



## ***The Uniquely Abled Academy Replication Guide***

### ***Element 0 – The UAA Replication Guide***

#### **Exhibit 0.1 - The Ten Critical Elements of a Successful Vocational Education Program for the Uniquely Abled**

##### **Why Uniquely Abled Academies are so Successful**

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After only one semester of training, The Uniquely Abled Academy (UAA) vocational education program has an almost 100% placement rate of its graduates into career jobs. This unique success is due to UAAs including all ten elements required in a successful vocational education program for the uniquely abled:

- Element 1: Match the Individual to the Job
- Element 2: Establish and Manage the Training Program
- Element 3: Marketing, Recruiting, Selecting, and Onboarding Trainees
- Element 4: Provide a Vocational Training Curriculum
- Element 5: Provide a Job Readiness Curriculum
- Element 6: Provide Resources for Instructors
- Element 7: Provide Job Development
- Element 8: Support Employment
- Element 9: Provide External Support Systems
- Element 10: Provide Funding

It is important to note that, in most geographic areas, each of these elements is addressed by at least one organization. However, there are so few successful (i.e., high career placement rate) programs for autistic individuals because almost no one organization offers them all. And, where programs could benefit from organizations partnering to provide differing functions, collaboration is missing.

Uniquely Abled Academies provide a structure that enables multiple organizations to partner to seamlessly deliver all 10 elements in a single program.

This document serves as only a high-level summary of how we address these 10 elements. The Uniquely Abled Project provides extensive resources for



establishing and managing a UAA Training programs, most of which are available to approved UAAs for free on the UAP website.

To explore establishing a UAA in your area, contact The Uniquely Abled Project at [info@UniquelyAbledProject.org](mailto:info@UniquelyAbledProject.org).

### **Element 1: Match the Individual to the Job**

17% of the US population, approximately 60 million people, are classified as disabled. Among this population, there is a 60-90% under- and unemployment rate.

A problem of this magnitude will not and has not been solved with charity or government grants. A sustainable solution that can work for 60 million people must simultaneously solve a problem for businesses.

The #1 problem for business is access to a skilled workforce. Skilled workers aren't just able to perform a particular task, like putting two parts together. The term skilled also includes abilities, such as the ability to tolerate high repetition and yet maintain detailed focus. Such abilities are often the critical aspect to success in a job.

These two problems are potential solutions for each other. What is in the way of them being implemented as such?

Words create worlds. Historically, what world has been created, what comes to mind, when we say someone is disabled?

- What are they missing?
- What can't they do?
- What compromises am I going to have to make to employ them?
- What is the cost?
- Is the benefit worth the cost?

An insight we had is that when one ability is diminished, the body makes up for it by causing other abilities to be extraordinary (unique abilities). For example, people with diminished vision often have extraordinary senses of touch and hearing.

What world is created, what comes to mind, when we say someone is uniquely abled?

- What are they really good at?
- How might their unique abilities help me?
- What new things might be accomplished utilizing their unique abilities?



Then the question to ask is, “What job could use this individual’s unique abilities?” For example, being a masseuse for someone who has diminished vision and consequently heightened senses of touch and hearing.

So the first element of a successful vocational education program for the uniquely abled includes:

- Shifting the perception of disability to include these unique abilities and extraordinary potential.
- Match the unique abilities of a population of individuals with the needs of a career job.

There is a high unfulfilled demand for skilled workers. For example, current UAAs focus on training individuals with level 1 autism to be CNC (computer numerical controlled) manufacturing machine operators, a well-paid job where there is a very high shortage. The unique abilities of many level 1 autistic individuals are a perfect match for a CNC machinist.

- Repetitive tolerant and detail focused.
- Able to focus for long time periods.
- Often high intelligence.
- Often mechanically inclined.
- Focused on accuracy, able to detect when something isn’t right.
- Likes working alone.
- Follows rules.
- Does what they say they will do.
- Dislikes transitions to a different company.
- Very appreciative of having a job.

This element could be even better served by the creation of tools for identifying the unique abilities of an individual and tools for identifying a job that matches a given set of abilities

## **Element 2: Establish and Manage the Training Program**

After selecting a career job in demand and identifying a population whose abilities match the needs of that job, the next steps in establishing a vocational education program for the uniquely abled are to:

- Identify and recruit a Host Institution.
- Validate that there is a sufficient demand for the selected job
- Validate that there is a sufficient supply of the selected population of uniquely abled individuals



For example, a CNC machine operator training program requires expensive equipment and skilled instructors. Thus, a UAA for this job is typically hosted by a community college that is already providing such training. There are numerous benefits to the college for being a Host School:

- New source of students and revenue
- Supports the funding agencies desire that a community college program be vocationally oriented and serve marginalized populations.
- Enhances public image.
- Promotes good relationship with local manufacturers and funding sources.

Once these steps have been accomplished, the next step is to form a UAA Project Team made up of organizations that will partner to produce all 10 elements. We recommend that the UAA Project Team be made up of 10 groups, each focused on delivering one of the 10 elements. In our experience, it typically takes at least 6 months from the first meeting of the UAA Project Team to the first class.

In addition to the ten groups, we have found that it is useful to have someone act as a Program Coordinator. This person serves as the contact for those interested in finding out about the training program; they ensure there is a match of the individual and the program, ensure that all the paperwork is handled, and typically build personal relationships with the trainees so they can handle any issues that might arise (such as a trainee being absent).

