



*Developed at the recommendation of
the Disabilities Commission
in December 2001*

Reasons for Disability Commission interest in a statewide autism advisory council:

- To gain consensus on how to address personnel development requirements to meet massive growth in autism in VA (School age and adult level); and
- To ensure that any Commission-endorsed resources are aimed at researched-based practices, not pseudo-science.

The Mission of the VA Autism Council

- provide leadership and coordination for state agencies and service providers

AND

- increase knowledge and understanding of autism in the wider community in order to maximize outcomes for people with autism.

Council's Strategic Goals are to:

- **Gather, synthesize, and distribute knowledge on autism;**
- **Develop consensus on best practice tools;**
- **Promote the interests of citizens with autism and those who are affected by autism;**
- **Identify and address gaps in the system.**

Council Membership includes autism experts and reps from:

- VA Autism Resource Center
- VCU Partnership for People with Disabilities
- Commonwealth Autism Service
- Northern Virginia Training Center
- VA Dept. of Education
- VA Board for People w/ Disabilities
- DMAS
- DRS
- DMHMRSAS
- Southeastern Cooperative Educational Programs (SECEP)
- Fairfax & Loudon County Public Schools
- Autism Society of America
- Family members/self-advocates
- Faison School for Autism/VCU Psychiatry
- George Mason University
- VA Union University
- VCU Training and Technical Assistance Centers (T/TAC)
- VDOE T/TAC at James Madison University
- Also Associated with VA Tech and Radford University
- Norfolk St. University (vacant)

VA Autism Council Accomplishments

- 1) Consensus/development of Personnel Skill Competencies Document**
- 2) Tuition Reimbursement Program (College Level)**
- 3) Council Website =Clearinghouse on Training Opportunities Available**
- 4) Online Autism Web Course (Intro Level).**
- 5) Consensus/development of Personnel Prep. Curriculum (Advanced Level) on Best Practice, Instructional "Strategies"**
- 6) Special Collaborations with Adult Service Systems (e.g., 2006 DRS project)**

1) Consensus Document: Skill Competencies in Autism

- Published & disseminated in Oct 2006
- Developed to guide personnel development in autism.
- Applicable to all fields of service delivery (school, rehab, group home, employment, etc) & across lifespan.
- Based upon consistent findings in current research & state/national consensus.

How were competencies developed?

- Originally designed by subcommittee of the Virginia Autism Council
- Reviewed by state and national experts in the field of autism.
 - Through consultant groups and systematic review
 - Comprised of individuals with a variety of backgrounds and experiences



Competency Areas

- **General Autism Information**
- **Individualization & Support Strategies**
- **Communication**
- **Social Skills**
- **Behavior**
- **Sensory Motor Development**

Who should demonstrate these skills?

- **Paraprofessionals**
 - Direct care staff or teacher assistants
- **Professionals**
 - Teachers, counselors, psychologists, or therapists with less than 3 years of experience with ASD
- **Master Professionals**
 - Professionals with more than 3 years of experience working with individuals who have ASD
- **Advanced Degree, Program Developer, Specialist**
 - Professionals with extensive experience and/or additional certifications related to ASD

Sample Competencies

4. Social Skill Competencies Statements	Paraprofessional Direct Services Staff	Professional Direct Service Staff	Master Professional Direct Service Staff	Advanced Degree, Program Developer, Specialist*
4.1K Understands social skill development and the unique social skill deficits and challenges associated with ASD, including but not limited to: relationship development and maintenance, play/recreation, non-verbal interaction, functional imitation, emotional expression, emotional understanding, self-advocacy, work, and/or the role of challenging behaviors versus social skill deficits.	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.1.1S Assesses social skill strengths and needs.		☐	☐	☐
4.1.2S Plans and uses specialized social skills strategies (for example, anger and stress management techniques, Social Stories™, Comic Strip Conversations™, mentoring, shaping, incidental teaching, role play, social scripting, integrated play groups, etc.) to teach social skills, and to foster social interest, and interaction.		☐	☐	☐
4.1.3S Teaches professionals and family to implement specialized social skill strategies in a variety of settings.			☐	☐
4.1.4S Plans for generalization and maintenance of social skills in a variety of settings with a variety of people including other professionals, friends, and family members.		☐	☐	☐
4.1.5S Assesses the function of problem behavior and identifies the social skill deficits that lead to the development of problem behavior.		☐	☐	☐

