



Vocational & Personal Independence Training for Individuals with ASD

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BACKGROUND

- Prevalence of ASD has been rising but available services for adolescents and adults with ASD have not increased to meet the demand.
- Adolescents and adults with ASD require specialized and highly individualized vocational & life skills training aimed at maximizing independence.
- The majority of programs that exist in the Calgary area are primarily recreational or were developed for individuals with developmental disabilities (i.e., not specific to ASD).
- Only a handful of studies have investigated adult outcomes; they highlight that adults with ASD are often un- or under-employed (Howlin et al., 2004) and continue to display impairments with respect to their social skills and adaptive functioning (McGovern & Sigman, 2005).
- There is evidence to suggest individuals with ASD are more likely to be denied services based on the severity of behaviours or assessed cognitive ability (Muller et al., 2003), and, as a group, require the most expensive set of services (Lawer et al., 2009).
- In addition to vocational challenges, many adults with ASD do not possess the adaptive functioning skills to live independently and are often isolated socially (Eaves & Ho, 2008; Howlin et al., 2004).
- Despite well documented social, vocational, and adaptive functioning challenges of adults with ASD, there is limited information to guide intervention efforts.

METHODS

- Mixed methods design examined pre- post- comparisons on outcome variables specific to each program, as well as social validity variables through feedback surveys.
- Participant inclusion criteria: diagnosis of ASD; aged 13 yrs as of a session start date; presenting with deficits that were consistent with the interventions being offered.
- Participants and caregivers completed an intake/screening process, which included Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales – 2nd Edition (VABS-II).
- Programming ran for 11-weeks, with participants attending one, 3-hour session per week.
- Three programs were offered concurrently, with separate curriculums; participants registered for only one program per 11-week session.

PROGRAMS

CommunityWorks® (Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center, 2008)

Vocational & social skills training program pairing individuals with ASD and typically developing peers to perform volunteer tasks in community organizations.

Practical Assessment Exploration System® (PAES®; Swisher, 1987)

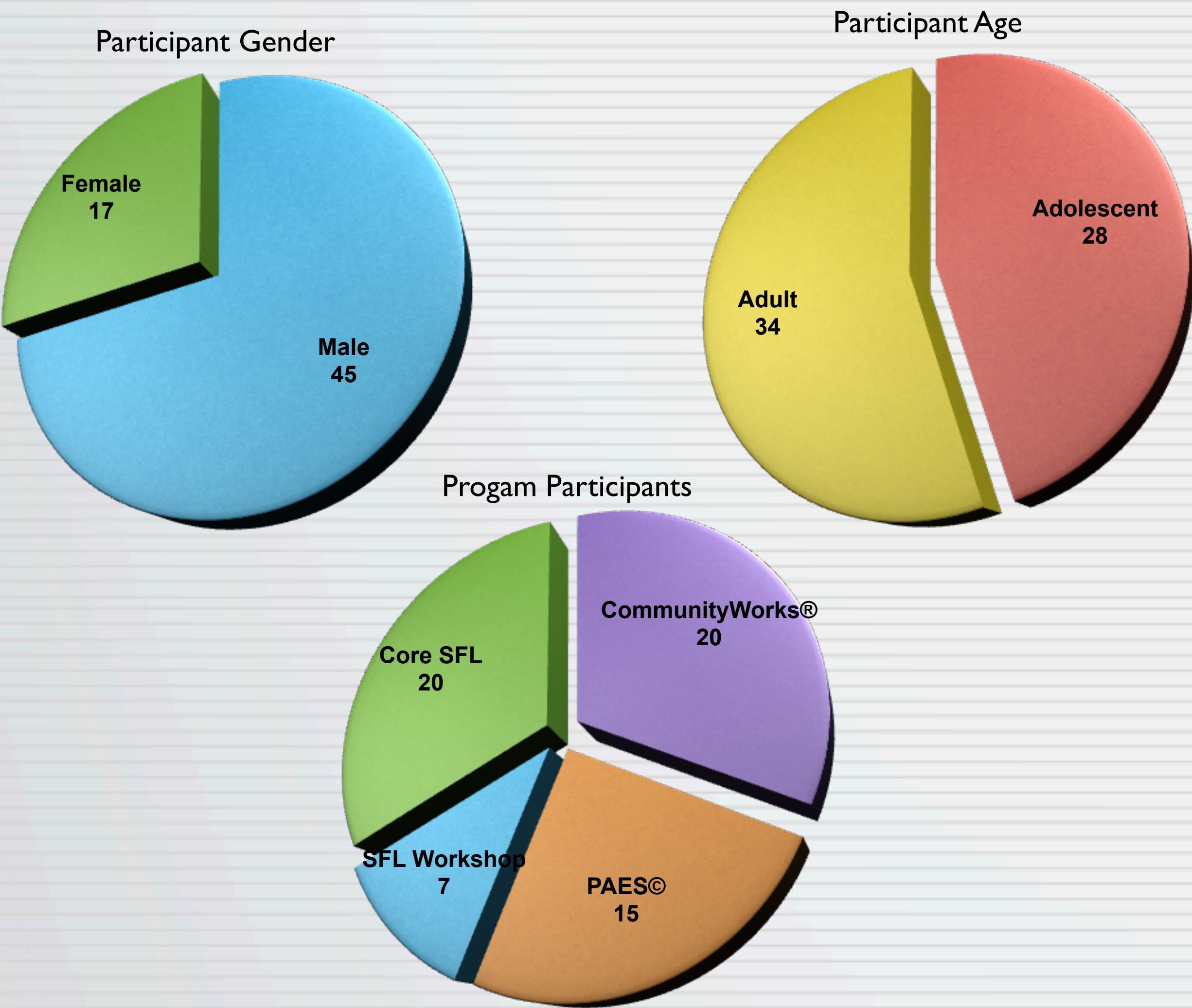
Highly individualized program that employs performance-based assessment methods to identify transition planning needs associated with employment and vocational training.

