

Vocational Training for Adolescents & Adults 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 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 investigated adult outcomes; they highlight that adults with ASD are often un- or under-employed (Holwing 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).
- Despite well documented social, vocational, and adaptive functioning challenges of adults with ASD, there is limited information to guide intervention efforts.
- A pilot study (Booker et al., 2011) investigating the effectiveness of Pursuits programs found statistically and clinically significant gains for CommunityWorks® and PAES© participants.

METHODS

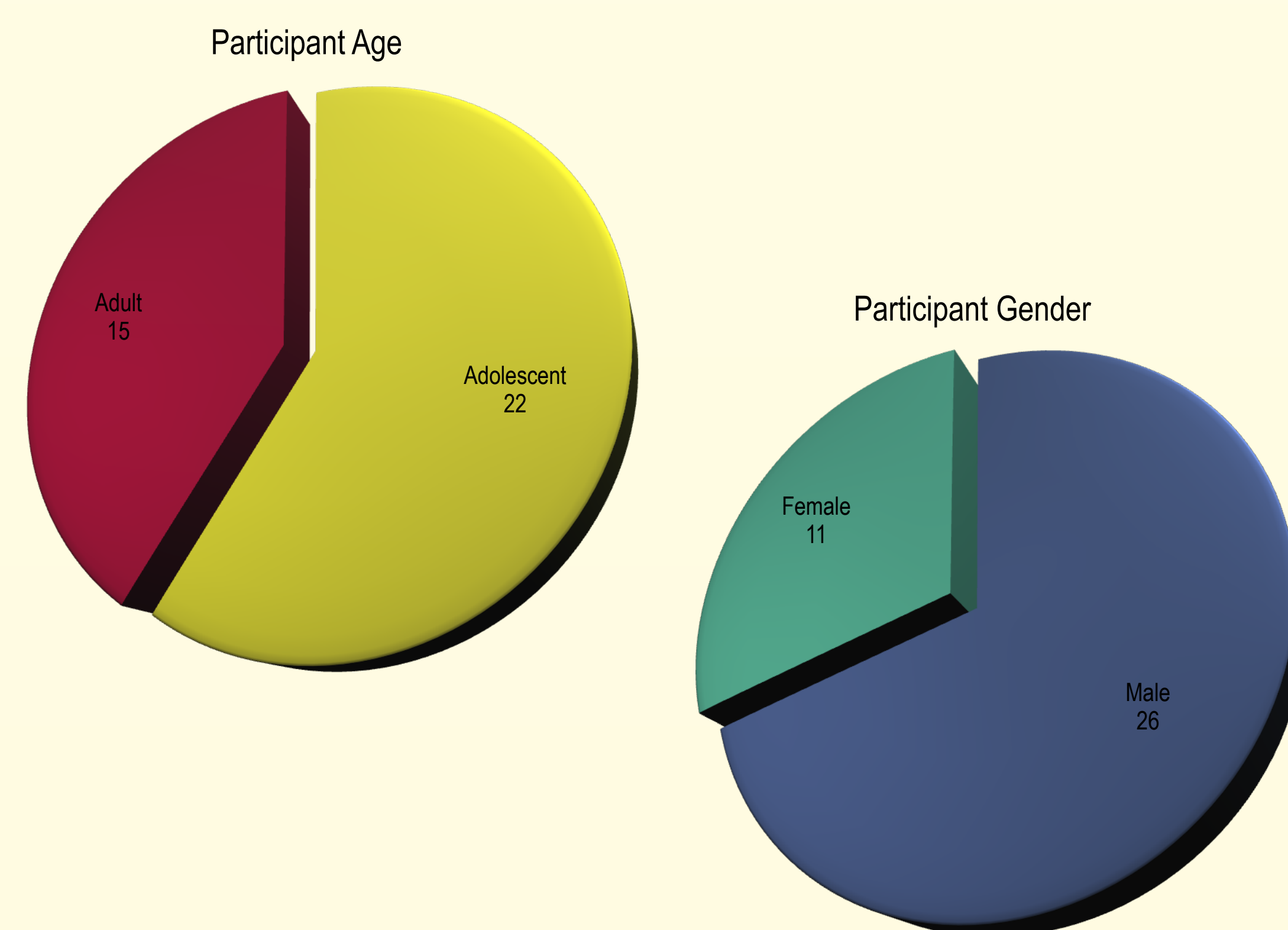
- A pre-post comparison study investigated changes in vocational skills related to participation in Pursuits intervention programs; outcome variables were specific to each program.
- Participant inclusion criteria: diagnosis of ASD; aged 13 yrs as of a session start date; presenting with deficits that 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.
- Programs were offered concurrently, with separate curriculums; participants registered for only one program per 11-week session.