Competencies are being widely disseminated free of charge

- Downloadable through Council's the website www.autismtrainingva.org
 - 20 page printout
- Limited number of bound copies available
 - Contact the VA Autism Council (info@autismtrainingva.org) for print copies

2) Tuition Reimbursement

- Developed to increase interest in autism coursework @ VA Colleges/Universities
- Council pre-approves each course using a rubric (We ask, Does course address VAC's Skill Competencies?)
- Developed to increase college student interest in autism
- Supported by a VDOE grant to Council.
- Defrays tuition costs for any school personnel or family member of school-aged student (\$300 max per year) if taken for academic credit & completed with "B" or better.



The VAC has encouraged the growth of autism specific courses at:

- Lynchburg College
- Radford University
- VA Commonwealth University
- George Mason University
- Most recently, Mary Washington College

Thanks to this program:

52 Virginians have been assisted to take college level courses preparing them to work in the field of autism over the last 3 years

3) Website and Month by Month Training Calendar

- Council's Website = Clearinghouse of VA info for staff development & caregiver training on autism spectrum disorders
- Regularly updated with training, educational events, VAC free products - Bookmark it!

www.autismtrainingva.org



CALENDAR

October 2006

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4 - Educating Students in the Autism Spectrum for Life	5 - PBS Facilitator Training - Strategies for Supporting Individuals with Autism	6	7 - Commonwealth Autism Service Dinner - PBS
8	9 - Shaping the Future	10 - Shaping The Future - Teaching Little Professors	11 - Shaping The Future	12	13 - Observing with New Eyes	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24 - An Overview of the Characteristics of Autism	25 - Nonverbal Learning Disabilities	26	27 - 4th Annual Applied Research and Intervention Conference	28 - Fourth Annual Research and Intervention Conference
29	30	31				

January

2006

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4) Online Autism Web Course (Intro Level Course)

- VAC course hosted through Psychology Dept., George Mason University.
- Provides broad overview of diagnosis and treatment (Autism 101).
- Consists of self-study materials, quizzes, and final exam.
- Offered once per month--lasts for 8 consecutive days.
- Provides direct interaction w/ professor.



Who should take the Webcourse?

- Anyone newly involved w/ autism (eg, Reg or Sp Ed teachers, parents, day care, recreation, VR or service providers)
- Teachers & Rehab Counselors earn points toward re-certification/prof requirements
- Cost = \$50; however, Council pays costs for:
 - All school professionals and families of school aged students (DOE grant)
 - Some staff members of CSBs, community private providers, state training centers, rehab counselors (small grants from DRS, DMHMRSAS but need more support here)

5) Advanced Level Curriculum on Best Instructional "Strategies"

- Council agreed on proven instructional & support strategies in autism and developed personnel prep curriculum
- Now pilot-testing statewide with school personnel (funded by VA T/TAC's).
- Additional pilot trainings with adult service providers planned for future
- When refined, will be disseminated widely and developed into the VAC's 2nd more advanced level web course

6) Special Collaborations with Adult Service Systems and State Human Service Agencies:

In the continuing efforts to help state agencies keep pace with the growing personnel needs in autism, the VAC:

- 1) maintains strong representation of state agencies on the Council and
- 2) seeks whenever possible to engage in collaborative training and education efforts with state agencies.

In 2005, with the encouragement of Disability Commission:

- 1) DRS collaborated with VAC to develop a training curriculum and 2 regional pilot trainings for DRS staff and users to enhance understanding of autism and DRS' role in services (course now on VAC Web Course & DRS Family Primer was developed), and
- 2) DMHMRSAS agreed to begin supplying a limited number of stipends so that CSBs, private providers and training center staff could take Council's autism-intro web course, free of charge.

How can the Disability Commission Continue its Momentum and High Productivity of the Autism Council?

- Use VAC as an objective touchstone on best practice personnel/program development and needed regulation changes in autism,
- Continue to encourage state agencies to collaborate with and support the VAC's efforts (letter from chair?),
- Find resources to expand statewide autism info dissemination and tuition reimbursement and web course stipends especially for the adult service system to help better serve adults with autism.

For More Information:

Website:

www.autismtrainingva.org



Email:

Info@autismtrainingva.org