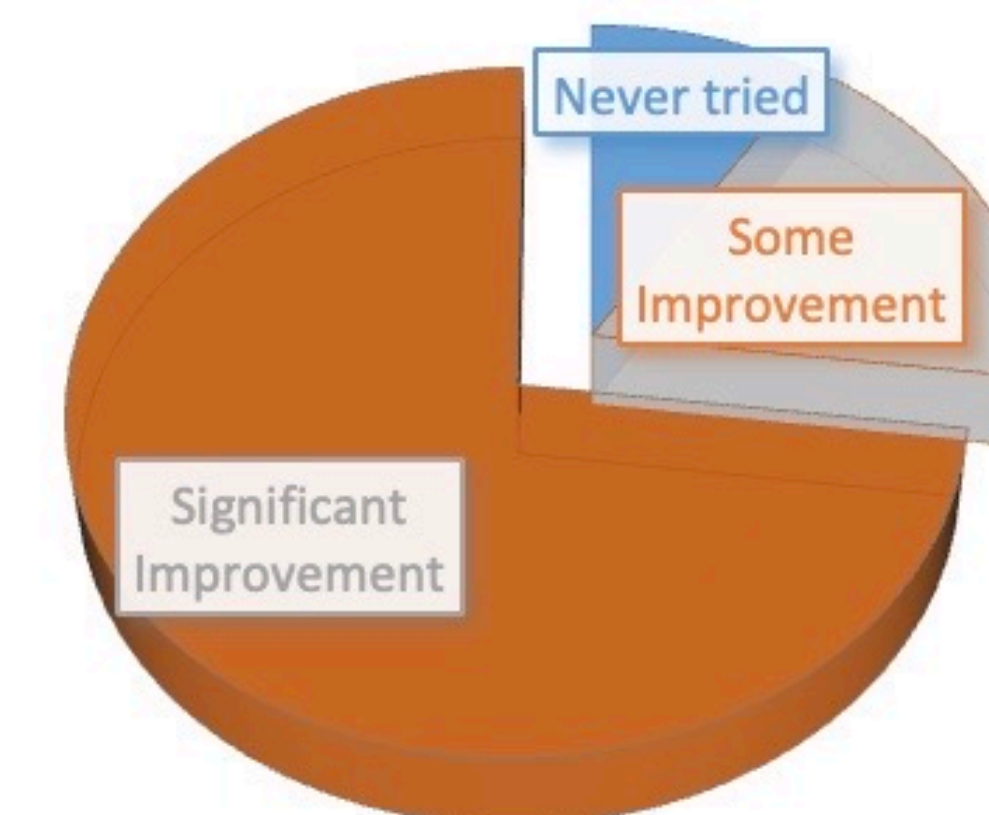


**Figure 2.** The Autism News Network Film Crew



**Figure 3.** Public speaking ability before and after joining The Autism News Network

### PUBLIC SPEAKING ABILITY



## CONCLUSIONS

A 2014 longitudinal study found a decline in vocational and educational engagement among adults with ASD over a decade of observation (Taylor, et al). This decrease in engagement could be due to a variety of factors, one being a lack of vocational opportunities that support individuals with ASD leading to a gradual lack of engagement with employment and educational opportunities. Our intervention demonstrates the value of vocational training programs in addressing these needs. The Autism News Network, using filmmaking as a vector, provides emotional and vocational support, leading to improved quality of life and potential further career promotion using the skills learned in the program.

As with any study, there are limitations worth noting. One being that in future studies, a pre- and post-survey will be implemented for all participants before enrollment in the 12 week intervention.

The Autism News Network is a pioneering program that bridges the emotional and vocational gaps faced by many adults with ASD. Participants and their families reported significant positive changes after being a part of the program. For example, Kristina Blake, initially prone to panic attacks in social settings, is a leading member of the group and made a speech in front of 100 individuals at the Autism News Network Experience movie premiere. Kristina's goal is to continue to interview prominent community members and she aims to make the Autism News Network a TV news channel that employs individuals with ASD.

## FUTURE INDICATIONS

The Autism News Network plans to expand its reach by increasing participant numbers, developing a similar program for teenagers with ASD, and creating more films. Plans are being developed to expand programming to more age groups and to measure outcomes in a more robust manner.



## REFERENCES

- 1) Taylor JL, Mailick MR. A longitudinal examination of 10-year change in vocational and educational activities for adults with autism spectrum disorders. *Dev Psychol.* 2014 Mar;50(3):699-708. doi: 10.1037/a0034297. Epub 2013 Sep 2. PMID: 24001150; PMCID: PMC3951267.
- 2) Roux AM. *National autism indicators report: Transition into young adulthood.* New York: AJ Drexel Autism Institute; 2015.