

## Autism CanTech! Research Project: Information Letter and Consent Form

**Title of the Study:** Autism Cantech! Overcoming Barriers to Employment in the Digital Economy

**Investigator:** Brooke Leifso  
ACT! Lead Researcher  
  
Research and Strategic Enrollment  
NorQuest College  
Edmonton, AB  
[Brooke.Leifso@norquest.ca](mailto:Brooke.Leifso@norquest.ca)

We are asking your ward to take part in a research study being done by NorQuest College. This study is supported by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), an organization that funds projects to improve the quality of life for all Canadians. The research team is also paid by the ESDC funded ACT! project.

### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The goal of this study is to understand the experiences of Autistic youth. We want to know about experiences of employment, including your successes, challenges, and needs for support. This will help us understand how programs like Autism CanTech! can best support Autistic youth across Canada.

### **How will you participate?**

There are four ways that the Autistic youth you care for will be asked to help with the research:

1. We will ask them to take part in a PhotoVoice activity so that we can understand how supports and barriers that may have changed from being in the Autism CanTech! Program. They will be asked to take photos about barriers to employment and supports in your life, and email these photos to the researcher with any title that they choose. A researcher will then contact them to meet and ask questions about the picture and its title. It should not take longer than one hour to take the photo, answer questions, and email the researcher. Your last photo will be taken 12 months after the program completes.
2. We will ask them to take part in focus groups *and/or* interviews for the duration of the program. In the focus groups or interviews they will be asked different questions

about their life. These questions will be about their background, past experiences, challenges, successes, and supports needed for gain and maintain employment in the digital economy. You will be given opportunities to speak, draw, type, or write in your interview or focus group. They will take place every two months. Focus group sessions will last 90 minutes, and interview sessions will last 60 minutes. Focus groups and interviews will take place online. Autistic youth participants are asked to participate in 3 focus groups throughout their classroom instruction, work experience and within the 12 months after the work experience is complete. However, should they want, they can continue to attend focus groups for the entire duration of 3 years. For interviews, Autistic youth participants are asked to participate in at least 3 interviews during their classroom instruction and work experience and approximately 6 months after the program.

3. We will ask them to let researchers access the information that you give to Autism CanTech! throughout the program. This includes information from the application, and the initial questionnaire and Career Coach notes. This will not take any time. If you consent, the Autism CanTech! Program staff will let researchers access the information. We will take information from the whole duration of the program. For example, we will access your Career Coach notes throughout the entire process, from the first session to 6 months after the work placement.

### **What are the benefits to being in this study?**

This research will help Autistic youth across Canada gain meaningful employment. It may benefit Autistic youth directly by helping them get the support that they need to be successful. This is because researchers may be able to respond to the needs that they express.

### **Are there any risks to being in this study?**

It might feel uncomfortable or emotional talking about experiences. In the focus groups, they may also learn things about their peers or their peers about them that makes things uncomfortable. If this happens, we will stop the research and work to provide with the support needed for the youth you care for. You are welcome to support the youth you care for through this process.

### **What happens to the information that is provided to researchers?**

#### *Confidentiality*

The information that shared will be confidential. It will only be used for research projects related to improving equitable employment for the disability community. The only people who will see the information that you share are members of the research team at NorQuest College. If you choose to take part in a focus group, researchers will ask everyone to keep the privacy and confidentiality of one another. Some of the activities will be online. To stay safe and help us keep your information confidential, we ask that you use safety measures like signing out of your account, closing your browser, and locking your screen or device when you are done using it.

## Data Storage and Usage

The information you share will be stored securely on NorQuest College servers. Only researchers at NorQuest College will see your personal information. We will not include your personal information in any reports of this study. All data (voice recording, transcripts and notes) will be stored for a minimum of 5 years. Data is made anonymous (you are given a numbered code), will be password protected and the audio recording is only used for transcription purposes. Secondary information and your anonymous data may be used for further studies within ACT!. By signing this agreement, you agree to your anonymous data being used in other ACT! related studies.

