Work-Related Soft Skills for Young Adults with Disabilities

National Symposium on Rehabilitation Counseling

Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment (VRTAC-QE)
Presenters

Janice Oursler, Ph.D., CRC
Weili Lu, Ph.D., CRC
Samantha Herrick, Ph.D., CRC
John Beninato, M.S., CRC

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Counseling Professions
Learning Outcomes

• Discuss the importance of soft skills for success and satisfaction in employment for individuals with disabilities.
• Identify component parts of a skill and how to subdivide a skill into teachable steps.
• Explain how curriculum-based groups can assist in helping individuals with disabilities to develop soft skills for work.
• Methods used to study the soft skills groups
• Findings of the study
• Future steps
YOUTH AND EMPLOYMENT
# Youth Employment Rates

## Disability Employment Statistics

### 2022 Youth Labor Force Participation Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>No Disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 16 to 19</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 20 to 24</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
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</table>

### 2022 Youth Unemployment Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>No Disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 16 to 19</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 20 to 24</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

- Emphasizes providing vocational rehabilitation services to youth and students with disabilities [WIOA, section 7(37) and § 361.5(c)(51)].

- Requires state VR agencies set aside at least 15% of Federal VR program funds to provide pre-employment transition services to assist in transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education programs and/or getting and keeping competitive integrated employment.
Soft Skills Vs. Hard Skills

“We like to think of technical or “hard” skills, soft skills are not about the knowledge you possess but rather behaviors you display in different situations.”

What Are Soft Skills? (Definition, Examples and Resume Tips)

• Soft skills are "people" skills and are needed on all jobs.
• Hard skills are usually job-specific.

Soft Skills: Practicing Early and Often
Soft Skills and Work

• “Importance of these soft skills is often undervalued, and there is far less training provided for them than hard skills. For some reason, organizations seem to expect people know how to behave on the job.”

Why Soft Skills Matter

Employers think state and local education systems should play a major role in training and preparing prospective employees with soft skills.

South Dakota Industry Leaders' Input: Summer 2019 Report
What Gets in the Way

Lack of knowledge about:
• Self and skills
• Employer requirements

Lack of:
• Employment experience
• Experience in job interviewing
• Limited soft skills
Study Focus

- Examine the effectiveness and feasibility of an employment-related soft skills development program ("Soft Skills at Work") for young adults with disabilities

- Intervention based upon the Direct Skills Teaching approach (DST) developed by Cohen, Danley & Nemec, (1985)

- Funding Source: Dean’s Grant
  Rutgers School of Health Professions
TEACHING SOFT SKILLS

BACKGROUND
Is It A Skill?

• Commonly cited “soft skills”
  – Communication
  – Team work
  – Positive attitude
  – Work ethic
  – Critical thinking

Top Soft Skills Employers Value With Examples
What is a Skill?

Is It A Skill? (Not)

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Positive attitude
- Work ethic
- Critical thinking
Basic Concepts

• Behavioral: Must be able to “see” the skill
• Skill subdivided into maximum of four behaviors or steps
• Infusion of “body of knowledge”
• **Critical skill:** Intense focus on one skill ONLY with outcome of behavioral change
• A skill that, if learned and used, will make the difference in getting and keeping the desired role in the desired environment
Soft Skills Training: What We Did
Curriculum for Four Skills

- Presenting Qualifications
- Conversing with Others
- Asking for Help
- Responding to Feedback
The Curriculum

- Preplanned written curriculum
- Four sessions – one hour minimum
- Self-contained with all directions and forms for exercises
- Does NOT require special leader preparation
- Curriculum MUST be followed
The Content Outline

• One page that summarizes the skill
• Guide to planning skill to be taught
• Contains 5 elements:
  – Skill name
  – Definition
  – Benefit
  – List of key behaviors
  – Performance conditions
• Often before and after
**Presenting Qualifications: Content Outline**

**Skill:** Presenting Qualifications

**Definition:** Presenting qualifications means explaining to an interviewer the reasons the organization should hire you.

**Benefit:** Presenting qualifications on an interview provides you with a better opportunity to be chosen for the position.

