

*MATANEL FOUNDATION
ACTIVITY REPORT*

Program: Workforce Development for People with ASD

Year: 2019

Please present your activity report according to the following lines. The whole rapport will not exceed 2 or 3 pages (as word document).

- 1. Name of the Program:** Workforce Development for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- 2. Year of activity:** 2019
- 3. Name of the report's writer:** Udi Rigai
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- 6. Website / Facebook address of the organization:**
<https://www.facebook.com/amutachildrenatrisk/>
- 7. Number of active participants in the program:** 6
- 8. Estimated number of impacted participants:** 6
- 9. Give the actual state of the program (where the program stands at the date of the activity report, no more than ten lines):**

The program's first cohort has concluded its first year. This year focused on training – vocational training and soft skills' training. For each type of training, 2 days (four hours each) were devoted every week, with the contents being tailored to each participant's unique needs. This cohort's second year in the program will focus on sustainable placement, with our coordinator visiting participants at their workplace on a weekly basis and facilitating weekly peer-group meetings. We are happy to report that we were able to continue the program through the COVID-19 crisis; despite the crisis, the program has yielded a first placement and a new industrial partner.

- 10. The main achievements during the last year of activity (main achievements, number of events, number of participants, etc.):**

The program's main achievement over the first of its three pilot years was in its actual existence. While our efforts to reach out to young adults with ASD and their families and enroll them with the program yielded only 15 applications, of which six were admitted, the program is no longer a dream, but a reality. We are very pleased to report that five of the six participants have successfully completed the training element of the program, and that the program is being applauded both by participants, their families and by our founding partner in this program, BDO.

The program has progressed according to its original schedule. By January 2019 we have had an interdisciplinary steering committee; by March 2019 this committee finalized the program's syllabus; and participants' recruitment began that month. While we have utilized a variety of platforms to expose the program, the number of applicants was very low – 15 (the number of participants we hoped to have in each cohort); however, we made a strategic decision not to lower our standards, but to move forward with our robust screening process which included a phone call, filling out a digital questionnaire, a personal interview, and a professional exam. Following this process, six young adults were admitted to the program. The main evidence for

the importance of not lowering our standards is that 100% of the five participants who stayed with us all through the program have successfully submitted their final assignments with regards to the vocational training aspect of the program and that they were all eligible for a vocational certificate by BDO. With regards to the low number of applicants, our hypothesis is that this was due to the fact that this was the first year of the program, and we are hopeful that our success over the passing year will lead to better results in that respect.

The cohort was launched November 2019. In terms of soft skills' training, participants benefitted from a variety of workshops and lectures, dealing with issues like emotional regulation, independence, responsibility, and initiative development. The workshops were based on principles from the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy approach, using role-playing to simulate various situations. In addition to the workshops, each participant benefited from a weekly personal session with the program's manager.

With respect to vocational studies, a certified BDO instructor engaged them with accounting, financing and with common professional software. During February 2020, the program's internship phase was launched, with program participants taking part in BDO's departments' daily work. They benefited from the mentorship and guidance of BDO employees and our staff. The internship was ceased upon the government's lockdown announcement on March 15th. In that respect, we consider our ability to shift the remaining lessons in the course into online platforms, within a couple of days. A testament to participants' dedication to this program is that attendance rate remained at 100% and that all assignments were submitted in time.

Furthermore, we consider our main achievement to be a first successful placement for a graduate of the program, during the crisis. The graduate is currently employed at the accounting department of a high-tech company. While placing his fellow graduates has become ever more difficult, we are continuing our efforts to facilitate such placements and have added additional online support sessions, both in person and in groups.

In May 2020, we started marketing the second cohort of the program. We have begun to interview potential participants. The second cohort of the program will be launched November 2020. For this cohort, we have been able to secure another industrial partner, *Infinity Labs*; this is yet another milestone for this program.

COVID-19 presents a new and even more challenging environment for the program. The Israeli economy is heading towards a major recession and there a close to one million unemployed. In this reality, the competition for each job opportunity will be fierce, and the importance of a vocational training, certification and internship programs like ours will be emphasized. We are hopeful that more companies will choose to hire the program's quality graduates. It is important to note that while we are optimistic with regards to the positive impact that the program's first year success will have on prospective candidates for the second cohort, the uncertainty that engulfs Israeli society and economy may very well lead us to make changes in the program's mode of operations and budget. At this time, more than ever before, our ability to adjust to sudden and extensive changes is critical, an ability to which strong philanthropic partnerships are highly conducive.

11. The evaluation (methodology, results, comparisons with the precedent year, conclusions for the future...):

The program is subjected to internal evaluation. While we have not been able to meet our enrollment objective of 15, we have been successful with regards to participants' vocational certification: of the five participants who submitted the final assignment, 100% were eligible for a vocational certificate. Furthermore, we have been able to yield the program's first placement at a time of an unprecedented crisis, which we consider a major achievement.

In terms of qualitative feedback, we have been witnessing very positive responses. Participants have become a cohesive group, with mutual assistance and cooperation. The participants tell us how impactful the course has been for them, also noting the importance of feeling supported and how it has enabled them to progress significantly and develop a sense of efficacy. One of the participants' mothers told us that during the time that her son has been attending the course, he is calmer, happier, more communicative, and even more present at home. He has been sharing the course material with her and feels he can find work with the knowledge and content he has acquired with us.

Please find participants' success stories attached. Participants' photos and names cannot be shared.