

# At Home in the Kitchen: Inclusion and Cooking Capacity Analysis of 3 Programs for Individuals with ASD, IDD and Support Staff

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## Active Engagement

**Name of Program:** Active Engagement

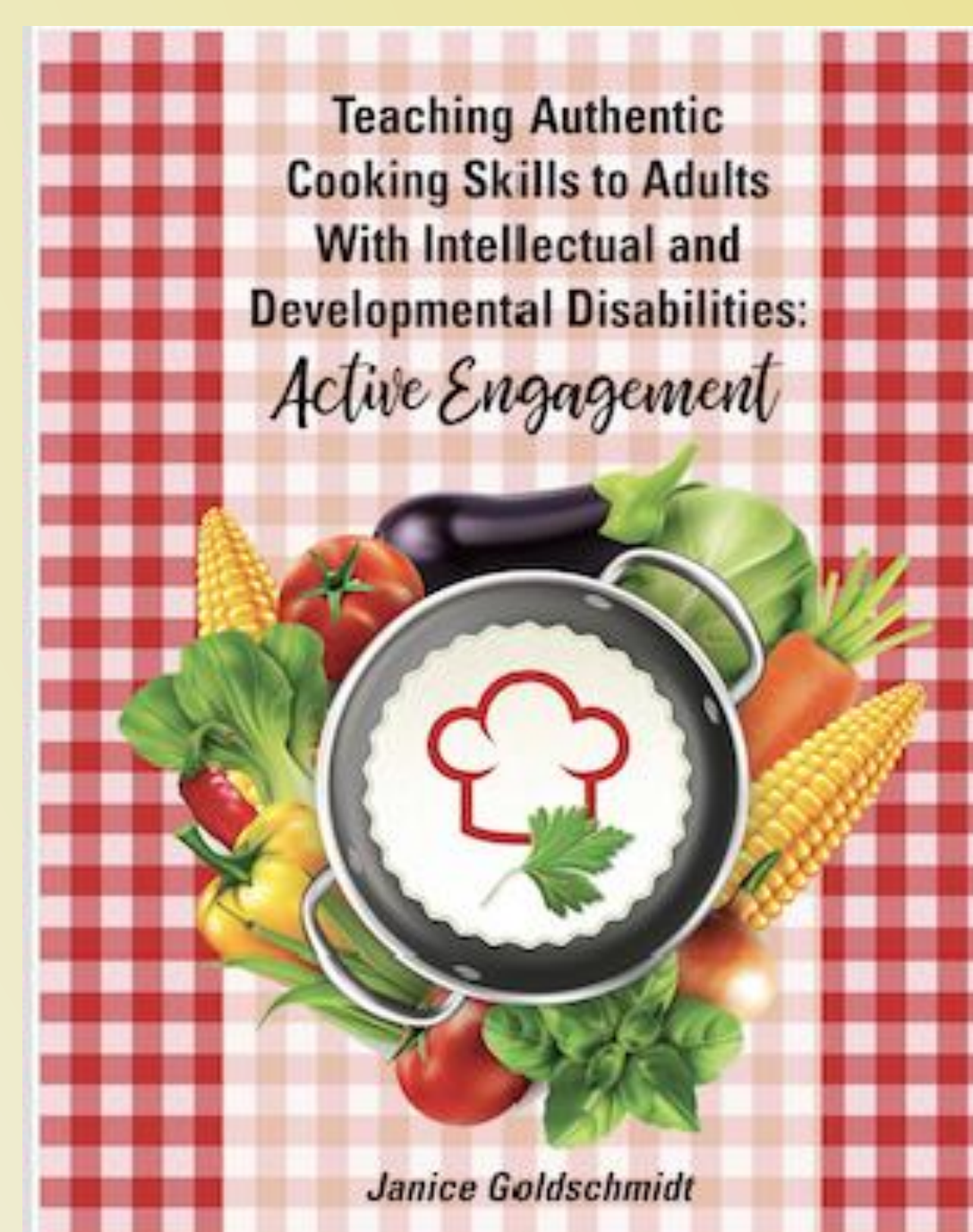
**Setting:** Community Support Services, Inc. is a large community-based center in suburban Maryland

