



SPECTRUM SKILLSHARE

A Mentor Match for Adults on the Autism Spectrum



About Spectrum Skillshare

Spectrum Skillshare was a mentoring and collaborative learning project created by, and for, adults on the autism spectrum. We matched autistic self-advocates with experience in education, employment, navigating government services, budgeting and housing to autistic people going through life transitions. We have also held collaborative workshops to help participants with employment skills.

Our project was based on the principles of self-determination, neurodiversity and “nothing about us without us.” We think the best experts on autism and life skills are autistic people ourselves, and by matching autistic people with their peers, we will be able to create a community of mutual support that is based on these principles.

This project was the project of the 2015 Barbara Wilensky Gopen Fellow, Finn Gardiner. Finn Gardiner is an incoming Master of Public Policy student at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University. He is the Boston Community Coordinator for the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, where he builds liaisons with local nonprofits and government agencies to advance disability rights, mobilizes disability activists to engage in community advocacy, and approaches policymakers to adopt laws that benefit the autism community and people with disabilities generally. He is also a member of the Attorney General's Disability Advisory Committee, where he meets with interested stakeholders to discuss salient issues regarding disability policy.

The Gopen Fellowship is sponsored by the Institute for Community Inclusion and the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council.

About This Booklet

This booklet is a showcase of some of the work done with Spectrum Skillshare — the guide created to train mentors, as well as the community resource guide directed at adults on the autism spectrum. These resources were created through months of painstaking research about mentoring projects for people with disabilities, interviews with experts on mentoring and disability services, reviews of the academic literature on the effectiveness of mentoring, and searching for comprehensive resources for people on the autism spectrum in the Greater Boston area.

Spectrum Skillshare Training and Policy Packet for Mentors

17 December 2015

Introduction

Welcome to Spectrum Skillshare! We're pleased to have you serve as one of our mentors. As a mentor, you will be helping another autistic adult for six months by offering peer support and encouragement to move toward specific goals they have identified in their application.

What mentoring is (and isn't)

(some text adapted from the Cygnet Project's training slides)

What is a mentoring relationship?

- **A time-limited, goal-oriented volunteer relationship.** You will be meeting with your mentees once a month, and following up with them weekly, to help them work toward specific goals the mentee has set.
- **Focus on both personal and professional learning and development.** Connecting with a mentee will help them learn important professional and life skills, and will also help them build relationships.
- **An experienced person providing guidance and support to less experienced people.** As a mentor, you will share your experiences with post-high school education, employment, navigating government services and other life skills with your mentees. This will be valuable because it comes from somebody who has gone through the same things they are encountering, and will feel relevant to them.
- **Goals are directed by the mentee.** You're there to help them achieve those goals, but it's your role to provide guidance, rather than to determine what those goals are.

What *isn't* a mentoring relationship?

- **A therapeutic relationship** - mentors can listen to their mentees' concerns, but this is different from what a trained therapist offers. Please refer your mentee to trained staff or ask Spectrum Skillshare staff to point them in the right direction.
- **Job coaching** - mentors can help their mentees with skills that will help them get a job, but that is different from the dedicated paid services job coaches provide.
- **Social work** - mentors can assist people with their goals, but they cannot replace the work of trained and licensed social workers.
- **Accounting, financial advising or tax preparation** - you can help your mentees by sharing your own experiences with things like budgeting, but this is different from being an accountant, financial advisor or tax preparer. If your mentee needs something more involved than simple guidance, please point them to accountants, tax preparers, social workers, or financial advisors.
- **Only a social outlet.** We'd like you to get to know your mentees, but this is primarily a professional relationship that is designed to help you achieve specific goals.
- **A way to get a date.** We'd like mentors and mentees to be friendly with each other, but please keep the relationship professional.
- A means to **convert people to your religion.** Spectrum Skillshare is publicly funded. Apart from the legal issue, part of being a good mentor also means respecting others' belief systems.

Guidance for mentors

Mentors and mentees should meet in person at least once a month for an hour to an hour and a half. These meetings should occur in a public place that is easily accessible to both the mentor and mentee. Examples include public parks, restaurants, coffee shops, or open meeting rooms in libraries. (We recommend against one-on-one meetings in people's own houses.) Mentors and mentees should also follow up with each other once a week for thirty minutes to an hour. The follow-ups can be over Skype, Google Hangouts, Facebook Chat, another video or audio chat application, phone, email, instant message, social networking, in person, or any other way of communication that works best for both the mentor and mentee.

After you've had your check-ins, write a journal entry about your mentoring experiences. These can include what you and your mentee have talked about, ideas for next meetings or issues that had come up when you were talking to each other and would like to resolve by the next meeting. The journal entries will be seen only by you and the Project Coordinators. Journal entries will help us find out what's working and what isn't, and will help us offer support if something comes up during your time as a mentor.