**Behaviors:**
1. Describing major accomplishments from work history
2. Identifying key Self-management and Transferable skills
3. Preparing for the interview
4. Presenting your qualifications

**Condition:** When you are called to go for a job interview
Conversing with Others: Content Outline

- **Skill:** Conversing with others

- **Definition:** Conversing with others means engaging in a verbal, reciprocal exchange of thoughts and ideas with other individuals.

- **Benefit:** Conversing with others helps you to socialize with peers.

- **Behaviors:**
  - Choosing topics for conversation
  - Demonstrating interest in what others are saying
  - Changing a topic
  - Concluding a conversation

- **Performance Condition:** When you are in a social situation with peers such as the cafeteria at work during lunchtime.
Asking for Help: Content Outline

- **Skill:** Asking for Help
- **Definition:** Asking for help means making a request to others to assist you.
- **Benefit:** Asking for help makes others aware of your needs and preferences for assistance.
- **Behaviors:**
  - Evaluating the Situation
  - Identifying Methods to Get Assistance
  - Selecting a Person to Ask
  - Presenting Your Request
- **Performance Condition:** When you have needs or preferences at work or in other social situations where you will need help from others to address your needs or preferences.
Responding to Feedback: Content Outline

- **Skill**: Responding to Feedback
- **Definition**: Responding to Feedback means discussing with your supervisor your strengths and areas for improvement on your job.
- **Benefit**: Responding to feedback helps you (and your supervisor) to learn more about what you are doing well on the job and areas where you can improve and how you might do that.
- **Behaviors**:
  - Identifying feedback occasions
  - Clarifying feedback information
  - Providing feedback on feedback
  - Following up on feedback
- **Performance Condition**: When you and your supervisor talk about how you are doing on the job.
Structured Teaching: ROPES Strategy

- **Review:** Learner's knowledge and prior experience with the skill.

- **Overview:** Introduce elements of content outline: Name of Skill, Definition, Key Behaviors, Benefits, Performance Condition. Also relationship to ORG.

- **Presentation:** Lecture points, demonstrations of skill behavior

- **Exercises:** Practice component behaviors and entire skill.

- **Summary:** Discuss understanding of skill and its performance, plan to use the skill in the target environment.

- Each group session follows this format. Also consider logistics such as time, location, materials needed.

Before Starting

• IRB approval
• Agency sites
• Recruiting participants
• Obtaining consents
• Selecting group leaders
• Pre-group measures completed
Eligibility Requirements

• VR services within past 24 months
• Primary disability: psychiatric disorder, learning disorder, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), visual impairment, or physical disability
• No hospitalizations or suicide attempts within the past two months before enrollment
• Able to communicate in English
• 18 to 35 years old (Average age was 25)
• Lack knowledge of and express interest in improving work related soft skills.
Intervention

• Four groups
• Each group focused on one skill
• Each group: 4 sessions
• Each session: 60-75 minutes
• Closed group
• Group size: 8-10 maximum
• Entire intervention: 16 sessions
Measures Used

• Brief Quality of Life Interview
• Working Alliance Inventory - Short Form
• Work-related Self-efficacy Scale
• Job Related Social Skills Checklist
• Needs Assessment of Job Related Social Skills
• Participant Satisfaction Survey
## Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic/Clinical Characteristics</th>
<th>Participants (N = 33)</th>
<th>Completers* (n = 24)</th>
<th>Non-Completers (n = 9)</th>
<th>χ²/t ( p )</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<td>4 (44.4)</td>
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<td>1 (4.2)</td>
<td>0 (0.0) 24.11</td>
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<td><strong>Age (M +/- SD)</strong></td>
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<td>26.21 +/- 4.37</td>
<td>+/-4.01</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>14 (58.3)</td>
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## Diagnosis