**Population Addressed:** Adults with autism spectrum disorder and other intellectual and developmental disabilities

**Description:** Active Engagement guides development of appropriate activities by emphasizing choice and individualization. All activities are individualized with as much choice built in as possible. The program has recently been published as a manual by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

**Materials Utilized:** A wide range of adaptive tools, methodologies and specialized pictorial recipes.

**Outcomes:** The conceptual framework for the program defines four areas of skills development. These are: autonomy, self-efficacy, social-relatedness, and preference. Because the contexts for instruction are highly individualized, each student activity is likely to be different and based on that person's abilities and preferences. Consequently, outcomes are highly individualized. No two individuals have the same program trajectory and each person develops different skill sets.



The Active Engagement Manual was published in 2018 by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

## Introduction

Though all programs involving individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) strive for inclusion, there are significant challenges to ensuring the development of appropriate supports. One context where this is apparent is in the realm of food preparation. Development of cooking capacity is important for this population not only because it supports independence, but also because it is an important means of participating in the surrounding culture and can help address, and even mitigate, current health trends.

Though integration into food preparation is an idealized goal, the reality is that most cooking programs for those with disabilities come nowhere close to achieving an authentically inclusive environment. The reasons for this are disparate but it must be acknowledged that

independence in the kitchen must be carefully balanced alongside the need to ensure the safety of individuals. After all, the risks involved in cooking are significant, including the potential for life-threatening burns, cuts, and food-borne pathogens.

Here three nutrition professionals offer distinct approaches to the development and implementation of cooking-related programs in support of individuals with disabilities. Though quite different in both focus and scope, each of the three approaches strives to enhance the lives of vulnerable populations in the kitchen. Taken together, these three unique approaches provide potential solutions and perspectives on the challenge of creating an inclusive kitchen environment that can be utilized to promote independence, self-determination, and positive health outcomes for individuals with autism spectrum disorder and other intellectual and developmental disabilities.

## Teen Group Food Lab



**Name of Program:** Teen Group Food Lab

**Setting:** California State University, Chico – Kitchen Lab

**Population Addressed:** Adolescents with autism spectrum disorder

**Description:** The Teen Group is a weekly after-school program run through California State University, Chico's Autism Clinic. Each 75-minute Food Lab session is designed by nutrition students to promote healthy eating habits through nutrition education and hands-on practice with food preparation in a supportive social setting. The group consists of about ten young teens with autism accompanied by college student mentors. Each lesson is designed and implemented by nutrition students. Feedback about this program is obtained throughout each semester from teens and teens' parents via open-ended questionnaires.

**Materials Utilized:** Classroom and Kitchen Lab, power point presentations, short videos, printed instructions with words and pictures, feedback forms, and recipe booklets.

**Outcomes:** Overall, parents of teens who completed feedback questionnaires about the program have said they notice a neutral to positive influence on their son or daughter's regard for food. Some of the teens' parents have noticed that their son or daughter is more actively involved with food choices and food preparation at home.

## Direct Support Nutrition

**Name of Program:** Direct Support Nutrition (DSN)

**Setting:** St. Louis Arc is a community based agency that supports individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) across the lifespan

**Population Addressed:** Direct care staff who provide 24 hour care and support to individuals in the areas of meal planning, grocery shopping, cooking, and following medically indicated diets



**Description:** DSN focuses on educating staff on foundational skills such as cooking, grocery shopping, food budgeting, as well as the diet-disease relationship in conditions such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes mellitus.

**Materials Utilized:** To assess knowledge of staff pre- and post-intervention, the St. Louis Arc is utilizing a modified version of the General Nutrition Knowledge Questionnaire (GNKQ). The program also uses the complete DNS Curriculum.

**Outcomes:** The program is currently in the planning stages and will be researched for efficacy and knowledge acquisition as a whole curricula beginning in January of 2019.