If you can't make it to a mentoring session, please let your mentee know 48 hours in advance if possible (emergencies are an exception), and reschedule to the nearest available date.

Mentoring timeline

Training Day - after the matches have been made, mentors and mentees will attend a training session to learn more about Spectrum Skillshare, our policies and complete a series of activities to get to know each other better and identify some of the things they'd like to work on during the duration of their mentor/mentee relationship.

The first few meetings - mentors and mentees will use the first few meetings to get to know each other. Suggestions of things to talk about during your first meeting:

The second month - mentors and mentees will start working toward the goals mentees have identified on their applications.

Workshops (please read following section)

Closure: saying our goodbyes - we will have a farewell dinner where we talk about future plans. We will also distribute a final survey to see what people have taken out of the project.

Workshops

After mentors and mentees have met for the first few months, they will start planning open skillshare workshops for members of the community to attend. These workshops will allow Spectrum Skillshare to reach more people than were chosen to become mentors and mentees, and they will also provide participants a means to hone the skills they've gained through their work together. There will be three open workshops in February, March, and April.

Sample workshop structure:

Career Networking on the Spectrum

10 minutes - Presenters introduce themselves by giving their name, their location, and some facts about themselves that are related to employment or networking

20 minutes - Main presentation (presenters talk about networking, how it works, how it has worked for them, and the strategies they use)

20 minutes - Interactive activity (for example, creating a LinkedIn profile, creating mind maps of how you can connect to people to build your network)

10 minutes - Q&A - wrap-up

Ground rules for mentors

(some rules adapted from the Cygnet Project's training slides and Partners for Youth with Disabilities' Best Practices Guide)

1. **Be respectful of your mentee's personal boundaries.** We do want you to build a healthy relationship and communicate with each other often, but you should remember that your mentee has other life responsibilities to take care of.
2. **Be aware of your own boundaries.** Think before saying "yes" to something.
3. **Respect each other's beliefs and emotions.** Don't try to dictate what others' feelings are if they've told you they're feeling a certain way. For example, if someone says they're sad, don't tell them that they're not, or try to perform psychoanalysis on them. Also, mentoring is not a way to try to convert someone else to your religious or political belief system.
4. **Keep the relationship friendly, but professional.** Going out for lunch or hanging out in the park is OK, but overnight visits aren't.
5. **Meet in a public place,** not at the mentor's or mentee's house. This will help ensure safety for both mentors and mentees. If you're meeting in a restaurant, participants should pay for their own food and drinks.
6. **Mentors and mentees should not lend or give each other money.**
7. If you give your mentee your phone number, Skype username, or Google Hangouts contact information, please try to **establish limits for when they can contact you.** For example, if you want to communicate by phone or video chat, try pre-arranging a set time when you can talk to each other. Being clear will help in making sure people's boundaries are respected.
8. **Respect each other's accessibility needs.** For example, you might want to take auditory processing issues into account when meeting in public places; sometimes restaurants can have a lot of background noise that makes it harder to distinguish what other people are saying in a conversation. Another issue that might come up is wearing heavy perfumes. Some people have strong sensory or allergic reactions to them, so it is a good idea to avoid or limit these products.
9. **Respect each other's confidentiality;** personal information discussed during meetings (for example, "I have \$30,000 in credit card debt" or "my son has cancer") should not be shared with others except for Spectrum Skillshare staff.



SPECTRUM

SKILLSHARE

Community Resource Guide

Introduction and Disclaimer

ABOUT SPECTRUM SKILLSHARE

Spectrum Skillshare is a mentoring and collaborative learning project created by, and for, adults on the autism spectrum. We match autistic self-advocates with experience in education, employment, navigating government services, budgeting, and housing to autistic people going through life transitions. Mentors and mentees will also work with Spectrum Skillshare staff to create workshops that are open to the community.

Our project is based on the principles of self-determination, neurodiversity, and “nothing about us without us.” We think the best experts on autism and life skills are autistic people ourselves, and by matching autistic people with their peers, we will be able to create a community of mutual support that is based on these principles.

ABOUT THE RESOURCE GUIDE

This is the companion resource guide for Spectrum Skillshare, intended to be used by both participants and the general public. The Resource Guide includes articles, books, and websites about employment, executive functioning skills, self-advocacy, social services, health care, and crisis resources. A large number of the resources, primarily those relating to social services, listed in this guide are primarily aimed at people in Massachusetts, but many of the other resources can be used for people in different regions, too.

Inclusion in the Resource Guide does not indicate an endorsement by Spectrum Skillshare, the Institute for Community Inclusion, or the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Network. All phone numbers, web addresses (whether normal or TinyURL shortened addresses), and other contact information are accurate at the time of writing.

