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https://www.bgdailynews.com/news/grant-to-help-wku-public-broadcasting-expand-supports-for-college/article_2b6f9e66-72fe-55f2-97ae-4d635f39eda2.html

Grant to help WKU Public Broadcasting expand supports for college grads with autism

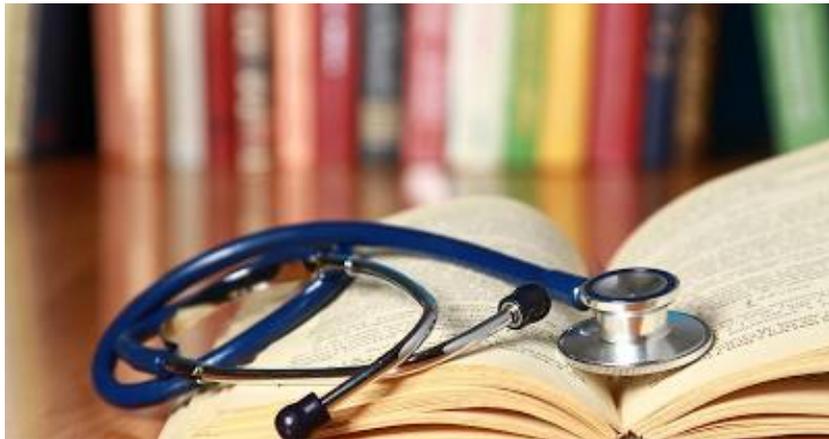
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About 1 in 59 children have been identified with autism spectrum disorder, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and when they grow up and look for jobs, employers often do not understand them.

That's where Western Kentucky University Public Broadcasting comes in. Last month, it was one of just four recipients awarded a \$246,863 grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to expand its project for boosting ASD inclusion in the workforce.

The big idea, according to project director Molly Swietek, is to create a model that businesses and organizations across the country can look to for guidance in achieving that goal.



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“I think there’s just a general lack of knowledge,” Swietek said, describing the unawareness employers can exhibit when it comes to working with ASD individuals. Often, it comes down to misunderstandings between the two – a lack of eye contact during a job interview could be read unfavorably by a hiring manager, she noted.

All this can add up to a lot of rejection.

“Making that transition to the workforce has been very difficult,” she said. About 80 to 85 percent of college graduates on the spectrum are either unemployed or underemployed, Swietek said.

To tackle that problem, the grant initiative is working in tandem with another project.

In a news release, Director of WKU Public Broadcasting David Brinkley described WKU as uniquely positioned to lead on the issue of ASD workforce inclusion. Brinkley is also a project director for the grant effort.

“In 2017, we established the Brinkley Student Employment Fellowship program, which provides WKU students with ASD the opportunity to gain valuable job training and workforce development skills in the areas of television and radio production; engineering; marketing; community engagement; and general administrative duties,” Brinkley said in the release.



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Each year, Brinkley said, WKU Public Broadcasting employs about 40 students, including Brinkley fellows.

An advertisement for Ford's Furniture. The left side shows a photograph of a light-colored sofa with a tufted ottoman in a store setting. A red circular callout bubble with a dashed border is overlaid on the sofa, containing the text "Basic Wool Sofa \$698". The right side of the ad is a dark vertical banner with the Ford's Furniture logo at the top, which includes "SINCE 1936" and "FORD'S FURNITURE Furniture You Know, People You Trust! BOWLING GREEN". Below the logo, the text reads "Ford's... NOT YOUR PARENTS' FURNITURE Store", with "NOT" in a red box.

“(We) train them in all facets of public media services. With the tremendous support of WKU and CPB, we’re able to enhance our mission to serve the public in innovative and impactful ways,” he said in the release.

Through the grant initiative, which spans two years, Swietek said the goal is to achieve several deliverables. The plan is to organize at least eight symposiums with area employers to explore ASD workforce inclusion.



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An advisory committee of nationwide public broadcasting station leaders will also work with the project team to integrate ASD inclusion into the national public broadcasting system, the release said.

Mary Lloyd Moore, director of the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex (which houses WKU’s Kelly Autism Program), said the grant is important for two key reasons.

“What’s so important about this grant opportunity is that WKU Public Broadcasting is providing a unique opportunity for our ASD college students to gain valuable job experience, and also educating the business community on the benefits of hiring neuro-diverse talent,” she said in the news release.

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