

Social Engagement Groups for Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder: The myLIFE Program

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BACKGROUND/ABSTRACT

The myLIFE Program at the Emory Autism Center (EAC) is a **social engagement program** for adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Groups are formed based on participant age (e.g., 18 to 24 years old, 25 to 35) and by level of support required. Clinical judgement and feedback from the client and family is used to determine an appropriate fit for each individual group and is **based on what the client needs to work on** such as verbal communication abilities, safety concerns, adaptive behaviors, and engagement in activities associated with positive adult life outcomes (e.g., enrollment in post-secondary education, employment, independent living). The current proposal highlights the myLIFE program goals, activities and strategies for young adults (i.e., 18 to 24 years old).

myLIFE 18-24 GROUPS

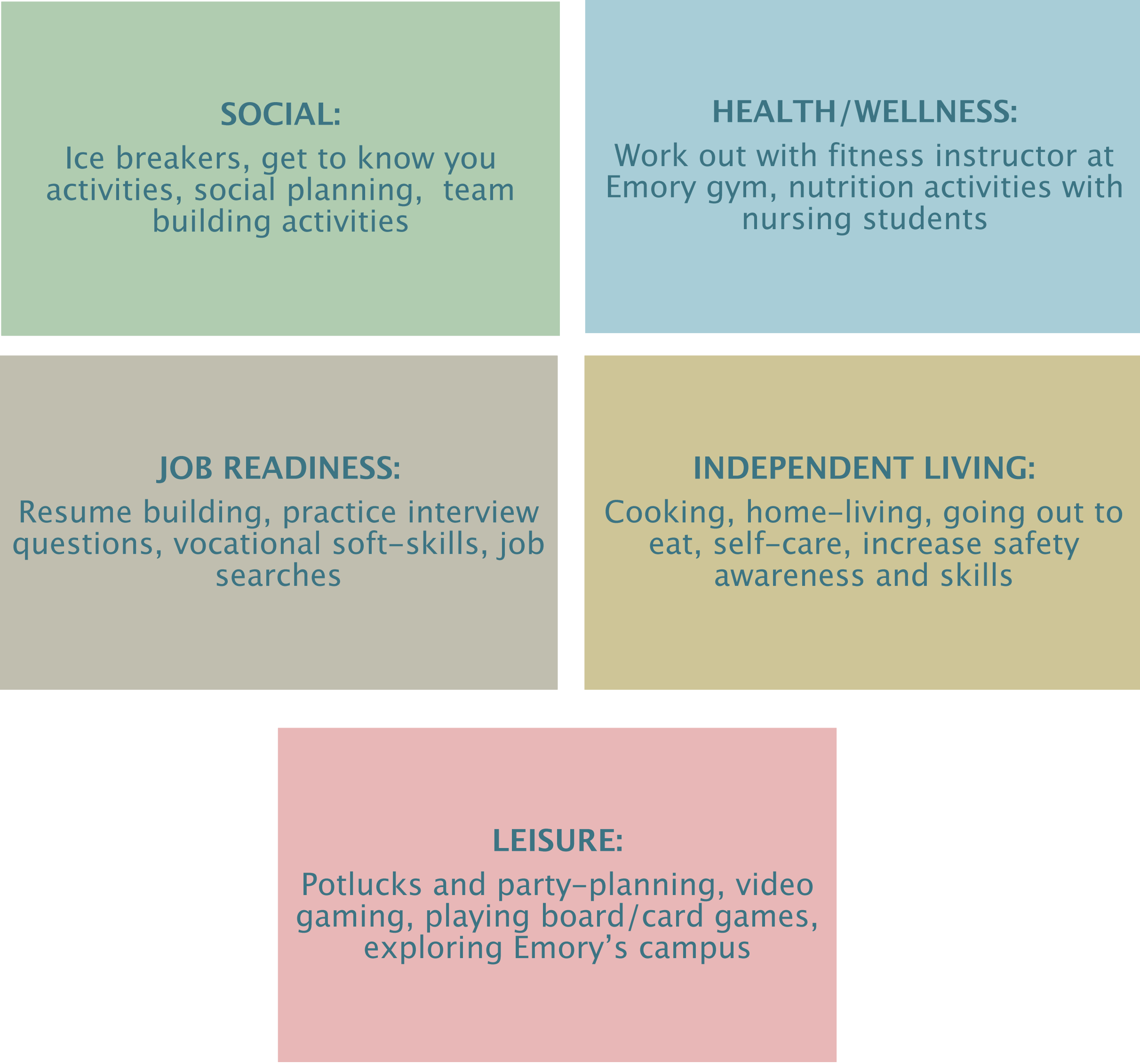
masterLIFE	discoverLIFE 1	discoverLIFE 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Work on verbal communication abilities•Moderate safety concerns•May require 1:1 support during group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Adequate verbal communication•Social communication challenges•Few safety concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Typically in college or employed•May live independently•Require minimal support during group

PROGRAM LOGISTICS

Where: groups meet up at the EAC, but spend most of their time engaged in activities across the Emory University campus
When: groups meet once a week from 3 to 7 hours depending on the group; the groups run on a semester basis for 8-12 weeks depending on the semester
Who: groups are made up of individuals with an ASD diagnosis and same-aged, typically-developing peers (often college students) who volunteer with the groups

ACTIVITIES

All groups engage in a number of **activities** throughout the day specifically designed to promote opportunities to build adaptive living skills within naturalistic environments. Specific examples include:



EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES

Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBI): NDBI incorporates research based strategies from the fields of applied behavior analysis and developmental psychology and generally reflects a combination of evidence based practices for ASD

Incidental Teaching: a systematic protocol of instruction that is provided in the context of natural environments (McGee, 1999). Specific strategies include prompting, modeling and feedback to practice and enhance social communication skills and behavioral routines. The environment is also arranged to promote engagement in appropriate behavior and visual supports are incorporated.

VOLUNTEERS

myLIFE groups are comprised of **typically-developing peer mentors** that volunteer in the group. These volunteers are often **college students** at Emory and other surrounding colleges and universities. Additional support comes via **Service Learning students** in a variety of health-related fields. All volunteers receive an initial orientation before group begins and **ongoing training and feedback** throughout their time volunteering with the program.

STAFF & TRAINEES

- **Program Manager:** develops, manages, and oversees all related to the myLIFE program
- **Educational Coordinator:** manages groups and oversees treatment planning and implementation of goals
- **Group Leader:** facilitates activities throughout the day and provides support to the coordinators
- **Practicum/Interns:** trainees from various disciplines (OT, PT, counseling, psychology, BCBA) that assist in groups
- **Administration support:** assists with documentation and billing

PROGRAM GOALS

