

My name is Carol Barans. Foremost, I speak to you as the parent of young man with Asperger's syndrome. In addition, I worked in the public schools for 30 years as a special education teacher and administrator and currently I am employed by the Focus Alternative Learning Center developing services for young adults with autism spectrum disorders. I am very familiar with the challenges that overwhelm and devastate our young people when they move out from under the protective umbrella of structure and support provided by school.

My son is 18 and graduating from high school this spring. He has performed well, is in the top 25% of his class, did well on CAPT, has never had a detention, he attends school regularly and report card comments repeat: good effort, positive attitude, pleasure to have in class. Looking at these facts, anyone would think he was totally ready to do well at four year competitive college. But he is not... Tho' in the same high school for 4 years, he does not know anyone in the senior class because he has difficulty recognizing faces. From one period to the next, he does not know if the same students are in his classes, in addition he is unable to discern if apparently friendly overtures are in fact that or a "set up" for teasing or taking advantage of him so he moves in his own world. His mind works at a faster pace than he can speak so often he stammers, garbles words or simply stops and says, "My tongue is in a knot..." He loves to talk; he does not know when to stop.

Why does he need the autism pilot? Because, he could be successful and self supporting (even tax paying) in a work environment if people were taught to understand his oddities and appreciate him for his assets. He is diligent, honest to a fault, eager to please; he has fine math, reading and writing skills andan encyclopedic knowledge of history. He has developed a moral code that includes tolerance of others' opinions and helping the less fortunate. But his loud monotonic voice, his apparent rudeness because he does not recognize you until he really knows you, his blunt manner of expressing his opinion and his wit which is occasionally funny but often odd or long winded are all traits that obscure his assets and put people off from getting to know him.

What difficulties do I observe in my professional life:

Every week at Focus ALC we receive telephone calls from parents like me. They are desperate to find help for their young people with ASD who having graduated high school and sometimes college, are now sitting at home unable to find (or keep) work, unable to figure out how to live independently and support themselves... often so discouraged that they give up, and do what comes most easily for someone with ASD, retreat into the computer... a world which is predictable, logical which does not confront them daily with confusing social situations which make them feel incompetent.

Expanding the Autism Pilot is the responsible, humane and cost effective way to help these talented people become productive citizens and to help them attain the quality of life they deserve.