Advocacy and Autism Info

THE ARC OF MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts branch of national advocacy group that works for and with people with developmental and intellectual disability.

🌐 thearcofmass.org

THE AUTISTIC SELF ADVOCACY NETWORK (ASAN)

National autistic-run advocacy group, geared towards public policy, leadership, community engagement, and working for the civil rights of autistic people and other people with disabilities.

🌐 autisticadvocacy.org

THE AUTISTIC SELF ADVOCACY NETWORK OF GREATER BOSTON

Greater Boston branch of ASAN. Primary focus is on public policy, advocacy, leadership, and community engagement.

🌐 asanboston.org

AUTISM WOMEN'S NETWORK

Autistic advocacy group primarily by and for women on the autism spectrum, though allies are also welcome to participate.

🌐 autismwomensnetwork.org

HOW DO I SELF-ADVOCATE?

s.e. smith

A brief introduction to disability self-advocacy and how to go about it.

🌐 tinyurl.com/o6zr6wo

QUEERABILITY

A blog and community for LGBTQ+ people with disabilities.

🌐 queerability.tumblr.com

WELCOME TO THE AUTISTIC COMMUNITY

An accessible introduction to autism and the community of autistic people.

🌐 tinyurl.com/nee9k9g

WELCOME TO AUTISM WOMEN'S NETWORK

A guide written specifically for women on the spectrum.

🌐 tinyurl.com/preaf3b

Crisis Resources

ABUSE AND SELF-HARM TEXT LINE

📞 Text **voice** to **20121** (Any day, 7PM-1AM EST)

CRISIS TEXT LINE

📞 Text **start** to **741-741** (24/7)

DATING & RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

📞 Text **loveis** to **22522** (24/7)

LIFELINE CRISIS CHAT

This is a live chat service available in the USA and territories from 2PM - 2AM Eastern Time.

🌐 crisischat.org/chat

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE

📞 **1-800-273-8255**. Available in English or Spanish. Lines are open all day, every day.

TRANS LIFELINE

Crisis and suicide hotline for transgender people.

🌐 translifeline.org | 📞 **+1 877-565-8860** 🇺🇸 | 📞 **+1 877-330-6366** 🇨🇦

THE TREVOR PROJECT

Crisis and suicide hotline for LGBTQ+ and questioning youth 13-24. Text and chat options are also available.

🌐 thetrevorproject.org | 📞 **866-488-7386**, or text **Trevor** to **1-202-304-1200** (Fridays 11AM-2PM EST)

Credit: Some of these crisis resources were originally compiled by the Autistic Self Advocacy Network of Los Angeles.

Employment and Education

AN AUTISTIC VIEW OF EMPLOYMENT

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network and The ARC of the United States

Written by autistic people with experience in the workplace, with tips and advice. Co-produced by the Autistic Self Advocacy Network and The ARC of the United States.

 tinycloud.com/okv3s2t

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO FINDING A JOB FOR PEOPLE WITH ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

Barbara Bissonnette, Forward Motion Coaching

This book comes with a cautious recommendation. Bissonnette can sometimes talk down to her readers, but some of the tips she gives about narrowing down your interests and turning them into work can be helpful.

 tinycloud.com/pec35lp

NAVIGATING COLLEGE

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network

A guide written to support autistic college students, written by and for autistic adults with higher-education experience. Discusses academics, socializing, self-advocacy, and time-management skills. Produced by the Autistic Self Advocacy Network.

 tinycloud.com/oljter3

Executive Functioning Skills

Definition

Executive function (EF) is a broad term that refers to the cognitive processes that help us regulate, control, and manage our thoughts and actions.

—Cynthia Kim

ACCOMMODATION AND COMPLIANCE SERIES: EMPLOYEES WITH EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING DEFICITS

Melanie Whetzel, Job Accommodation Network

A brief overview of what executive functioning is, ways people can struggle with it, and workarounds to deal with executive functioning issues. Primarily geared to employers, but the tips given may help you.

🌐 tinyurl.com/osvay83

AUTISTIFYING MY HABITAT

Kassiane Sibley, Radical Neurodivergence Speaking

This article discusses some of the methods she uses to increase her productivity and make her living space more liveable by using a reminder system that is accessible to her. This article may be helpful to other people who have issues with executive functioning or planning.

🌐 tinyurl.com/of9abdn

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING ISSUES IN TEENS AND ADULTS

Susan Golubock, AZAssist

A PDF of a presentation giving basic information about executive functioning difficulties and how they affect teenagers and adults. A good introductory document.

🌐 tinyurl.com/oyewz3d

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING PRIMER

Cynthia Kim, Musings of an Aspie

This series of articles explains what executive functioning and how it can affect people on the autism spectrum.

