



# Accessible Online Learning

*Maine Coalition for Housing and Quality Services  
5/10/21*



[pslstrive.org/striveworldwide](http://pslstrive.org/striveworldwide)

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Anne Ryan, is the program director of STRIVE WorldWIDE, which is a first of its kind program that teaches independent living skills online. Email: [ARyan@PSLSTRIVE.org](mailto:ARyan@PSLSTRIVE.org).

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# Agenda

- Ice Breaker Activity
- Brief background of STRIVE
- About STRIVE WorldWIDE & demonstration
- Student Profile
- Rose, bud, thorn (link)
- Questions/Discussion





ICE BREAKER



STRIVE WORLDWIDE  
WORLDWIDE  
WIDE

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Icebreaker goal (in seminar): Connecting the students to us and to one another, allow the students to practice using the chat and microphone, and identify and work through any tech issues before we get too far into the class

Goal today: Experience the seminar as a student would.

Link to video of exercise we are doing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5Agl8vvlxc>



STRIVE is a non-profit in South Portland Maine that serves teens and young adults with intellectual disabilities and autism in a variety of programming, from social and educational programming to in home, community, and case management support. STRIVE recently celebrated our 20th anniversary, and we now serve over 1400 participants in Maine.

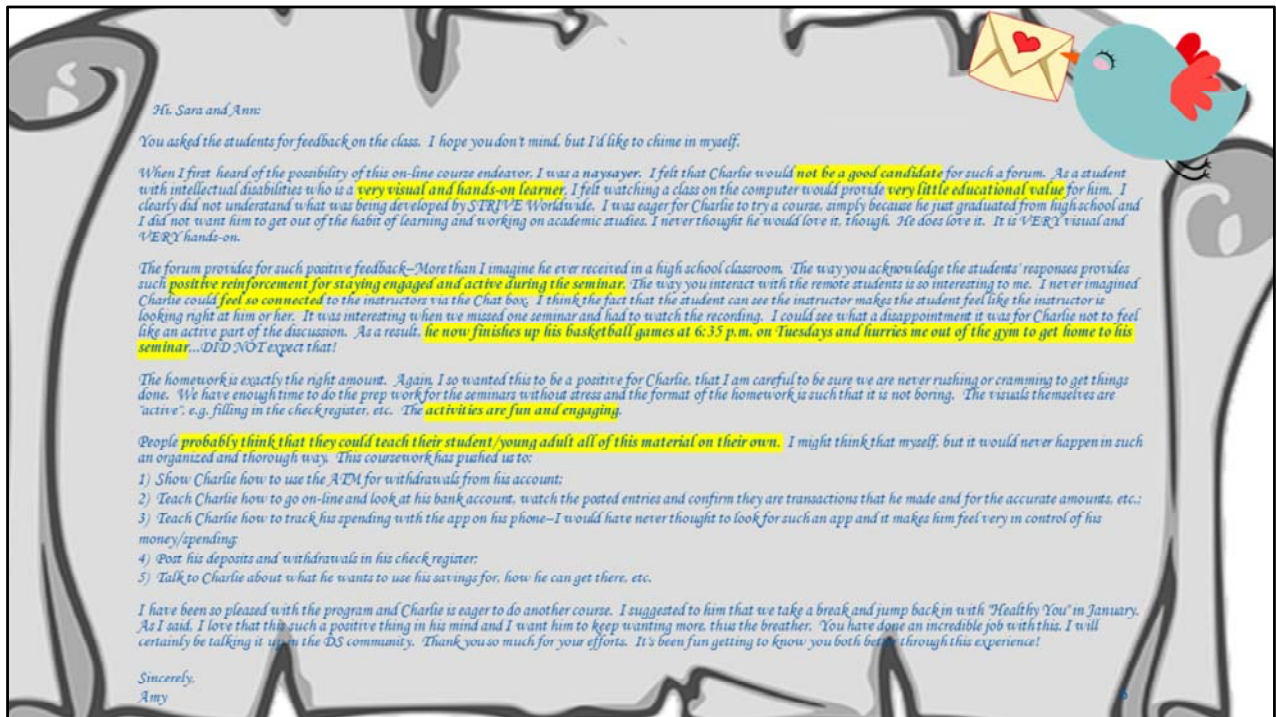
STRIVE WorldWIDE is the newest program which started as a conversation after we had lots of requests from our 2 year, residential college program, STRIVE U, to expand to different parts of the state and out of state. We surveyed our participants to see who might be interested in learning independent living skills online, and the response was overwhelming! So we formed a committee, ran a pilot course in April of 2019 where we did pre and post testing, then took some time to make changes based on the feedback from our pilot and launched our full program in September 2019. Since then, we've taught 22 classes to just under 300 students from 19 states and 2 countries, though 66% of our students are still from Maine. And 80% of our students once they've taken a course, enroll in more SWW courses.

