



MasterDrive Presents Strategies To Train Teens With Autism (ASD) And ADHD To Become Drivers

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Ronn Langford, the founder and President of MasterDrive Inc., recently presented a full day workshop at the national Conference of ADED, the Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists. The Annual Conference was held in August in Lexington, Kentucky, attended by more than 400 Occupational and Physical Therapist from all over the United States and Canada.

At the request by the Educational Committee for ADED, Langford presented the strategies and unique training program, especially designed for working with teens with Autism (ASD) and other special needs developed by MasterDrive Inc. over the past 18 years.

Depending upon the various studies regarding the definition and estimation of numbers, young people who have been diagnosed with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) has increased from 1 in 10,000 to 15,000 just a few years ago, to the current estimation of 1 in 59. The "Spectrum" label is intended to describe the broad range of behaviors and functional challenges of these kids.

The greatest impact upon these young people is in regard to their potential "quality of life". The ability to

drive in our culture is a very important part of their being independent ? the ability to choose where they want to go and to make their own decisions. But this must be done with the specific objective of safety ? for them and for other drivers.

According to Langford, in order for a teen with special needs to increase their skill level in any area, and especially to become a skillful driver, requires a very unique and hands on type of training, to achieve basic car control skills. ?Every teen needs to learn the skills of controlling 4,000 or 5,000 pounds of metal in motion, especially in difficult driving conditions or a crisis. But the training to prepare teens with special needs, such as high functioning Autism, is a highly complex process.?

An intense ?experiential training program? is absolutely necessary. Metaphorically, one can look at the process directly related to the way that computers process information ?

Input (Sensory Input into the brain {a biological computer});

Processing (which is processed based upon the computer?s software), and

Output (the result or decision making).

If the quality of the information going into the brain ? i.e., visual processing, visual spatial awareness, depth perception and closure speed, reaction time, kinesthetic information (feel or tactile), auditory, focus, multi-tasking, etc.), is not good, the result (the performance) will not be good. (Garbage In ? Garbage Out).

If the quality of the information going in can be increased, the level of performance will increase.

If the level of ?software? in the brain can be enhanced by appropriate training, the processing of information will be quicker and better. And the level of performance (the result) will be better. And, as human beings, the only way people can develop this software, for any skill, is through an experiential process. That is why driving educators refer to it as ?programming?. People learn best by doing.

Kids with ASD have a much more complicated set of issues of performance ? behavior ? decision making ? self-perception ? self-belief system ? and their overall resulting psychology, after years of wondering ?who they are and what is their problem?.

So educators need to know if their physiological and functional challenges regarding driving impact their overall psychology. The also need to know if their psychology (belief systems, identity, etc.) impact their overall level of function. All of these wrap around each other and influence each area of function.

As an example, many kids defined with ASD have great difficulty with Visual Spatial Awareness and Visual Tracking. These are absolutely necessary functional skills to do most anything, but especially driving. Focus and Concentration is a major issue in driving. And the ability to stay focused upon what is happening around them, the ability to select information coming into an intersection, etc., is a foundational skill in order to drive safely.

The important thing for people to know is where can these young people and their families discover some understanding of the situation ? define a potential solution ? and implement some specific strategies that may be able to enhance their performance.

The typical ?medical model? will not be able to address this situation and the very complicated conditions as related to driving. It will require a ?functional? model ? a performance model ? in which the systems of the body and the brain are developed to a higher level. And PERHAPS ? these young people can become a safe and responsible driver for many years.

(Note: For a greater understanding and specific information regarding ASD, Google: Ted Talk by Temple Grandin; and Ted Talk by Wendy Chung.)

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MasterDrive

MasterDrive Of Denver has been helping teens learn how to drive for many years. We provide the best opportunity for your teenager to become a safe driver. We serve Orange County, Parker, Castle Rock, Lakewood, Littleton, Fort Collins and Colorado Springs.

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