PROGRAMS

- 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.
- CommunityWorks® (Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center, 2008)
Vocational and social skills training program pairing individuals with ASD and typically developing peers to perform volunteer tasks in community organizations.
- Work Experience (Society for Treatment of Autism, 2011)
Supported, real, on-site employment experience at to Calgary London Drugs locations.

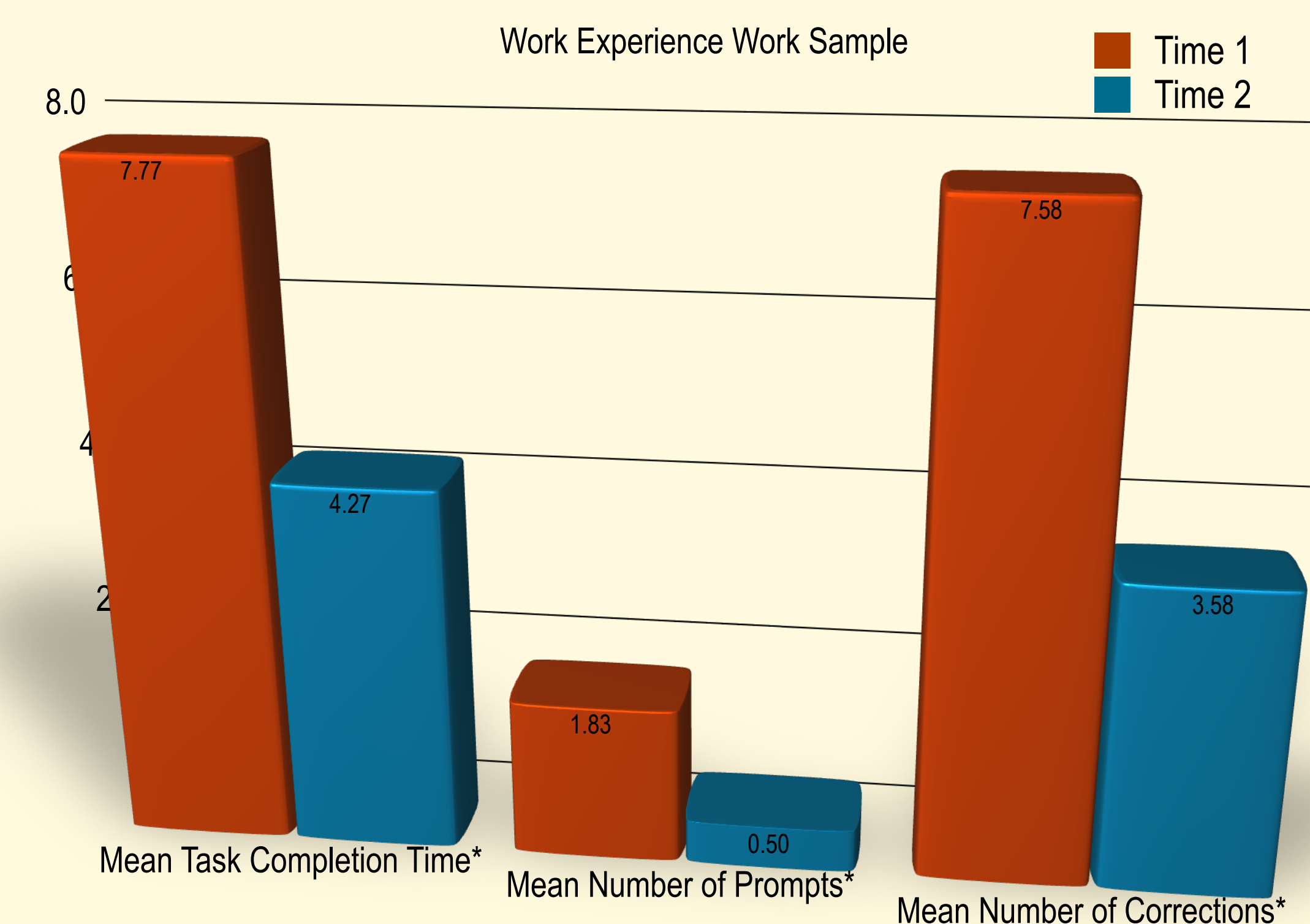
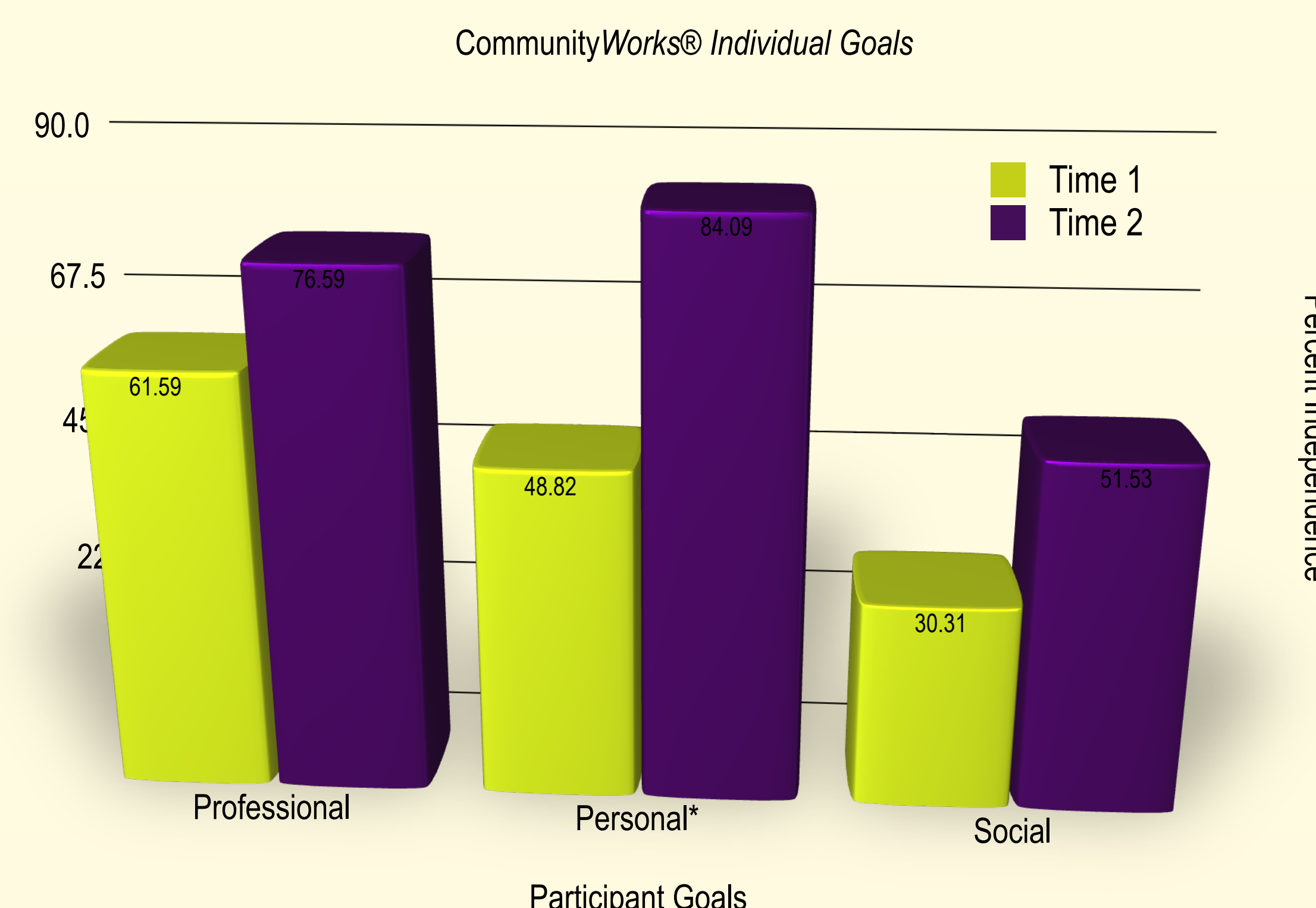
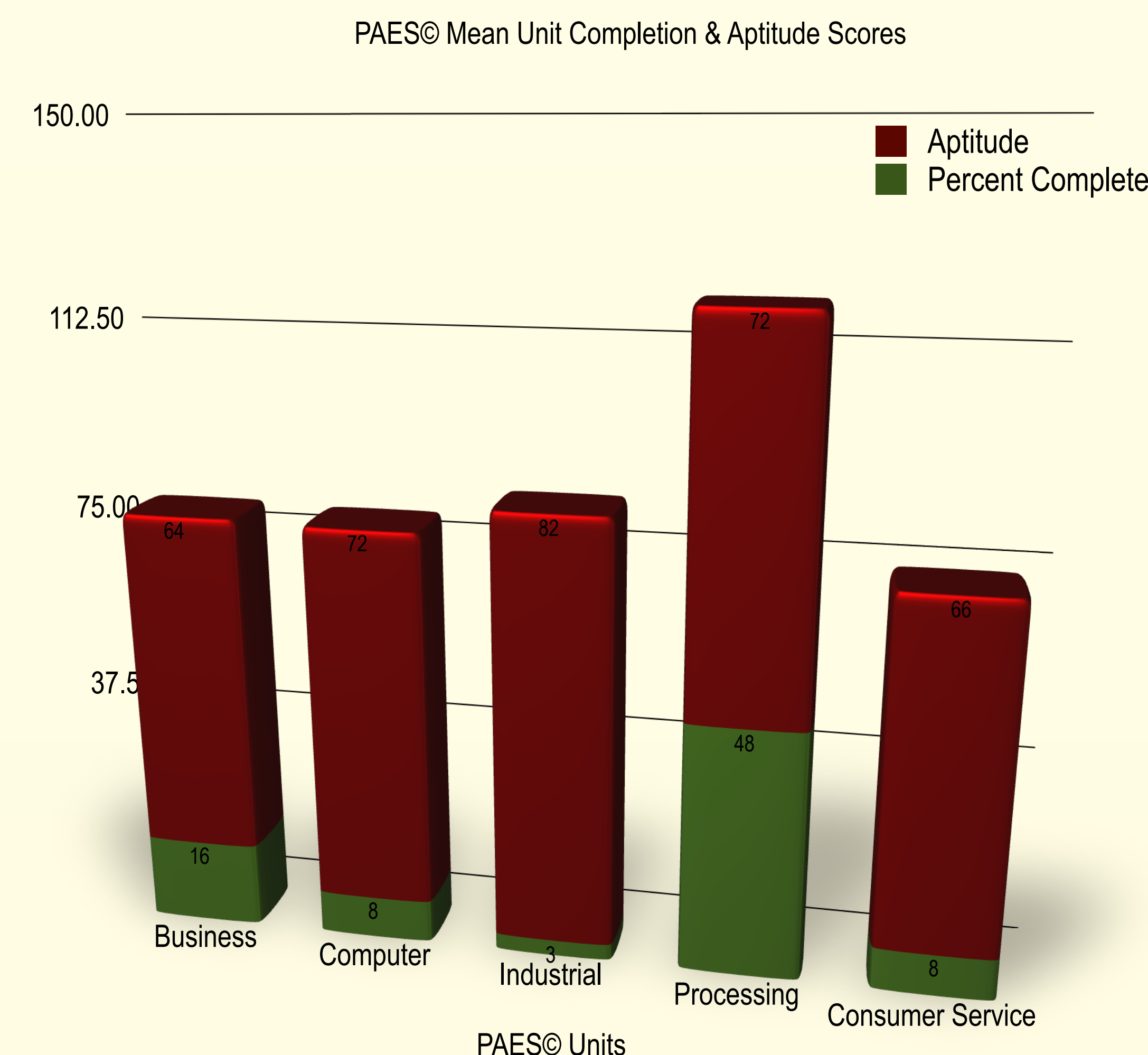
PARTICIPANTS