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Demographic/Clinical Characteristics</th>
<th>Participants (N =33)</th>
<th>Completers* (n =24)</th>
<th>Non-Completers (n=9)</th>
<th>( \chi^2/t )</th>
<th>p</th>
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<td><strong>Psychiatric Diagnoses</strong></td>
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<td>7 (29.4)</td>
<td>3 (33.3)</td>
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<td><strong>Age of First Hospitalization (M +/- SD)</strong></td>
<td>18.33 +/- 4.17</td>
<td>19.58 +/- 4.01</td>
<td>15.83 +/- 3.55</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.18</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total # of Hospitalizations (M +/- SD)</strong></td>
<td>4.09 +/- 9.3</td>
<td>3.96 +/- 10.28</td>
<td>4.44 +/- 6.50</td>
<td>12.33</td>
<td>0.34</td>
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<td><strong>Disability Diagnosis</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Employment Status</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Never Employed</td>
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<td>3 (12.5)</td>
<td>1 (11.1)</td>
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<td>0.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
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<td>Sheltered Workshop</td>
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<td>Competitively</td>
<td>7 (21.2)</td>
<td>6 (25.0)</td>
<td>1 (11.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Leading the Group

• No specific training needed to lead group
• Curriculum has all directions and handouts
• Curriculum must be followed
• Teaching based on ROPES
• Each skill has 4 steps: One session on each step
Before Each Group

- Review lesson plan for the session
- Photocopy handouts and prepare other materials
- Everything is written down: Need a flip chart or blackboard for each session
RESULTS
QUANTITATIVE OUTCOMES
## WSS and WAI: Pre/Post

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t (compared with BL)</th>
<th>p (one-sided)</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Work-related Self-efficacy Scale (WSS)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Baseline (BL)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>74.40</td>
<td>18.63</td>
<td>-3.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.73</td>
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<td>Post-Tx</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>82.93</td>
<td>15.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 mos. f/u</td>
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<td>79.90</td>
<td>16.03</td>
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<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.17</td>
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<td><strong>Working Alliance Inventory (WAI)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Baseline (BL)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>-1.53</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.32</td>
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<td>0.85</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 mos. f/u</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## Job Related Needs/Social Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t (compared with BL)</th>
<th>p (one-sided)</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
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<tr>
<td>Needs Assessment of Job-Related Social Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baseline (BL)</td>
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<td>3.27</td>
<td>0.59</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-Tx</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>-1.13</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.24</td>
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<td>6 mos. f/u</td>
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<td>3.32</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.17</td>
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<td>Job Related Social Skills Checklist</td>
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<td>Baseline (BL)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9.39</td>
<td>1.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-Tx</td>
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<td>9.87</td>
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<td>10.17</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>-0.78</td>
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# Wages and Quality of Life

<table>
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<th>N</th>
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<th>p (one-sided)</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
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<td><strong>Weekly Earned Wages (Competitive)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Baseline (BL)</td>
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<td>57.50</td>
<td>85.20</td>
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<td>0.41</td>
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<td>Post-Tx</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>145.83</td>
<td>164.45</td>
<td>-1.01</td>
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<td>6 mos. f/u</td>
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<td>162.00</td>
<td>134.52</td>
<td>-2.01</td>
<td>0.07</td>
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<td><strong>Brief Quality of Life</strong></td>
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<td>QLGLS (General quality of life)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baseline (BL)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>1.34</td>
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<td>0.11</td>
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<td>Post-Tx</td>
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<td>5.31</td>
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<td>-0.53</td>
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<td>6 mos. f/u</td>
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<td>5.16</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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QUALITATIVE OUTCOMES
Assessing Satisfaction

All modules had high satisfaction on:

• Perceived quality of the group
• Instructor’s knowledge
• Helpfulness of the information
• If the group held their interest
• Number of sessions
• If they would recommend the group to a friend
• Perceived confidence in utilizing the skill learned in the group
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Item (agree/strongly agree)</th>
<th>Responding to Feedback (n, %)</th>
<th>Conversing with Others (n, %)</th>
<th>Presenting Qualifications (n, %)</th>
<th>Asking for Help (n, %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The overall quality of the group was good/excellent</td>
<td>19 (90.5)</td>
<td>21 (100)</td>
<td>16 (94.1)</td>
<td>21 (95.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor's knowledge was good/excellent</td>
<td>20 (95.2)</td>
<td>20 (95.2)</td>
<td>16 (94.1)</td>
<td>21 (95.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think the information I received will be helpful to me on the job</td>
<td>19 (90.5)</td>
<td>19 (90.5)</td>
<td>15 (88.2)</td>
<td>21 (95.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group held my interest</td>
<td>20 (95.3)</td>
<td>20 (95.3)</td>
<td>16 (94.1)</td>
<td>19 (86.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of sessions was about right</td>
<td>19 (90.5)</td>
<td>17 (81.0)</td>
<td>16 (94.1)</td>
<td>21 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel confident that I can use the skill I learned in the group</td>
<td>20 (95.3)</td>
<td>19 (90.5)</td>
<td>16 (94.1)</td>
<td>22 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend this group to a friend</td>
<td>19 (90.5)</td>
<td>18 (85.7)</td>
<td>16 (94.1)</td>
<td>20 (90.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outcomes Summary

- Work-related soft skills training curricula based on the DST approach can be effectively implemented among a diverse sample of people who are utilizing VR services.

- Participants expressed high satisfaction with all four modules.

- Work-related Self-Efficacy and Job-related Social Skills measures increased significantly from baseline to post-intervention.

- However, treatment gains were not maintained at the six-month follow-up.
Study Limitations

• No control group

• No ability to assess use of the soft skills in a work environment

• No perspectives of others about participant increased soft skills knowledge/skill

• Participants lacked choice about completing all four curricula
THE FUTURE
What We Learned: Summary

• A small group intervention to teach work-related soft skills to prepare young adults with disabilities for employment is feasible and acceptable

• Apparent increase in job seeking behavior

• Longer term follow-up needed
Future Development

• Develop more curriculum modules addressing critical soft skills

• Prepare curriculum modules for online delivery

• Need to assess effectiveness with various populations

• Need to assess curriculum effectiveness when agency staff are group leaders
Implementing at an Agency

• Ongoing need for basic skills at a behavioral level to develop “soft skills” to get and keep employment

• Assess soft skills as part of the job placement process or related to job difficulties or loss

• Select curriculum that addresses the person’s needs: not necessary to teach all modules

• Short-term approach

• Curriculum can be used individual
Differences from Other Approaches

• Based on a written curriculum

• Intense focus on one critical skill

• Behavioral skill definition with 3 or 4 steps

• Considers before, during and after of skill

• Skill taught in the context of a goal (ORG) the person can state and wants
More Differences

• Systematic teaching plan: ROPES

• Includes both behavior and body of knowledge to “inform” behavior

• Everything written down

• Intentional repetition in approach

• Has behavioral outcomes
Publications

Lu, W., Oursler, J., Herrick, S., Socha, C., Zaher, A., Harris, K., & Beninato, J. (2022). A study of work-related interview skills training for people with visual impairments, *Journal Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, 53(2). DOI: 10.1891/JARC-D-20-00041 (*Oursler and Lu were joint first authors.*)


Publications (2)


Publications (3)


Lu, W., Oursler, J., Herrick, S., Durante, A., Socha, C., & Crisafulli, G. (2020). Direct skills teaching of work-related conversational skills for individuals with disabilities. Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin, 63(4), 235–244. (*Oursler and Lu were joint first authors.) http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0034355219878501

Under Review

Manuscripts Under Review (2023)


Federal Grant Award

• National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research

• September, 2022 to 2025; 90IFRE0071

• Internet Assisted Career-Oriented Soft-skills Training (iCareer) for Transition Age Youth with Mental Health Conditions: A Randomized Controlled Trial, $600,000.00
Our Crew

• Janice Oursler, Ph.D.
• Weili Lu, Ph.D.
• Samantha Herrick, Ph.D.
• John Beninato
• Sharon Gbadamosi, M.S.
• Elizabeth Meyers, M.S.
• Crystal Socha, M.S.
• Carolyn Bazan
Additional Information

Janice Oursler, Ph.D., CRC, Program Director
ourslejd@shp.rutgers.edu

Weili Lu, Ph.D., CRC
luwe1@shp.rutgers.edu

Samantha Herrick, Ph.D., CRC
samantha.herrick@rutgers.edu
Thank you for attending this workshop!