One of our biggest testimonial to this program actually came from a member of our steering committee who first vetted this program. Our steering committee is made up of a combination of participants, supporters/family of participants, and community partners. Our Steering committee was not in full agreement on this program. In fact one parent in

particular was adamant that her son would not be successful learning online. She couldn't envision how her very visual/hands on learner son would be successful online. But, she, being the amazing STRIVE supporter that she is, gave it a shot anyways. She's now our biggest supporter. Here's what she has to say.

**STRIVE** **WELCOMING<sup>®</sup>**  
**World** **I NDEPENDENCE**  
**WIDE** **D IVERSIFYING**  
**E DUCATION**

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To: Sara and Ann:

You asked the students for feedback on the class. I hope you don't mind, but I'd like to chime in myself.

When I first heard of the possibility of this on-line course endeavor, I was a naysayer. I felt that Charlie would not be a good candidate for such a forum. As a student with intellectual disabilities who is a very visual and hands-on learner, I felt watching a class on the computer would provide very little educational value for him. I clearly did not understand what was being developed by STRIVE Worldwide. I was eager for Charlie to try a course, simply because he just graduated from high school and I did not want him to get out of the habit of learning and working on academic studies. I never thought he would love it, though. He does love it. It is VERY visual and VERY hands-on.

The forum provides for such positive feedback—More than I imagine he ever received in a high school classroom. The way you acknowledge the students' responses provides such positive reinforcement for staying engaged and active during the seminar. The way you interact with the remote students is so interesting to me. I never imagined Charlie could feel so connected to the instructors via the Chat box. I think the fact that the student can see the instructor makes the student feel like the instructor is looking right at him or her. It was interesting when we missed one seminar and had to watch the recording. I could see what a disappointment it was for Charlie not to feel like an active part of the discussion. As a result, he now finishes up his basketball games at 6:35 p.m. on Tuesdays and hurries me out of the gym to get home to his seminar...DID NOT expect that!

The homework is exactly the right amount. Again, I so wanted this to be a positive for Charlie, that I am careful to be sure we are never rushing or cramming to get things done. We have enough time to do the prep work for the seminars without stress and the format of the homework is such that it is not boring. The visuals themselves are "active", e.g. filling in the check register, etc. The activities are fun and engaging.

People probably think that they could teach their student/young adult all of this material on their own. I might think that myself, but it would never happen in such an organized and thorough way. This coursework has pushed us to:

- 1) Show Charlie how to use the ATM for withdrawals from his account;
- 2) Teach Charlie how to go on-line and look at his bank account, watch the posted entries and confirm they are transactions that he made and for the accurate amounts, etc.;
- 3) Teach Charlie how to track his spending with the app on his phone—I would have never thought to look for such an app and it makes him feel very in control of his money/spending;
- 4) Post his deposits and withdrawals in his check register;
- 5) Talk to Charlie about what he wants to use his savings for, how he can get there, etc.

I have been so pleased with the program and Charlie is eager to do another course. I suggested to him that we take a break and jump back in with "Healthy You" in January. As I said, I love that this such a positive thing in his mind and I want him to keep wanting more, thus the breather. You have done an incredible job with this. I will certainly be talking it up in the DS community. Thank you so much for your efforts. It's been fun getting to know you both better through this experience!

Sincerely,  
Amy

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# About STRIVE WorldWIDE





- 5-Week courses (can be modified for groups)
- Orientation + technology self-assessment
- Self-paced work
- Seminars twice a week (can be modified for groups)

**STRIVE WorldWIDE** WELCOMING®  
I NDEPENDENCE  
D IVERSIFYING  
E DUCATION

**Accessible** **Online** **Independent**





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STRIVE WorldWIDE is a first-of-its-kind online program that teaches independent living skills to individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism. Pre-COVID, online learning had grown in nearly every area of education, and as we at STRIVE continue to find new ways to provide access to our participants, we asked ourselves, "why should that be different for our students?" The answer was: it shouldn't, but our research found that any neurodiversity online program focused on educating the supporter, not the individual. This is a missed opportunity; in fact, in many ways, online education creates more access for neurodiverse learners, allowing students to participate in multiple learning style ways and can be repeated as often as necessary. It also provides access to services throughout the state (country and world). Now that the global pandemic has shifted the way we interact with people, we are seeing more and more services shift to some version of remote services/online learning. But not all online learning is the same, so we will give you an idea of what our offerings are like:

Each course is typically 5 weeks long with each week will be its own unit, focusing on a different topics and learning outcomes. However, we've done variations on this


for different groups.

Before students get started on that first course, we have them complete an orientation, which allows them to practice all of the elements of the online class, as well as completing a technology self assessment, where they tell us how they currently use technology. As you will see in the coming slides, we structure the course similar to how we interact with social media and apps, so that students who do have a smartphone or tablet and who use it with some regularity will be comfortable navigating our classes. The technology assessment asks the students what technology they currently use, how they use it (smartphone, tablet, computer, all of which can be used to access the course), and if they use it independently or with support. This allows us to identify areas where we may need to provide additional support throughout the courses.

For the course itself, there are two parts:

1. self-paced coursework and the seminar. The self paced work is housed in our learning management system, Talent LMS. Students have about an 1-2 hrs worth of “homework” to do on their own each week. We will look at some examples of that in just a moment.
2. Seminars, where we meet twice a week using

# Self-Paced Content



- **Narrated Slides & Videos** (YouTube)
- **Quizzes** (Buzzfeed)
- **Multi-modal Assignments**
- **Discussion Boards** (FaceBook, Twitter)

STRIVE WIDE WELCOMES! | EXPERIENCES | DISRUPTING | A BOUNDARY

Text reply   Upload a file   Record video   Record audio

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Our courses are set up similar to how one might interact with social media.

**Narrated Slides/Videos.** We use a lot of videos and narrated content, to introduce concepts to the students. They are set up just like youtube, and often are embedded from Youtube. The narrated content has playback controls, so students can rewind and repeat content to view it as many times as needed. The videos are all closed captioning enabled with playback controls, so again, students can repeat, slow down, speed up the information. When we create our videos, we have STRIVE participants as actors. The example we are looking at here is from our cooking and meal planning class where one of our participants is showing us how to follow a recipe.

**Quizzes** After we introduce a concept, we will check the students understanding, either by a quiz or by completing an assignment. Then we will revisit and discuss the concept in more detail in our seminars, using spaced repetition to help students to retain the information. I try to structure my quizzes in fun ways, so they mirror taking quizzes on Buzzfeed. In the example playing here, we are looking at private

and public information in a unit on online safety. Students have to answer the questions to figure out which Harry Potter character they are (if they spill the beans and give away private information, they are Hagrid, but if they keep their information private they are Dumbledore). Again, all of the content is narrated with playback controls so they can review and repeat. I don't have the classes or quizzes set to pass or fail, I have them set up to try again--review the concepts and repeat the exercises until they demonstrate understanding.

**Multi-Modal** We have students demonstrate understanding through other ways as well. When we use assignments, they are multi-modal, giving students multiple options as to how they want to participate so that they are most successful. In this instance, the student can type a reply, upload a document or picture, or video or audio record their response. In this instance, the directions to the assignment were text and visual. When that's the case, I also included a "click to listen" link that has me narrating the directions as well. We use this tool for emails or any time we have text information, we always include a link to listen to me read the email or directions.

**Discussion Boards** We will see that audio link again used in the discussion boards, which are just like social media discussion threads (Facebook, twitter, insta, etc). There is an audio file for the discussion topic, then students can type a response or attach a file for a response, which could be video, audio, or visual. I also include a link to a free speech to text tool, any time there is a place for students to type and answer, in the event that they'd rather speak their answer than type.

# Live Seminars Twice a Week

**Seminar** similar to FaceTime

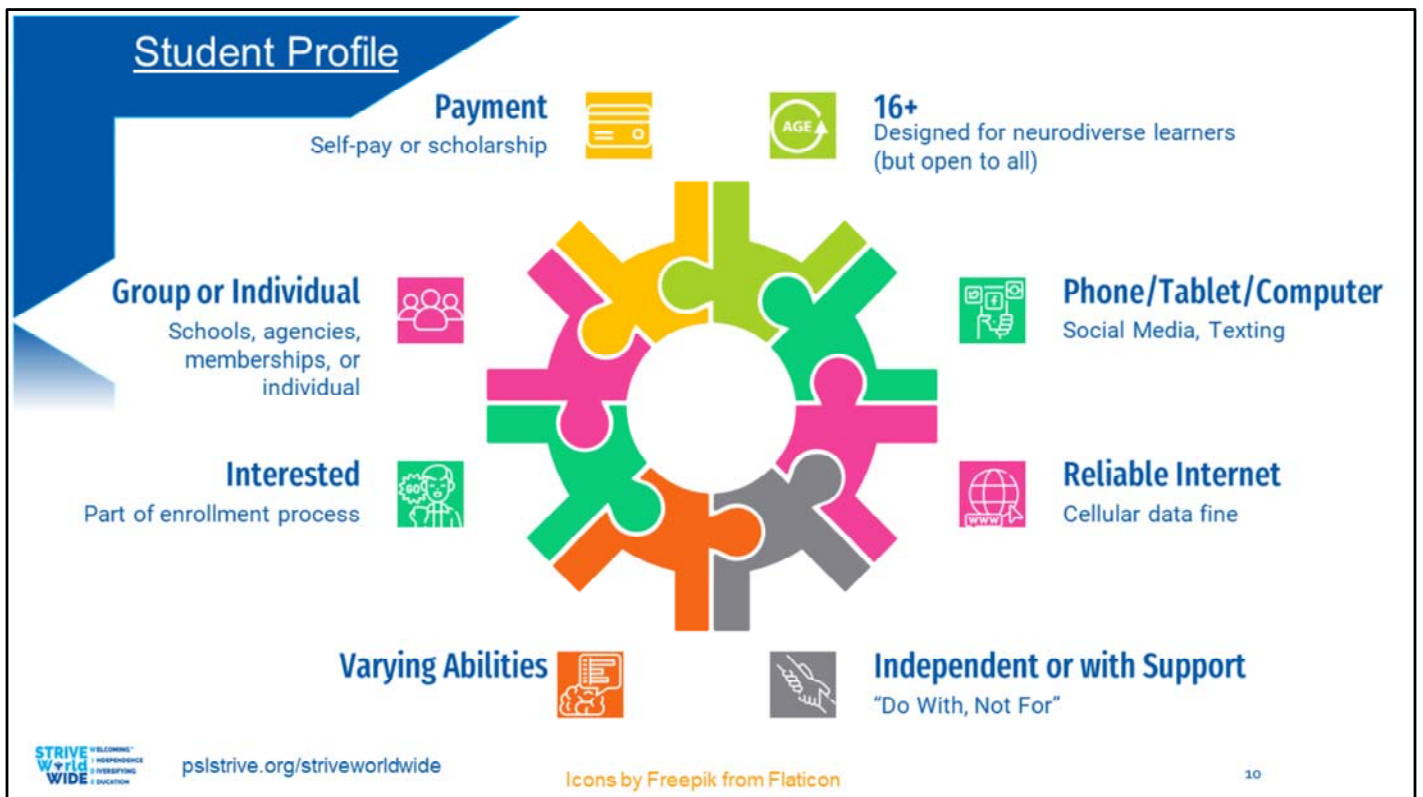
- Instructor has video, audio, and presentation
- Students have chat box or can raise hand to turn on microphone
- Videos and microphones allowed at beginning and end of seminars for socialization

All seminars are recorded so students can re-watch as many times as needed or watch as alternative if unable to attend



**STRIVE** WIDE  
WORLDWIDE  
WIDE

We use Zoom with a presentation with close captioning, audio, video, and chat. (Video and chat are optional for participants). Seminars meet twice a week for an hour. We have a combination of students who attend seminars independently or with support. Some students started attending with support but now attend independently. Just like the self-paced content, the seminar can be accessed on their phone, tablet, or computer, and are recorded and posted to the class. Students will not lose access to the course, so they can repeat the class and rewatch the seminars as needed.



The program is designed specifically for individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism aged 16+, though we do open our classes to anyone who is interested. You do not need to be a computer expert to be successful in this course. However, students should have some experience using a phone, tablet or computer, with or without support. Because our activities can mirror social media, so some familiarity with watching videos, posting on a discussion thread, or other types of activities, will be pretty comfortable navigating our platform. As these are online courses, reliable internet or cellular access is necessary. Students can attend independently or with support. We are not able to provide the support, but we have students who will attend with parents, siblings, staff members, etc. At the beginning of each of our seminars, we have a slide for the supporters where we ask them to do with, not for, meaning we want to hear from the student, not the supporter. And there's a difference between enabling and empowering. So that might look like rephrasing a question for a student if they are confused, but it would not look like answering the question on the student's behalf. As you saw, we have the coursework set up so that varying abilities can be successful. Reading and writing are not a prerequisite, and we aim to design universal accessibility in our design of the courses and seminars. It is very important students are a part of the decision to take a course. Online learning requires some self-direction for learning, and if parents sign up their kids versus making a decision together, students can be less engaged. Individuals can sign up for courses, or agencies or schools can send groups of students. We can create individualized sections for a group and we have different options of how we can partner with organizations and schools. This program is self-pay in Maine (other states do allow funding for online educational programs, but Maine does not). The courses are \$299 each or students can do

a monthly subscription of \$160 for access to all the courses we offer. That's supposed to be a 25% discount off of the total amount of courses we offer, but this year we started with a schedule of 9 courses, which the cost is based off, and have already added 7 more. So right now, it's over a 50% discount. We do have a donor who set up a scholarship fund for Maine residents only if cost is prohibitive. We do one full and one partial scholarship per course.



# Rose, Bud, Thorn



STRIVE  
WORLDWIDE  
WIDE

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Rose: Something you learned

Bud: Something you are looking forward to

Thorn: Something you are still unsure of

<https://forms.gle/hfhA9t1ggyqN7xob9>

We typically close with Rose, Bud, thorn. This is an activity we do at the end of each seminar as an exit activity, where everyone tells us something they learned, something they are still looking forward to, and something they are still unsure of. We typically do this in seminar, but for this group, this is the link to provide that feedback.

<https://forms.gle/hfhA9t1ggyqN7xob9>

# Questions & Discussion



[ARyan@PSLSTRIVE.org](mailto:ARyan@PSLSTRIVE.org)



(207) 710-3935



[pslstrive.org/striveworldwide](http://pslstrive.org/striveworldwide)




[Informational Session](#)  
[May 18, 11:30 AM EST](#)

[Anne's contact information is included. This is the bite sized version of SWW, if you are interested in learning more, we are hosting an informational session on May 18 at 11:30 AM.](#)

[Link to register for Informational Session](#)

# Addendum

# Gamification



**35**

courses in progress

**3**

completed courses

**28d 4h**

training time

**12**

badges

**2542**

points

**How to collect points**

Points Levels Badges Certifications


- Each login gives 25 points
- Each unit completion gives 25 points
- Each course completion gives 150 points
- Each certification gives 150 points
- Each successful test completion gives 1 point
- Each successful assignment completion gives 1 point
- Each successful LT completion gives 1 point
- Each discussion topic or comment gives 25 points
- Each update an discussion comments gives 10 points

back


**Leaderboard**

Points	Level	Badges	Certifications	Points
17050				Vas M.
14830				Ashwika D.
11789				Brenden C.
10845				Matthew J.
10660				Hassak H.
10495				Paula M.
2542				Alina K.


**ASSIGNMENT BADGES**




**Assignment  
Newbie**  
(1 passed  
assignment)




**Assignment  
Grower**  
(2 passed  
assignments)




**Assignment  
Adventurer**  
(4 passed  
assignments)



**Assignment  
Explorer**  
(8 passed  
assignments)



**Assignment  
Star**  
(16 passed  
assignments)


14

In addition to using a lot of game-based theory for education, we also have gamification built into the self-paced content. When a student logs in, they will see their dashboard that includes some of the gamification features: how many courses are in progress, how many are completed, how many hours they've spent learning, how many badges they've earned, and how many points they've earned. Students can earn points and badges by completing different activities, as you can see here. There is an active leaderboard, where students can see where they rank versus other students (just for the game bits, not any confidential or course information). And students can collect badges (you can see the badge leaderboard too).

**Congratulations!**

**STRIVE WorldWIDE** WELCOMING INDEPENDENCE DIVERSIFYING EDUCATION

**SOCIAL CONNECTIONS USING TECHNOLOGY**

**COURSE INFORMATION**  
1/4 - 2/7/2021

This is a hands-on learning course. We will practice using one or more of the tools we introduce for social connection during each of the seminars.

**Course Outcomes**  
By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Describe what it means to feel socially connected
2. Recognize your balance between self-care & screen time
3. Define safe and responsible use of social networking and technology
4. Recognize how to set and accept social & digital boundaries
5. Discuss your priorities when using technology
6. Practice using multiple virtual communication platforms and identify which ones will work best for your social connections
7. Experiment with social activities using technology
8. Identify offline activities that can be adapted for staying connected from a distance

**Seminar Days/Times**  
Tuesdays & Thursdays  
7PM-BPM EST

**Units**  
Unit 1: **Social Connection, Safety, & Self-Care** (1/4 - 1/10/21)  
Unit 2: **Priorities & Practice** (1/11 - 1/17/21)  
Unit 3: **Experiment with New Activities** (1/18 - 1/24/21)  
Unit 4: **Experiment & Practice Continued** (1/25 - 1/31/21)  
Unit 5: **Going Analog for Virtual Connections** (2/1 - 2/7/21)

**Certificate of Completion**  
This certification is awarded to  
**Anne Ryan**  
For successfully completing the course  
**STRIVE WorldWIDE Virtual Campus Tour & Orientation**

**1. Citizenship to be a Part**  
**2. Healthy You**  
**3. Self-Advocacy**  
**4. Social Connections Technology**  
**5. Social Skills Relationship**

**1. Social Relationships**  
**2. Health**  
**3. Brain Function**  
**4. Personal**

We offer a variety of courses that you can see listed here. When a student completes each course, they earn a certificate of completion. With each course you earn not only a certificate for that course, but each course is applied to one or more larger certificates in key areas of living independently: Overall independent living, employment, relationships, health, and safety.

**Advance** To design the curriculum, I use an Understanding by Design approach, starting with course objectives and outcomes to fully design and implement the curriculum. The steps are:

- Step 1: Identify desired results
- Step 2: Determine evidence of results
- Step 3: Plan instruction to meet outcomes

Because these are outcomes based and measurable, it is possible to integrate these courses into transition-aged students school experience. I will give you a couple examples, though as you know, this is learner dependent, so these are examples only. But I do provide learning outcomes like you are seeing here for each course. And each outcome is assessed.



**STRIVE WorldWIDE by the numbers:**

3 - we've been offering classes for 3 years now

In year 1, we offered 3 classes

In year 2, we offered 7 classes

In year 3, we started off with a schedule of 9 classes, but as of now, it's looking like we will have 16.

With those classes offered, we've taught 295 students (many of those were repeat students, so 100 unique students)

These students come from 19 states and 2 countries

But 66% of those students are still from Maine

We've had 1 major partnership so far, but we expect that this will be the first of many.

Community Catalysts of California is our exclusive licensed distributor in CA, meaning they will pay us to teach our curriculum to students in CA. They will do all the state approvals, student recruitment and marketing, and we will do the back end support. This allows us to exponentially grow our student reach without adding additional manpower to our program.

Been asked to do 4 professional presentations over the last couple of months to external organizations who attended one of our open houses

In fact, we were the hosts of Presbyterian College's 7th annual Charles Chadwell SPED Institute, where we presented to ~50 registered special ed teachers from mostly South

Carolina.