Skills for Life (Society for Treatment of Autism, 2011)

Involve parent/caregiver and/or participant selected life skills taught with hands-on, experiential learning, addressing individualized needs and skill sets.

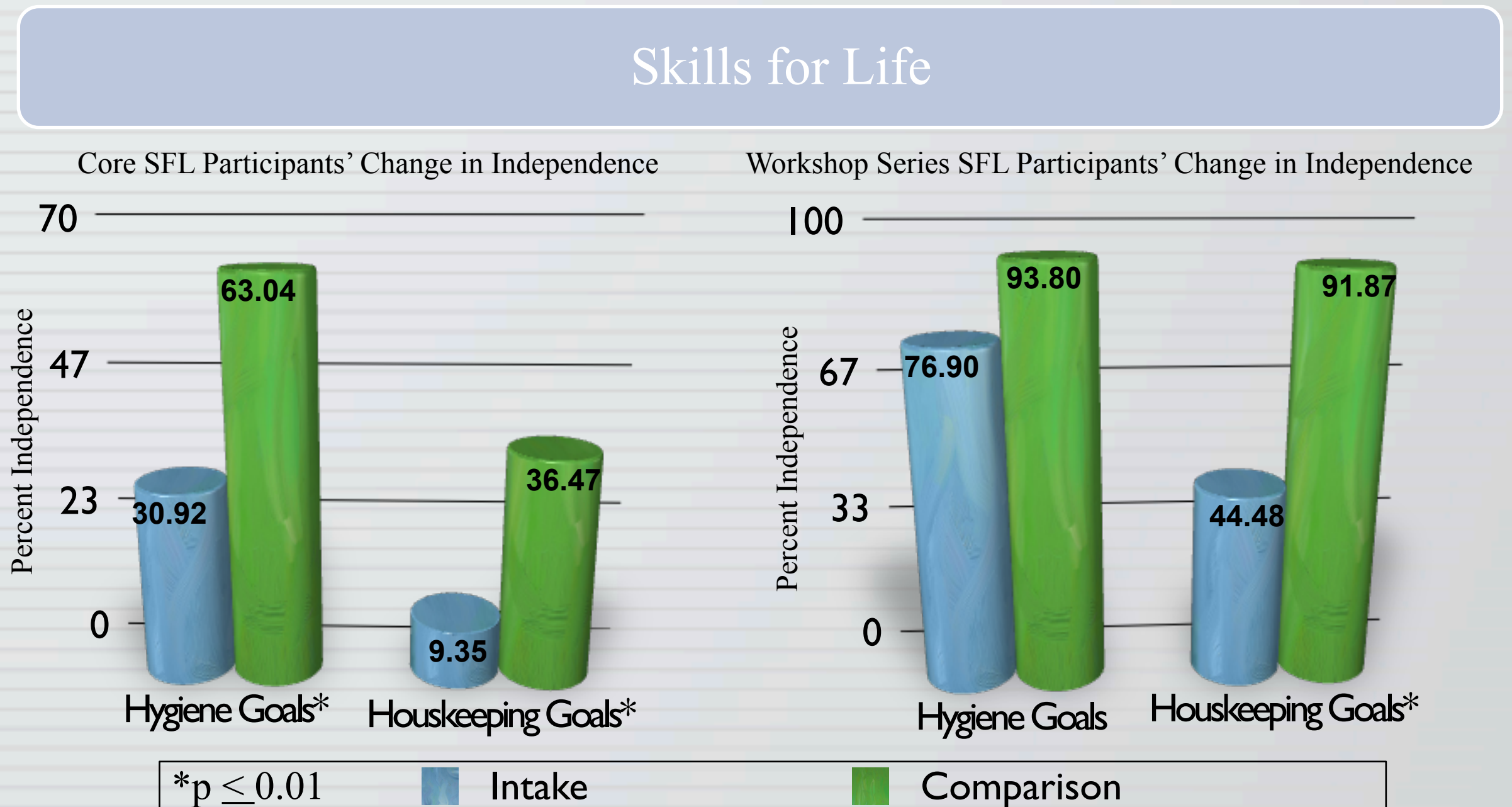
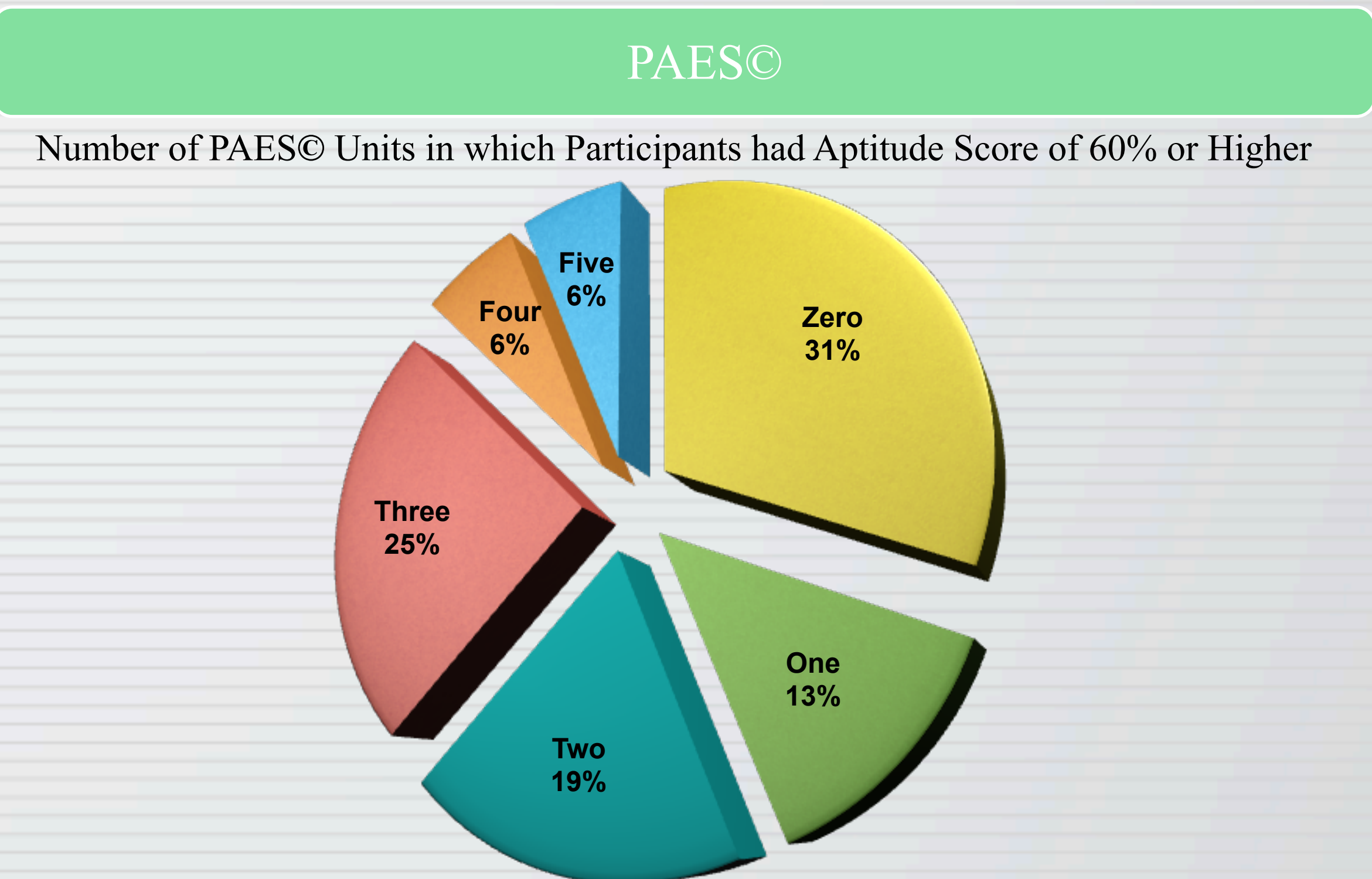
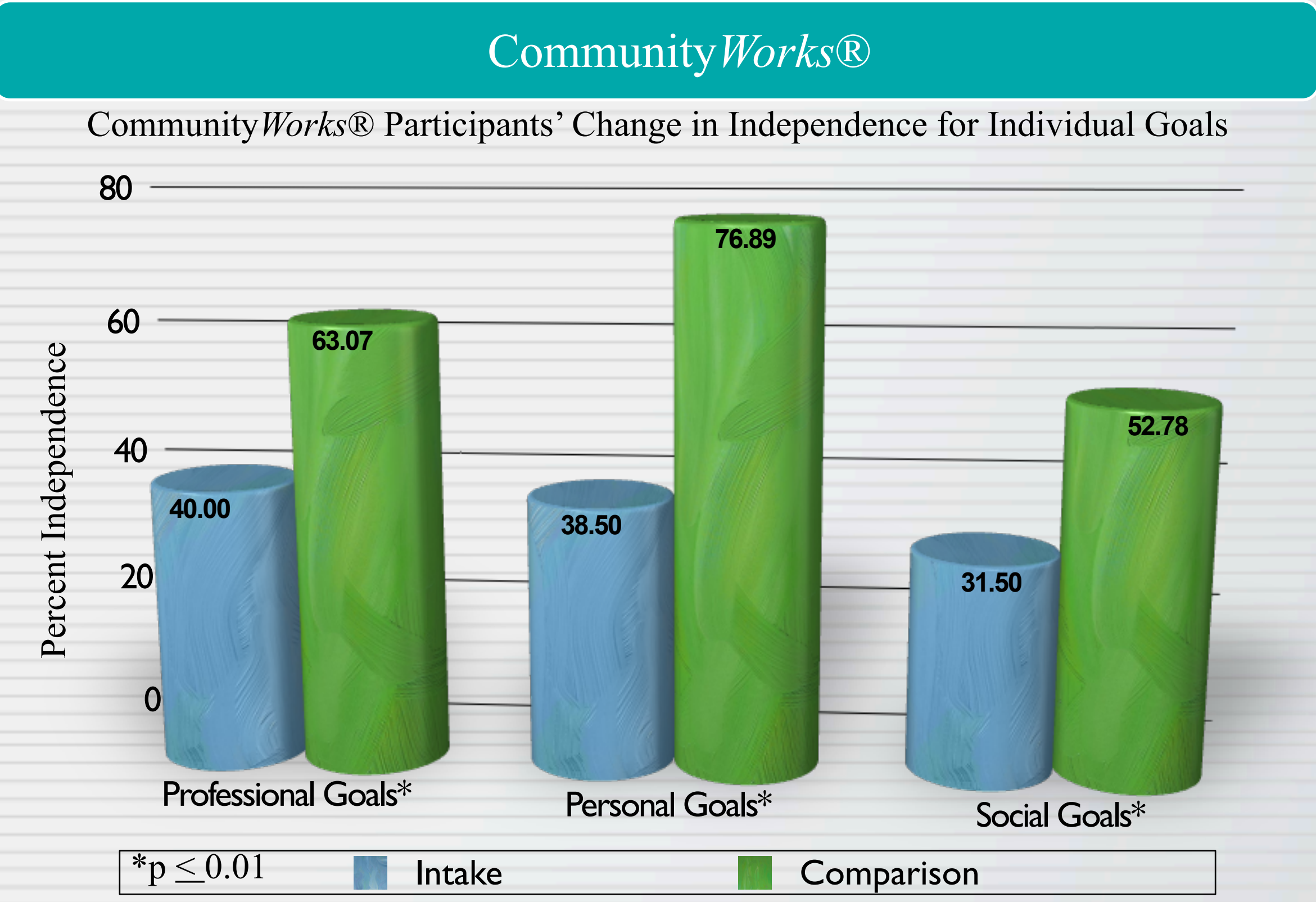
PARTICIPANTS

Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales – II Participant Scores										
	All Programs (N=52)		Community Works® (N=19)		PAES® (N=11)		Skills for Life Workshop Series (N=5)		Core Skills for Life (N=17)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Adaptive Behaviour Composite	57.23	17.03	69.00	14.19	48.91	16.86	64.80	10.76	47.24	12.44
Communication Standard Score	59.06	18.63	71.21	16.64	51.18	18.96	66.80	8.20	48.29	13.90
Daily Living Skill Standard Score	60.94	21.43	75.16	19.18	51.36	18.16	71.00	23.93	48.88	15.00
Socialization Standard Score	56.48	15.01	66.37	12.21	47.91	16.55	63.20	9.81	49.00	10.74



RESULTS

- Significant change was found for CommunityWorks® participants' individual professional, personal, and social goals, as well as their time to complete a structured task.
- 69% of PAES® participants demonstrated an aptitude of 60% or higher on at least one unit, indicating readiness for supported employment.
- Significant change was found for participants' personal independence in the Core Skills for Life program & for Skills for Life Workshop Series participants' personal independence with Housekeeping goals.
- No change was noted in participants' personal independence with Hygiene goals in the Skills for Life Workshop Series.



SURVEY RESULTS

Participants

- 80% reported making friends while participating in a program; participants were also observed exchanging phone numbers, arranging to meet outside of program hours, and requesting to become Facebook "friends".
- 68% reported they felt their job skills improved.
- 70% reported they felt more independent & 80% reported they felt more confident.

Parents

- 78% agreed or strongly agreed the program contributed to the development of their son/daughter's social skills.
- 79% agreed or strongly agreed their son/daughter felt accepted by the other program participants.
- 60% agreed or strongly agreed their son/daughter was better prepared for employment.
- 80% agreed or strongly agreed their son/daughter felt more confident.

Other

- 63% of peer mentors within the CommunityWorks® program reported their understanding of ASD was "much greater" after participating in the program.

CONCLUSIONS

- Statistically and clinically significant results, as well as positive feedback from parents and participants, suggested programming was effective in meeting identified personal and vocational needs for individuals with ASD.
- Participant and parent report, as well as clinical judgment, indicated one 11-week session was not a sufficient length of time to bring about changes necessary for independent or supported employment.
- CommunityWorks® participants' significant improvements demonstrated a need for supported work experience programs.
- While a notable percentage of PAES® participants demonstrated aptitude scores indicating readiness for supported employment, clinical judgment indicated a need for further teaching and skill practice for the majority of participants before attempting a work placement.
- Clinical observations also indicated a need for modifications to PAES® tasks and/or instructions (e.g., visual supports, modelling, repeated practice), some of which impacted aptitude scores.
- It is likely that too many skills were targeted within the Workshop Series Skills for Life 11-week session, which washed out expected statistically significant change.

For additional information please contact:

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