	PAES© (N=22)		CommunityWorks® (N=10)		Work Experience (N=4)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Adaptive Behaviour Composite	52.86	16.25	73.60	8.95	70.50	7.42
Communication Standard Score	51.00	18.22	78.00	12.17	72.25	10.05
Daily Living Skill Standard Score	57.91	17.02	79.50	10.78	72.75	11.50
Socialization Standard Score	54.55	16.53	69.50	8.32	71.75	4.50



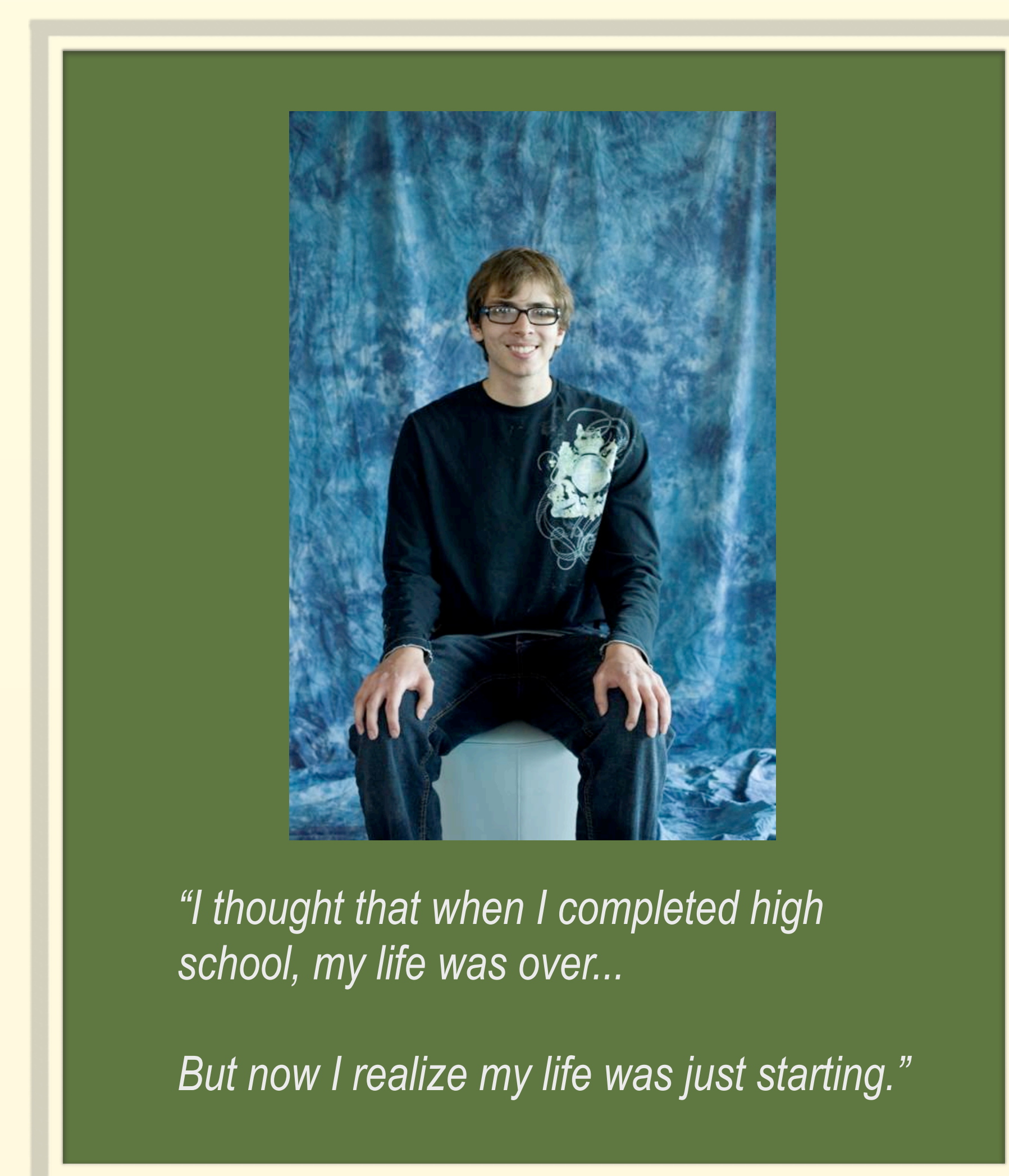
RESULTS

- Mean aptitude scores greater than 60% in all five PAES© units.
 - 86% of PAES© participants demonstrated an aptitude of 60% or higher on at least one unit; 27% of PAES© participants completed more than 75% of a unit and demonstrated an aptitude of 60% or higher on those units, indicating readiness for supported employment.
- Significant change was found for CommunityWorks® participants' individual personal goals; clinically significant gains were noted for CommunityWorks® participants' individual professional and social goals.
- Significant change was found for Work Experience participants' time to complete work tasks, the number of prompts required to complete the task, and the number of corrections required by a supervisor for task adequacy.



CONCLUSIONS

- Statistically and clinically significant results, as well as positive feedback from parents and participants, suggested programming was effective in meeting identified 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.
- Work Experience participants' significant improvements demonstrated a need for additional supported work placements.
- CommunityWorks® participants' baseline percentage of independence in professional goals was relatively high; goal selection probe data will be further evaluated to assist in selecting appropriate individual goals.
- While a notable percentage of PAES© participants demonstrated aptitude scores indicating readiness for supported employment, the majority of them had not completed more than 75% of a unit. Repeated PAES© sessions were recommended prior to attempting supported employment placements.
- 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.



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