



AutismCRC

# Better Outcomes and Successful Transitions for Autism (BOOST-A): From research to practice

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The project was led by Curtin University. The project team was comprised of researchers and autistic project assistants from the School of Occupational Therapy, Social Work, and Speech Pathology, and the School of Health Promotion. The team gratefully acknowledges the support of the CRC participants' representatives in the recruitment of participants to the BOOST-A workshops and providing workshop venue facilities; and to the young people on the autism spectrum and their families and teachers who contributed to the development of the promotional and training video resources.

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## **The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC)**

The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC) is the world's first national, cooperative research effort focused on autism. Taking a whole of life approach to autism focusing on diagnosis, education and adult life, Autism CRC researchers are working with end-users to provide evidence-based outcomes, which can be translated into practical solutions for governments, service providers, education and health professionals, families and people on the autism spectrum.

Copies of this report can be downloaded from the Autism CRC website [autismcrc.com.au](http://autismcrc.com.au).

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## Background

Young people on the autism spectrum have poorer post-school employment outcomes than their peers without autism. Less than one quarter of adolescents with autism are involved in transition planning; when they are involved, it is usually not in an active role. The Better Outcomes and Successful Transitions for Autism (BOOST-A) was developed as an accessible and appropriate transition planning tool for young people on the autism spectrum and the trusted adults in their lives who assist with them in planning their future goals.

An Australia-wide trial of the BOOST-A with 94 high school students on the autism spectrum in 2016 determined the usefulness of the BOOST-A in increasing self-determination among young people to plan and prepare for life after school. Community awareness about the benefits of the BOOST-A and training prospective BOOST-A users are important first steps to increase uptake and use of the BOOST-A in the wider autistic and autism communities.

## Project objectives

This project aimed to:

1. Share information about the BOOST-A to young people on the autism spectrum and the people who support them in planning their transition to employment when they leave school; and
2. Provide training in multiple and accessible formats to potential BOOST-A users about evidence-based principles for successful transition planning, and how best to use the tool to commence and progress transition planning activities.

Two more objectives were added to the study to support the use of the BOOST-A in a non-research capacity by the wider community.

3. Develop an autism-specific career interest exploration tool as an alternative to the Career Interest Test, for use in the interests section of the BOOST-A;
4. Develop written content for the *myWAY Employability* online resource - a joint collaboration between the Autism CRC and Curtin University funded through Telstra Foundation. The content pertains to activities related to career exploration, goal setting, preparing for work

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experience, further education/training, or finding a job. *myWAY Employability* will be launched in July 2020 and will incorporate the elements of the BOOST-A transition planning tool.

## Who took part

BOOST-A training workshops (of two-hours duration) were delivered to 102 attendees in Perth and Kalgoorlie (WA), Melbourne (VIC), Sydney (NSW), and Brisbane and Mackay (QLD). Workshop participants included young people on the spectrum, families, school teachers and educational assistants, allied health professionals (i.e. occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists, and psychologists), local coordinators, work placement professionals, mentors, and supporters in the autism community.

Three school students on the autism spectrum (Liam, Ethan, and Phoebe) who had been participants in the evaluation of the BOOST-A assisted in the development of the training and promotional audio-visual materials. Together with their parent and/or school teacher, they shared their experiences of transition planning using the BOOST-A and some of the challenges they faced in planning for their lives after school.

We developed the Autism-Career Explorer (A-CE) as a replacement for the Career Interest Test in the BOOST-A. As part of this development process we consulted with and received feedback on our draft versions from five young people on the spectrum to ensure the accessibility and clarity of the language and format of the tool.

## How we did the research

BOOST-A training workshops (of two-hours duration) were delivered to 102 attendees in Perth and Kalgoorlie (WA), Melbourne (VIC), Sydney (NSW), and Brisbane and Mackay (QLD). Workshop participants included adolescents on the spectrum, families of young people on the spectrum, school teachers and educational assistants, allied health professionals (i.e. occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists, and psychologists), local coordinators, work placement professionals, mentors, and supporters in the autism community.

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## Findings

Nearly all attendees of the BOOST-A training workshops reported they had increased their knowledge and confidence to support an adolescent on the spectrum in their transition planning as a result of attending the workshops and learning about the five employability principles underpinning the BOOST-A. There was overwhelming support for an autism-specific tool like the BOOST-A to be available to the wider community. Suggestions to improve the BOOST-A were minor and related to design principles that allowed for flexibility in selecting job category preferences (and were subsequently integrated into the design of the A-CE).

We have developed the Autism- Career Explore (A-CE) as an autism-specific tool for autistic individuals to consider their preferences for type of jobs across a wide range of categories. The A-CE will be incorporated into the revised version of the BOOST-A and will be available on the *myWAY Employability* website. Five young people on the spectrum were involved in early stages of design and user-testing to provide feedback. The young people agreed the A-CE was written in language they could understand, was of an appropriate length, and was motivating to complete. They reported that the flexible format we developed for them to rate their preferences across different types of job categories was appealing.

Information articles and AV resources to guide various stages of transition planning have been developed for the *myWAY Employability* website. Topics include planning and attending a work experience, disclosure in the workplace, getting around and workplace communication. All resources were co-designed and co-produced with young people on the autism spectrum.

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## Next steps

The research version of the BOOST-A has been revised based on feedback from participants in our project. The new version will be embedded into the career exploration and goal setting components of *myWAY Employability* that is available from [www.mywayemployability.com.au](http://www.mywayemployability.com.au). *myWAY Employability* is freely available for use to support young people on the autism spectrum in all stages of their transition planning.

More information about the BOOST-A and resources to apply the employability principles into practice in schools is also available in the Transition Planning links on inclusionED ([www.inclusioned.edu.au](http://www.inclusioned.edu.au)).



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## Our values



### Inclusion

Working together with those with the lived experience of autism in all we do



### Innovation

New solutions for long term challenges



### Independence

Guided by evidence based research, integrity and peer review



### Cooperation

Bringing benefits to our partners; capturing opportunities they cannot capture alone



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