Early in the process of establishing a UAA, the Project Team should decide the length of the program. UAAs are typically one college semester, running an average of 13-16 weeks. To get the trainees familiar with working in an industrial environment, the trainees attend full-time, e.g., 9AM – 4PM four or five days a week.

In addition to many relevant documents, the UAP provides a UAA Replication Guide to UAAs that are in formation.

### **Element 3: Marketing, Recruiting, Selecting, and Onboarding Trainees**

It is crucial to establish a process that informs potential trainees about the program, invites them to apply for the program, and ensures that accepted applicants are a good match for the training program as well as the target job.

Marketing channels can include social media, news outlets (radio, TV, and newspapers), non-profit societies, government agencies, and parent groups.



UAAs typically hold open houses where the program is described and ideally, the potential trainees have an opportunity to see and experience the job, e.g., to see a CNC machine operate.

It is important to ensure that the potential trainee is applying to the program because they want to, not pressured by others; it is also important to determine if their interests and skills are a match to the target job. For example, when selecting trainees for a CNC operator job, we recommend questions about the games they like to play, such as Legos, to determine if they like to manipulate physical things with their hands.

We also recommend the use of Work Keys or something similar to validate the potential trainee has basic competence in English, math, and reading comprehension.

Finally, there is an interview, generally with no more than 4 interviewers, to get a good sense of the applicant as a person and to determine if they will be able to operate in an educational and an industrial environment.

#### **Element 4: Provide a Vocational Training Curriculum**

It is easiest if a vocational education program for the uniquely abled is based on an existing, successful vocational curriculum.

UAAs typically include the same class content as the first four or so courses for learning how to be a CNC machinist, e.g., safety, measurement and reading blueprints, operating a manual machine, and operating a CNC machine. However, the timing of the classes is different than the typical college CNC educational program because the UAA is full-time. For example, the entire safety course might be taught the first week.

#### **Element 5: Provide a Job Readiness Curriculum**

Uniquely abled populations often require training beyond technical vocational training. For example, autistic individuals may need job readiness (“soft skills”) training.

Successful soft skills training includes social or psychological topics as well as industrially relevant topics, such as how to receive feedback and what to do if you see a co-worker violating a rule.



The UAP provides the 10-lesson 40-hour *Time to Shine Job Readiness Curriculum* for free to all UAAs training those with level 1 autism to be CNC machine operators. It includes an Instructor Workbook, a Student Workbook, and numerous videos illustrating its topics. It includes the following:

- Self-discovery: Know Yourself Love Yourself, Be Yourself
- Be Your Best Self & Become a Self-Advocate
- Improve social-communication skills to integrate successfully in an inclusive workplace.
- Understand how to become a good friend and team member, in the UAA and in a future job.
- Teamwork and Tricky Situations at Work
- Asking for Help and Problem Solving
- Your Job Search: Finding the Right Fit
- Improving your interviewing skills.
- Improving your pre-hire interview performance.
- Transitioning: Next Steps In Your CNC Career

### **Element 6: Provide Resources for Instructors**

Instructors frequently need support on how to teach a particular uniquely abled population.

The UAP provides a video and documentation to support CNC instructors teaching autistic populations. For example, because autistic individuals typically interpret statements literally, we encourage instructors to minimize or eliminate the use of idioms such as “You need to connect the dots” or “Cat got your tongue?” or “You can knock off at 3 today.” Instead, instructors should use precise language such as, “You can leave work at 3 o’clock today.”

### **Element 7: Provide Job Development**

Uniquely abled individuals may need additional support in finding and securing a job. Thus, a successful vocational education program for the uniquely abled must provide support for job search and placement.

This role is often played by non-profit social service organizations and by job placement government agencies. A common issue is that job developers within these organizations and agencies typically have a social work background rather than a business background. This contributes to the frequency with which autistic individuals are placed in (non-career) retail jobs.

Job developers need to speak business, not charity, when placing graduates. Continuing education on how to locate career job vacancies and determine if they are appropriate for their autistic clients is also recommended.



The UAP offers a seven lesson Job Developer Workshop for free on our website for this purpose.

### **Element 8: Support Employment**

Coaching needs to be available to employers on how to select, on-board, and manage uniquely abled individuals. Managers of UAA graduates need to have information similar to what is provided for instructors with additional support for addressing issues typically found in the workplace.

The UAP has produced two videos to support potential and existing managers of UAA graduates, available on the UAA website.

Additionally, uniquely abled individuals often need post-hire support (job coach, internship, etc.) which is typically provided by a non-profit organization or a government agency. We have found that graduates of current UAAs rarely require more than 6 months of support.

### **Element 9: Provide External Support Systems**

An important component of a successful vocational education program for the uniquely abled are the external support systems, including parents and transportation systems.

Sometimes autistic individuals live with their parents; transportation from their home to their school and to their place of work needs to be accessible, easy, and not require more than 1 hour of travel. If public transportation is not available, there may be free or low-cost transportation provided for trainees and graduates.

Parents should be explicitly included in the UAA operation from the beginning. They should be encouraged to let their child explore the new world of self-sufficiency and discover their unique abilities.

### **Element 10: Provide Funding**

To date, all UAAs have been free to students, parents, and employers. Funding has primarily come from government agencies, such as state job development departments. Historically, these agencies have had a problem in placing their consumers in jobs requiring prior training because there are so few appropriate training programs. When you can tell a state agency that in 16 weeks they can likely close a case, for only \$3,000-5,000 per trainee, they become a UAA's biggest supporter.