



AUTISM & ENTREPRENEURSHIP:

AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
SELF-EMPLOYMENT AS A MODEL TO ADDRESS THE
ECONOMIC ISOLATION EXPERIENCED BY INDIVIDUALS
WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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INTRODUCTION AND AGENDA

- Defining the problem
- Project Client
- Project Objectives and Research Questions
- Methodology
- Literature Review
- Conceptual Framework
- Findings
- Discussion and Analysis
- Recommendations
- Conclusion

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

- Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are more socially isolated and economically disadvantaged than their peers with other developmental disorders and much greater than the general population (Roux, Shattuck, Rust, Rava, Anderson, 2015).
- Canadians with a disability between the ages of 25 and 64 had an employment rate of 49%, as compared to a rate of 79% for the same age grouping of their peers without a disability (Turcotte, 2014).
- Recent studies have shown that 58% of young adults with autism have been employed in the past, as compared to 74% of those with an intellectual disability and 90% of those with an emotional disturbance, speech impairment, or learning disability (Roux, et al, 2015).

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

- individuals and organizations across North America are taking a different path in creating employment options for people living with ASD: they are creating enterprises and self-employment opportunities for people with ASD.
- In Newfoundland and Labrador there is no program in place to specifically address self-employment development opportunities for people with ASD. This represents a gap in supports that the client, the Autism Society, Newfoundland and Labrador (ASNL) wishes to fill.

PROJECT CLIENT

- Autism Society, Newfoundland Labrador (ASNL)
 - Established in 1984, 4 offices across province, employs 25-30 staff, membership ~1000
- Member of Autism Canada and Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance (CASDA)
- Employment focused programs include: Transitions, Employment Works (Worktopia), Students Transitioning into Employment Program (STEP), Ready, Willing, and Able (RWA)

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To understand the benefits, consequences, and adaptations necessary to support individuals with ASD that would like to start their own small businesses and become self-employed.
- Two primary research questions and secondary questions related to each.
 1. *Is a self-employment development program an effective model to help ameliorate the economic and social isolation experienced by individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)?*
 2. *If so, can the ASNL develop a program that is effective and inclusive of those with ASD who are interested in starting their own business?*

