Siena Salvaggio Advocacy Justification

**Advocacy Project:** Be the Change: Inclusion of Autistic Adults in the Workforce

**The Problem:**

Autism affects over three million individuals in the United States and tens of millions worldwide.1 In a recent US population study, scientists found that one in sixty-eight Americansare on the Autism Spectrum.2 However, over the last two decades, the number of individuals diagnosed with this disease has doubled.3 Autistic individuals struggle financially and emotionally, as they need additional support and services to help them maintain a healthy lifestyle. Often, the families of such individuals are forced to help care and tend for their autistic loved ones, creating a financial strain on the family. This role of caregiver does not stop when ASD individuals reach adulthood. Rather, a key concern for many families of autistic individuals is financial security, as finding work for someone with ASD is often an onerous task. Studies show that 90% of adults who suffer from autism are unemployed or under employed.4 Therefore, the financial burden of the autistic community falls not only on their loved ones and but also on society. According to a 2007 study, the average person with autism costs an average of $3.2 million to society over their lifetime.5 The increasing number of autistic adults creates a concern both societally and personally as this specific demographic is serially unemployed and subsisting through governmental support programs.6 Though the burden of economic security for autistic adults has been bearable in the past, 500,000 teens with autism will reach adulthood over the next five to ten years.7 Currently, the need for assistance for the ASD adult community continues to far exceed the available resources, leaving a generation of people with autism and their families in a programmatic, financial, and personal limbo and society-at-large economically diminished.8 Given the ten-fold increase in autism during the past decade, the number of ASD children who will reach adulthood over the next few years is overwhleming.9 This bubble when combined with the already disproportionate ratio of ASD individuals to programs will result on a growing strain on the economy.

**The Campaign:**

The “Be the Change” campaign seeks out business owners and employers in the State College area. Specifically, this campaign will address the members of the State College Rotary Club. This campaign will be initiated at one of the club’s weekly meetings. Infographics and flyers will be handed out to the employers who attend this meeting. Brief informational handouts will be provided to give the targeted business owners a direct visual of the potential benefits of employment autistic adults. Additionally, a brief discussion of this issue will be presented, with the end goal of encouraging these business owners to consider autistic adults in their employment pool. This campaign hopes to seek momentum with the help of the rotary club members, as the goal is to encourage these members to further the initiative and pass along brochures and reading materials to their colleagues in the State College area. Though drastic change in employment numbers of autistic individuals in Happy Valley is impractical, the campaign defines success as increased knowledge of the autistic community and recognition of an issue with the workforce. The goal is to simply get the word going of the potential benefit of employing individuals with ASD. Though measuring such perspective changes is difficult, the simple discussion and passing of literature of the financial benefits to employees will hopefully incentivize changes of employment in State College.

Endnotes:

1. "Facts and Statistics." Autism Society. 2016, available at <http://www.autism-society.org/what-is/facts-and-statistics/> (last accessed April 2017).

2. "About Autism." Advancing Futures with Adults with Autism. 2014, available at <http://www.afaa-us.org/about/about-autism> (last accessed April 2017).

3. "Facts and Statistics." Autism Society. 2016.

4. "About Autism." Advancing Futures with Adults with Autism. 2014.

5. Elizabeth Landau. "Autism's burden reflected in family incomes." CNN. March 19, 2012.

6. Fred R. Volkmar. Adolescents and Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders. S.l.: Springer-Verlag New York, 2016, references Chapter 2: Families of Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Overview and Introduction: Roles and Responsibilities of Parents: 20, available athttp://www.springer.com/cda/content/document/cda\_downloaddocument/9781493905058c1.pdf?SGWID=0-0-45-1453815p176547314 (last accessed April 2017)

7. "About Autism." Advancing Futures with Adults with Autism. 2014.

8. Ibid.

9. "Autism Speaks Launches Unprecedented Global Autism Public Health Initiative." Autism Speaks. September 26, 2008, Internationalizing the Fight Against Autism Through Improved Awareness, Increased Research and Enhanced Service Delivery, Along with Standardized Diagnostic Methods, available at https://www.autismspeaks.org/about-us/press-releases/autism-speaks-launches-unprecedented-global-autism-public-health-initiative (last accessed April 2017).