

Autism CanTech!

Autism CanTech! Research Project: Information Letter and Consent Form

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

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We are asking you 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 your 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. For research purposes, Autistic youth are asked to participate in the research from the beginning of program enrollment to 12 months after the work experience is complete. Anonymous data could be used for further study within ACT.

How will you participate?

There are four ways that you will be asked to help with the research:

1. We will ask you to take part in a PhotoVoice activity so that we can understand how the quality of your life may have changed from being in the Autism CanTech! Program. You 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 you choose. A researcher will then contact you to meet and ask you questions about the picture and its title. It should not take you 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 you to take part in focus groups *and/or* interviews for the duration of the program: 6-month classroom instruction and welcome to continue for the full 3 years of the pilot program. In the focus groups or interviews you will be asked different questions about your life. These questions will be about your background, past experiences, challenges, successes, and the impact of the Autism CanTech! program. We will also ask you to give feedback about the Autism CanTech! Program. 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.

We will ask you to let researchers access the information that you give to Autism CanTech! throughout the program. This includes information from your application, and the initial questionnaire and Career Coach notes specific to barriers and support. This will not take any of your 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 Career Coach notes related to barriers and support throughout the entire process, from the first session to 6 months after the work placement.

You can choose what activities you would like to participate in and do not need to participate in all activities. To be in the study, you only need to participate in one activity, one time – although ideally you would continue to participate in more than one session.

What are the benefits to being in this study?

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

Are there any risks to being in this study?

You might feel uncomfortable or emotional talking about your experiences. In the focus groups, you may also learn things about your peers or your peers about you that makes you uncomfortable. If this happens, we will stop the research and work to provide you with the support that you need.

What happens to the information that is provided to researchers?

Confidentiality

The information that you share 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; however, the research team cannot guarantee that others from the focus group will maintain the confidentiality of what is discussed. 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 take part in this study then there will be no impact on you or your standing in the Autism CanTech! Program. If you do choose to participate, you can choose not to answer any question that we ask you. You can also change your mind and opt-out of the study by emailing the Lead Researcher, Brooke Leifso, at Brooke.Leifso@norquest.ca. In your email, you will tell her that you no longer want 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

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 your rights as a research participant or how the research is being conducted you may contact the Research Ethics Office at reoffice@ualberta.ca or 780-492-2615. Humber College affiliated participants may reach out to Research Chair, Dr. Lydia Boyko, lydia.boyko@norquest.ca

Please keep this form for your records.

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

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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.

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 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

Participant's Full Legal Name:

Participant's Signature:

Date (mm/dd/yyyy):
