

## Research Project – Connie Sung

The African Futures Scholar will be engaged in a community-based intervention research project with my research team which is composed of multidisciplinary researchers, postdoctoral fellows and graduate students. This project aims to culturally adapt a dual work-related social skills and employment readiness training program (ASSET-EPASS) which was originally developed in the United States for transition-age individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

The ASSET (Assistive Soft Skills & Employment Training) Program, is a manualized soft skills training curriculum to be implemented in a group setting by teaching/rehabilitation professionals to improve work-related social skills of transition-age individuals with IDD. ASSET addresses *eight* different competencies as key skills for workplace success: *Communication, Networking, Enthusiasm and Attitude, Teamwork, Problem Solving & Critical Thinking, Professionalism, Mental Health & Stress Management and Awareness of Self and Others.*

The EPASS (Employment Preparation And Skills Support) Program, is a manualized, multicomponent, and technology-assisted employment-readiness skills training curriculum to be implemented in a group setting by teaching/rehabilitation professionals to transition-age individuals with IDD with job search process. EPASS addresses another *eight* competencies for employment readiness: *Goals and Job Interests, Job Search, Job Application, Job Interview, Disability and Accommodation, First Day on the Job, Workplace relationship, and Job Maintenance.*

Both ASSET and EPASS utilize an experiential learning model which incorporates an interactive learning process with a combination of *ten* different pedagogical approaches: *Didactics, Modeling, Discussion, Videos, Experiential Activities, Role Play, Self-Reflection, Performance Feedback, Reinforcement, and Generalization.* The innovative training approach of ASSET and EPASS have been going through research in the United States to examine its efficacy and effectiveness. In addition, a cultural adaptation study of the dual program has also been conducted in the Ireland context in collaboration with a postdoctoral research fellow and a mentor from an Irish University. The preliminary results show that both programs are effective, practical and applicable that are beneficial to learning modalities of youth and young adults with IDD and helpful for them in successfully obtaining and sustaining employment.

In this particular project, the African Futures Scholar will be involved in a series of research activities. For instance, he/she will be conducting focus groups and interviews to solicit input and feedback from stakeholders (e.g., practitioners, researchers, caregivers) for adopting the curriculum in the African context. When deemed appropriate and necessary, the content of the curriculum will be modified and adapted based on the input and feedback received from stakeholders. Afterwards, a feasibility study, including a small-scale RCT, will be conducted to examine the applicability, practicality and acceptability of the ASSET-EPASS intervention program. Throughout the project, I will work closely with the African Futures Scholar as well as the co-mentor at an African institution to develop research materials for the project (e.g., focus group/ interview protocols, curriculum review forms, pre-post intervention surveys, data management system, etc), conducting qualitative and quantitative analyses, writing manuscripts based on the feasibility study, and writing grant proposals to further support future work. Specific work activities that the African Futures Scholar will be expected to perform, including: engaging in lab meetings, developing research materials, conducting focus group/interviews, collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data, contributing to manuscript and grant proposal writing, supervising graduate students, etc. The work will be performed together with a team of researchers, postdoctoral fellows and graduate students.