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

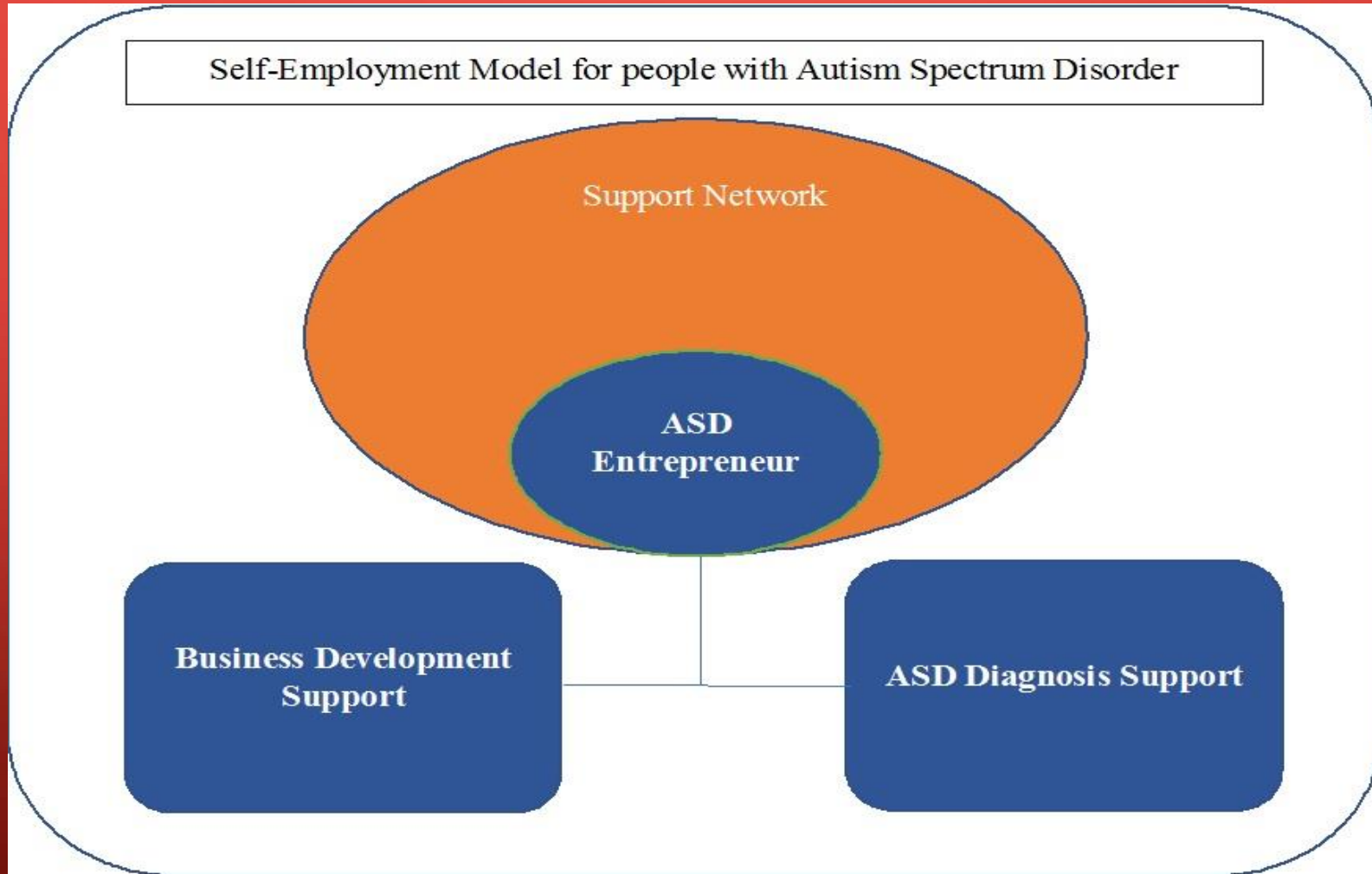
- Methodology
- Methods
 - Literature Review
 - Key Informant Interviews
 - 5 individuals with ASD, 3 individuals from self-employment programs
 - Survey
 - 5 respondents
 - Environmental Scan
 - 17 organizations profiled
- Project limitations and delimitations

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three key themes studied:

1. Transition to Adulthood
2. General Benefits of Employment
3. Entrepreneurship

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



FINDINGS

- Individual Stakeholder Interviews
 - 5 individuals with ASD – recruited with support of the ASNL
 - Adam, Bernard, Cyril, Donald, Elise
 - 3 individuals from self-employment organizations – recruited directly
 - Francis (Enactus Calgary), Grant (Autism Nova Scotia), Harold (Picasso Einstein)
- Survey
 - 5 Respondents
- Environmental Scan
 - 17 organizations – 10 for individuals with disabilities, 7 for neurotypical individuals

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Four key themes identified:

1. Entrepreneurial activity for people with ASD
2. Challenges
3. Benefits
4. Defining success and failure

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Options to consider
 - Promote already established programs for self-employment
 - Develop an adjacent program stream for self-employment
 - Develop a new self-employment program
 - Do not develop a self-employment program
- Considerations
 - Urban and Rural
 - Human and Financial Resources
 - Short-term vs long-term

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Urban (4 recommendations)
 - 1: Develop program, 2: High school outreach, 3: Self-employment event, 4: Engage other organizations
- Rural (3 recommendations)
 - 1: Develop online program, 2: Summary of online programs, 3: Video series
- General (4 recommendations)
 - 1: Resource package, 2: Business profiles, 3: Staffing complement (new vs current staff), 4: Resources suite

CONCLUSION

- Individuals with ASD often face levels of economic disadvantage and social isolation higher than their peers in the disability community, and much higher than neurotypical individuals.
- Self-employment represents an opportunity to alleviate the economic disadvantage and social isolation often felt by individuals living with ASD.
- Along with traditional employment opportunities, self-employment should be considered as a viable option for an individual to become actively engaged in their community.

THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS?