



# DREXEL AUTISM SUPPORT PROGRAM



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# CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

- ◎ Close to 1 in 88 children are identified with ASD.
- ◎ Today many (50-70)% in higher functioning range by adulthood.
- ◎ People with disabilities are radically under-employed, ~ 20.3%, compared to 69.1% of non-disabled (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2012).
- ◎ Both Feds and State have recognized the tremendous challenge of finding a place in society, in communities, for adults with autism.



# DASP INITIATIVE

- ① Create a model program to improve outcomes of students with ASD who get into college, but who need assistance to succeed at college and later employment.



# DASP: FUNDING & PARTNERS

- © Initial funding by the Bureau of Autism Services (BAS), PA Dept. of Welfare as part of the Eastern ASERT– Regional Center for **A**utism **S**ervices **E**ducation **R**esearch **T**raining 2008-2010
- © Qualitative survey of college support needs and initial materials created in collaboration with Youth Advocate Programs (YAP)



# MODEL FOR PROJECT

- ◎ Development of two sets of training materials
  - ◎ Self-Advocacy & Social Skills training (SASS)
  - ◎ Peer Mentor training (PM)
    - Geared towards SASS assignments, classes
- ◎ *Train-the-Trainer* program for colleges



# PROJECT GOALS WERE

- ⊙ Roll out to Eastern PA colleges
- ⊙ Feasibility evaluation of model
- ⊙ Attempt to
  - ⊙ Foster infrastructure for positive accommodation and support structures in colleges to serve individuals w/ ASD
  - ⊙ Obtain improved outcomes/retention for this population
    - although empirical evaluation not possible at initial stage



# PROJECT GOALS (CON'T)

- ⦿ Incidental goals include awareness and acceptance.
- ⦿ Build faculty and higher ed administrative awareness of the range of services that can be provided in a college setting.
- ⦿ Peer mentor training would offer increased acceptance, community awareness, and experience that encourages high-quality professionals to go into the field .



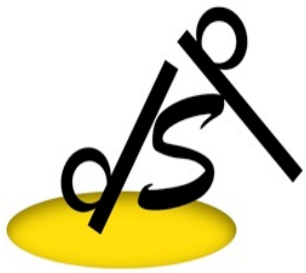
# A FEW LESSONS LEARNED

- ⊙ T-t-T might not be enough without
  - ⊙ Ongoing **technical** support
  - ⊙ **Funding** plan
  - ⊙ High level of **institutional Commitment**
  - ⊙ Someone **onsite** with **ASD expertise**
  - ⊙ **Tested model** prior to scaling up
    - Generally, did not get to full implementation stage.

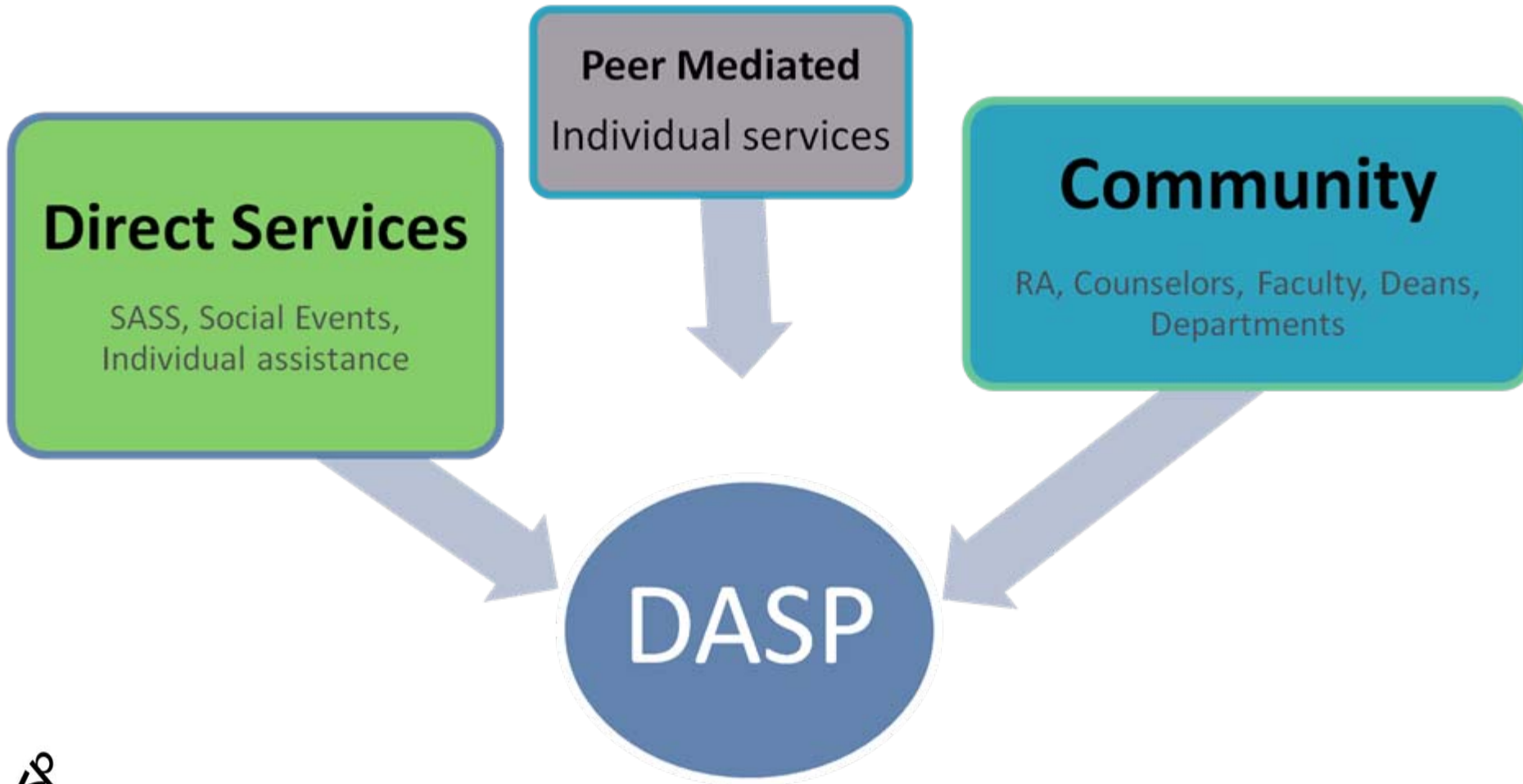


A 3D golden stick figure is running on a golden bar chart. The bar chart shows a downward trend followed by a sharp upward trend. The background is a light blue gradient with a darker blue horizontal band. The text is centered in the dark blue band.

HOWEVER, DASP WENT  
FORWARD AND KEPT EVOLVING



# HOW WE MORPHED





# SASS THEN & NOW

- ◎ Self Advocacy & Social Skills = SASS
- ◎ Students with autism in SASS class along side assigned Peer Mentors
- ◎ 8, sequential 2-hour seminars in Fall
- ◎ Curriculum set with DASP/YAP materials
- ◎ interactive



# SASS THEN & NOW

- ◎ Self **A**dvocacy & **S**ocial **S**kills = **SASS**
- ◎ Students with autism in SASS class along side Peer Mentors, not necessarily their own
- ◎ 12 2-hour seminars throughout Fall, Winter, Spring
- ◎ Curriculum set by student-expressed interests, needs we have noted
- ◎ Interactive, try to include some humor, perhaps relax and play a game.



# THEMES OF SASS TRAINING

- ⊙ Knowledge of laws and history of disability based civil rights legislation
- ⊙ Defining self-advocacy and practicing advocacy in every day life
- ⊙ Exploration of self-identity as an adult with autism.
- ⊙ Levels of disclosure
- ⊙ Social skills for college classroom, work place, interview skills, & building connections/friendships.
- ⊙ How to make small talk
- ⊙ Special topics: nutrition, improv. theatre, job interviews, etc.



# THEMES OF SASS TRAINING

- ① Interaction skills as related to college environment.
- ① Goal setting skills, including use of benchmarks and subgoals.
- ① Organizational and coping skills for college, and consideration of accommodations that can assist.
- ① Vocational and community connections.



# METHODOLOGY: THEN & NOW

- ◎ Graduate level trainers
- ◎ Use of multimedia, including interviews of videos with self-advocates and with peer mentors
- ◎ Experiential assignments in conjunction with peer mentors.
- ◎ Teaching of skills that students are supposed to “pick up on their own”, e.g. goal setting, self advocacy, how to emphasize strengths in an interview, how to discuss disability with others.
- ◎ Evaluation via BbVista course, anonymous assessments & surveys.



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# PM PROGRAM SHIFTED PARADIGM

- ⊙ Transitioned to 1:1 mentoring not linked to SASS, across 4 quarters and (sometimes) coop.
- ⊙ Very popular program — most students with ASD who try it find it useful
- ⊙ ~20 pairs this year



# PEER MENTOR TRAINING, THEN & NOW

- ⊙ Delivered prior to SASS seminar
- ⊙ Could be reviewed online, or in classroom, or some combination
- ⊙ covered characteristics of autism, ideas about self-determination, empathy development, concept of hidden curriculum



# PEER MENTOR TRAINING THEN & NOW

- ⊙ ~~Delivered prior to SASS seminar~~ Geared towards individual PM program
- ⊙ ~~Can be reviewed online, or in classroom, or some combination~~ 7 hours interactive training + biweekly supervision
- ⊙ Covers characteristics of autism, ideas about self-determination, empathy development, concept of hidden curriculum, but more pragmatic: Emphasizes Q & A and case studies



# PROGRESS MONITORING

- ① Individual goals in domains of self-advocacy, academics, social interaction and adaptive functioning
- ① Progress monitoring by PMs, tracked (de-identified) by DASP.
- ① Supervisions catch emerging problems or broader issues.



# WHY VOLUNTEER PMS?

- ⊙ Dedicated, ASD has affected most of them
- ⊙ Tend to stick with program for 1 or more years
- ⊙ Invested in mentee.
- ⊙ As fellow undergrads, know tricks of navigating Drexel culture.

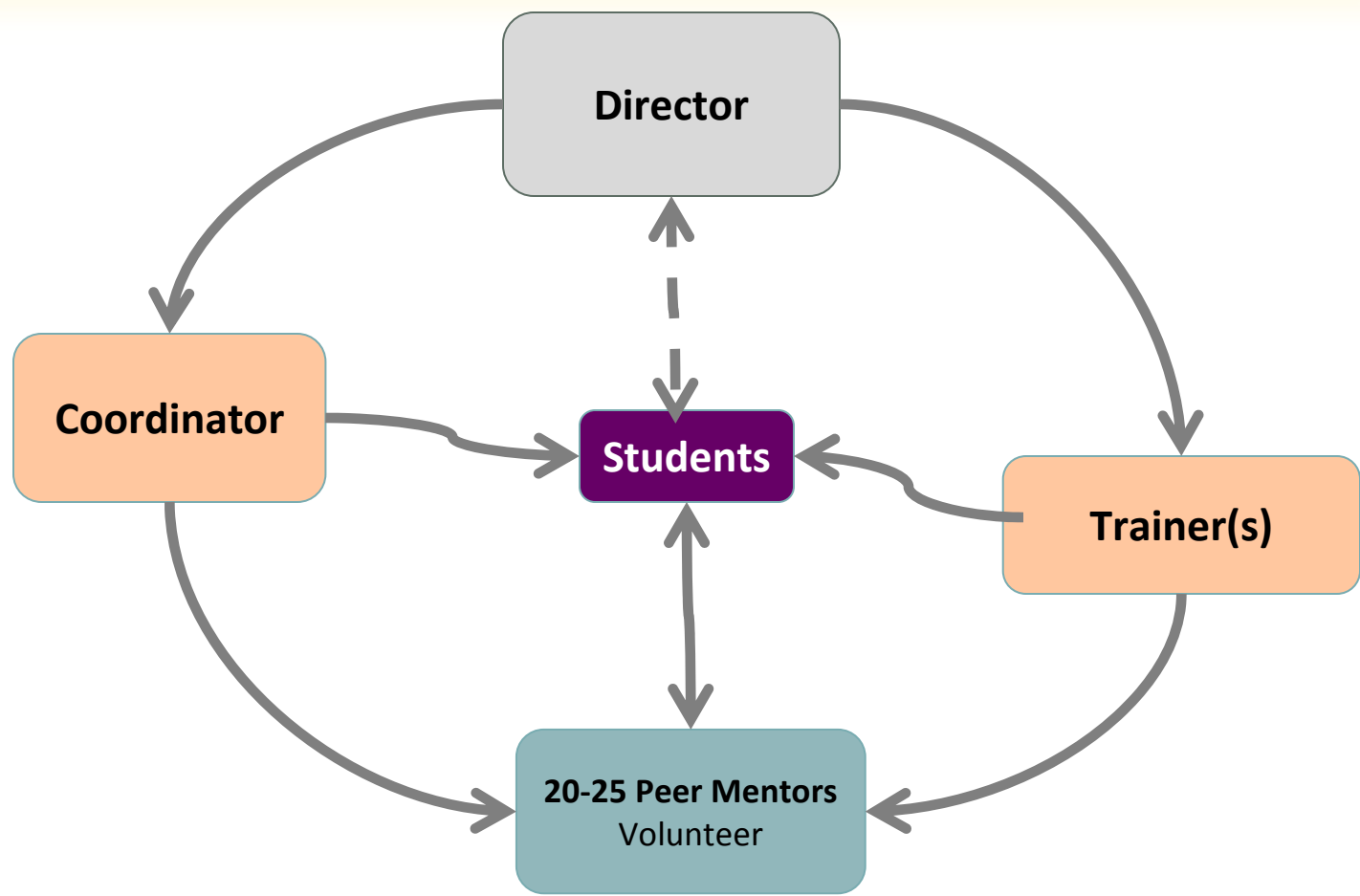


# COMMUNITY TRAINING

- ① Assistance/training for residence halls, counseling staff, departments, disabilities office, learning center, other programs
- ① Create training materials and offer seminars.
- ① Website
- ① Starting next Fall – special sections of some classes
  - ① **Universal design approach**



# STRUCTURE





# CHALLENGES

- ⦿ Getting PMs to show up — to SASS, to supervision, takes a lot of effort, although they are extremely conscientious with students with ASD.
  - ⦿ If supervision missed, must be made up.
- ⦿ Students with ASD may drop out of sight for a time, or not show up for appts with PM.
- ⦿ Balancing interests of university, depts., office of disability, community, parents, & students, respecting student's self-autonomy.





# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- ① Need to revise funding model, as can't afford to expand as free service.
- ① Taking on coop in a more systematic manner.
- ① Further evaluation
- ① Dissemination



QUESTIONS?