🌐 musingsofanaspie.com/executive-function-series/

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SERIES

Autisticality

This article discusses some of the methods she uses to increase her productivity and make her living space more liveable by using a reminder system that is accessible to her. This article may be helpful to other people who have issues with executive functioning or planning.

🌐 tinyurl.com/psqd2ud

THE POMODORO TECHNIQUE

The Pomodoro Technique can be a helpful tool for time management. In the Pomodoro Technique, you break up your tasks into 25-minute chunks with five-minute breaks in between.

🌐 pomodorotechnique.com for more general information

🌐 tomato-timer.com is an online Pomodoro timer you can use on both computers and mobile devices.

Local/State Resources

3L PLACE

Somerville transitional living and education for young adults (21-32) with developmental disability.

🌐 3lplace.org

THE ASPERGER/AUTISM NETWORK (AANE)

Social groups, support groups, trainings, consultations, and other services for people on the autism spectrum.

🌐 aane.org

BOSTON CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

Helps clients with disabilities with healthcare, housing, employment, and government benefits. Accessible via the Red or Orange lines via the Downtown Crossing stations, or a short walk from the Park Street Green Line station.

🌐 bostoncil.org

BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATERS

Shelter and transitional housing for homeless youth in the Greater Boston area.

🌐 bridgeotw.org

FENWAY HEALTH

An LGBT-friendly clinic in Downtown Boston, near Fenway Park. Accessible by the 55 bus (which unfortunately comes infrequently in comparison to other buses) or a ten-minute walk from Kenmore Green Line station.

🌐 fenwayhealth.org

GOVERNMENT OF CAMBRIDGE - RESOURCES FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE

PDF guide for local homelessness resources.

🌐 tinyurl.com/nqcwzus

HEADING HOME INC

Emergency shelters, transitional housing and permanent housing for homeless individuals and families in the Greater Boston area.

🌐 headinghomeinc.org

JUSTICE BRIDGE *(by University of Massachusetts Law School)*

Legal services for people not eligible for Legal Aid, but cannot afford standard legal fees.

🌐 umassd.edu/justicebridge

MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

State-wide advocacy group for homeless people.

🌐 mahomeless.org

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

The Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS) serves people with developmental and intellectual disabilities in Massachusetts who struggle with activities of daily living and other functioning criteria.

🌐 tinyurl.com/oa8w7g8

Local/State Resources

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE

Administers SNAP/Food Stamps and cash benefits for low-income and disabled people in Massachusetts. Be careful if you're on a phone plan that charges by the minute; you may spend a long time on the phone trying to clarify things with them.

🌐 tinyurl.com/ocbtwgd

MASSACHUSETTS REHABILITATION COMMISSION

Helps people with disabilities gain success in the workforce.

🌐 tinyurl.com/7ung6pf

MASSACHUSETTS HEALTH CONNECTOR/MASHEALTH

The state-wide portal for applying for health insurance, MassHealth or the Health Safety Net. If you are having problems with billing or documentation and live in or close enough to Boston to get to their Portland Street office, visit them in person instead of calling them.

🌐 MassHealth: tinyurl.com/d7z2g4u

🌐 Health Connector: mahealthconnector.org

MASSACHUSETTS HOUSING AND SHELTER ALLIANCE

Contains resources on housing and homeless services throughout Massachusetts.

🌐 tinyurl.com/o3jjne3

MASS LEGAL HELP

A wide-ranging guide to common Massachusetts social services and legal questions, including government benefits, landlord/tenant laws, housing and homelessness, immigration, and dealing with criminal records and background checks. The site is available in seven languages: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Russian, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, and Chinese.

🌐 masslegalthelp.org

SOMERVILLE HOMELESS COALITION

Serves homeless people and people at risk of becoming homeless in the Somerville area.

🌐 somervillehomelesscoalition.org

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

us federal government agency. Responsible for administering Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

🌐 socialsecurity.gov

ST. FRANCIS HOUSE

Day shelter for homeless and low-income people in the Greater Boston area. Provides housing, educational, substance abuse, clothing, and other resources.

🌐 www.stfrancishouse.org

YOUTH ON FIRE

Drop-in space for homeless and marginally housed youth in the Greater Boston area.

🌐 tinyurl.com/ovvxes9

Technology

ATMAC

A blog about accessibility for Macs, iPhones, iPads, and iPod Touches, including reviews and profiles of users with disabilities who make the most out of their Apple equipment.

🌐 tinyurl.com/okv3s2t

Executive Functioning App Reviews

by Nattily, Notes on Crazy

An autistic graduate student reviews and lists apps that may be helpful for regulating executive functioning skills,

🌐 tinyurl.com/q5zemwk