And up until recently, we've done this all with 1 ¼ staff. I was part time (just recently moved to full time), our instructor, Sara, split her time with SWW, TOPS, and training, but will be moving to full time for SWW some time this summer, then we also have a secondary instructor that works about 10 hours most weeks.

# Technology & Neurodiverse Learners

### Availability/Access to Technology

Device	Individuals with Cognitive Disabilities	General Population
Smartphone	72%	68%
Tablet	50%	45%

Morris, J. T., Jones, M. L., & Sweatman, W. M. (2016)

### Effectiveness

Pre/Post  $\wedge$  39%  
Self-Reported  $\wedge$  30%

Assistive Technology Accessible Design

### Program Availability

No Result Found

SEARCH AGAIN

#### Resources

Alarri A, Tyler-Wood T. Factors Affecting Learners With Disabilities—Instructor Interaction in Online Learning. *Journal of Special Education Technology*. 2017;32(2):59-69. doi:10.1177/0152643416681497

Ayres, K. M., Mechling, L., & Sansosti, F. J. (2013). The use of mobile technologies to assist with life skills/independence of students with moderate/severe intellectual disability and/or autism spectrum disorders: Considerations for the future of school psychology. *Psychology in the Schools*, 50(3), 259-271.

Carmen Carrillo, Maria Assunção Flores. (2020) COVID-19 and teacher education: a literature review of online teaching and learning practices. *European Journal of Teacher Education* 43:4, pages 466-487.

Chadwick, D., Quinn, S. & Fullwood, C. (2016). Perceptions of the risks and benefits of internet access and use by people with intellectual disabilities. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities* [doi:10.1111/bld.12170]

Morris, J. T., Jones, M. L., & Sweatman, W. M. (2016). Wireless technology use by people with disabilities: A national survey. [ThinkCollege.Com](http://ThinkCollege.Com)

When determining the efficacy of this program, we had to ask ourselves some questions about the feasibility of offering our program online. First, what is the availability and access to technology for neurodiverse learners? Is using technology to teach neurodiverse learners is effective? and are there existing programs that already meeting this need?

Our first question was fairly easy to answer. The Pew research center publishes a Survey of User Needs (SUN) every few years. And the results showed that Neurodiverse Learners (18 years or older) use technology at a similar or higher rate than the general population (also 18+). The 2016 Survey of User Needs found that 72% of individuals with cognitive disabilities owned a smartphone versus 68% of the general population. Similarly, 50% of individuals with cognitive disabilities owned a tablet versus 45% of the general population. These numbers were steadily on the rise at the time of the study, and likely have gone up even more. We also see an increased access to technology for younger populations. **Advance** So what this tells us is that our neurodiverse learners have the same, if slightly higher, access to technological resources as neurotypical learners.

When it comes to determining if online instruction is an effective method of teaching neurodiverse learners, it's an ongoing field of research, and one which we plan to offer our research to the body of literature. We do a pre and post assessment in each of our classes to determine how much each student learns, which we also use as feedback to determine



how well our curriculum is meeting its intended learning outcomes. So what the data here tells us is that so far, we have seen a 39% increase in content knowledge after a student has completed a course. We also ask students how they perceive their knowledge before and after taking a course, and there we see a 30% increase in confidence. (average of 3.73 - 4.16). However, I do need to be very clear here, we don't have enough data points here for us to draw any meaningful conclusions just yet, but it is looking quite promising. We do also know that there are a growing number of studies that focus on the use of assistive technology for neurodiverse learners. This technology can make the information more accessible to the learners, however access to educational materials does not necessarily translate to learning. We also know that design is important, both the user interface and accessibility features, so that is a primary focus when developing our courses, which we will see examples of in a little bit. So the answer to this question is (**advance**) pending, and we will help to answer it.

Despite the surge of online post-secondary programs (pre-covid), there has been an absence of programs designed to teach independent living skills. All online programs that focus on neurodiverse learners are for the teachers or supporters, and not for the individuals themselves. So we determined there was not program availability, and ours would be the first of its kind program. Of course this research was all pre-pandemic, and there will no doubt be new programming that has and continues to emerge, as well as new research that emerges as a byproduct of the pandemic. This is something that we will track closely and see what we can learn from, but at this point in time, information is still being collected.