### **Can I say no?**

Absolutely! If you choose not to allow your ward take part in this study then there will be no impact on you or their standing in the Autism CanTech! Program. If you do choose to allow them to participate, they can choose not to answer any question that we ask. You can also change your mind and opt-out of the study by emailing the Lead Researcher, Brooke Leifso, at [Brooke.Leifso@norquest.ca](mailto:Brooke.Leifso@norquest.ca). In your email, you will tell her that you no longer want your ward to be in the research project. You do not have to say why. It will no longer be possible to withdraw from the study once the report has been finished. For more information you can contact Brooke. If you choose to withdraw from the study at any time before the final report, your individual data will be deleted from the data sets.

### **Where do I find information about the study results?**

Once available, you can find information about the study on the Autism CanTech! website at [autismcantech.ca](http://autismcantech.ca)

### **Questions or Concerns?**

Please let the Lead Researcher know if you have any questions or concerns. Their contact information is at the beginning of the information letter.

The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have any questions regarding the rights of your ward as a research participant or how the research is being conducted you may contact the Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615 or [reoffice@ualberta.ca](mailto:reoffice@ualberta.ca). Humber College affiliated participants may reach out to ResearchChair, Dr. Lydia Boyko, [lydia.boyko@norquest.ca](mailto:lydia.boyko@norquest.ca)

Please keep this form for your records.

### **Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act Statement**

The personal information collected in this form will be used to complete the Autism CanTech! Research Project. Collection is collected under the authority of Section 33(C) of Alberta's *Freedom of Information and Privacy Act* (FOIP Act). Collected personal information will be protected from unauthorized access, use, and disclosure in accordance with the FOIP Act. For information about the collection and use of this information, contact the Principal Investigator, Brooke Leifso, at 10230 108 Street NW Edmonton, AB, T5J 1L6, [Brooke.Leifso@norquest.ca](mailto:Brooke.Leifso@norquest.ca).

## Consent Form

***For participants: Please initial the boxes below***

- I understand what I read in the information letter about the research project at NorQuest College.
- I understand that I could ask questions about this research, and that I could ask for more information.
- I understand that being in this research means being in a focus group or interview, and/or doing the PhotoVoice activity. I know that researchers will be able to see the information I share with the Autism CanTech! Program, like my wards application and questionnaires.
- I agree to my information being kept safely at NorQuest College for five years after the research project is done.
- I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time, and that this will not impact me in the Autism CanTech! program

***For guardians: Please read and agree to these terms before signing the box below***

As the lawful parent or guardian of my ward, I provide consent for my ward to engage in the Autism CanTech! Research Project. Should my ward wish to take part in the Autism CanTech! Research Project, I provide consent for participation in any and all activities related to the research including interviews, focus groups, observation, PhotoVoice, and any further interactions with Autism CanTech! Researchers or program staff responsible for the administration of the Autism CanTech! Research Project.

By providing consent, I acknowledge that the sharing of ward information may occur among Autism CanTech! Researchers and in group research settings, like focus groups, with people outside of the Autism CanTech! Research Team. Every effort will be made to respect privacy and confidentiality of the information shared. This information will be limited to only what is necessary to meet the goals of the Autism CanTech! Research Project.

There is the potential for referrals to additional NorQuest supports or to external providers to be made if needs for support arise during the research process. In these instances, Autism CanTech! Researchers will engage with the parents/guardians on the purpose, suitability, and required next steps related to these referrals.

By signing your name below you are agreeing to participate in the Autism CanTech! Research Project. A parent or guardian's signature is only required in you do not hold your own guardianship.

Participant's Full Legal Name:

---

Parent/Guardian's Full Legal Name:

---

Parent/Guardian's Signature:

---

Date (mm/dd/yyyy):

---

- I acknowledge that I am the legal guardian and have already provided the Autism CanTech! Program proof of guardianship