



Autism Assessor Training Options for Speech Pathologists and Psychologists In Western Australia

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WAADF, Inc's Function

WAADF, Inc (WAADF) functions as an organization of professionals who share a special interest in the provision of quality Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) assessment and diagnosis in Western Australia (WA). WAADF's membership is comprised predominantly of Paediatricians, Psychiatrists, Speech Pathologists and Psychologists, however, its membership also includes Social Workers, Occupational Therapists, Educators and a range of intervention service providers.

Purpose of this Handout

WAADF has received many enquiries, particularly from Speech Pathologists and Psychologists, who wish to become "recognized" and/or "credentialed" specialist ASD assessors within WA. This handout is in response to those queries.

Background to Specialist ASD Assessor Training in WA

An assessor training process for ASD assessors has been available in WA, in an evolving form, for the past 10 years. This process has always been considered to be "informal" in nature. It has always functioned as a "colleagual" training process in the sense that it is a form of peer mentorship, without any attendant prescribed training methodology or skill acquisition criteria.

The majority of the Speech Pathologists and Psychologists who are currently members of WAADF received their specialist training in this colleagual system. Many of these clinicians have then, in turn, participated as peer mentors in this informal training process. The collective knowledge of these experienced clinicians, in combination with their Paediatrician colleagues, culminated in the clear and precise standards and guidelines for ASD assessments described in WAADF's 2005 publications *The Diagnostic Process for Children, Adolescents and Adults Referred for Assessment of Autism Spectrum Disorders – Assessment Providers' Version* and *Family and Service Providers' Version*. These publications clearly state the currently accepted WA guidelines and standards for conducting an assessment, formulating a diagnosis and writing diagnostic reports that address the current DSM criteria (at this time DSM-IV-TR[®]). Order forms for these booklets are available on the WAADF website. In addition, copies of the Family and Service Providers' version are available free of charge to families living in Western Australia by contacting the Autism Association of WA on 94898900 or Email: autismwa@autism.org.au

Current Informal Training Process

At this time, there is no formal or credentialed training program for ASD assessors available in Western Australia. A start has been made on the development of more formal training program, however it is currently on hold while WAADF, Inc pursues funding options to progress it further. In the meantime, there is an informal training process in place. WAADF Inc recommends that all Western Australian based Speech Pathologists and Psychologists who wish to provide ASD assessment and diagnostic services complete this training.

The current informal training process occurs in the following 3 phases:

Phase 1:

The trainee observes 2 full assessment sessions as they are conducted by experienced clinicians. The sessions must include a clinician from the trainee's same discipline and usually also includes at least one of the other disciplines.

Phase 2:

The trainee participates in 2 assessments, usually referred to as "partial assessments". The trainee discusses with their "supervising" colleague the components that they will be responsible for during the assessment. The supervisor provides feedback and support as needed during the assessment.

Phase 3: The trainee is responsible for conducting their discipline's component of the assessment. Their disciplinary supervisor is present and provides feedback as necessary

The vast majority of this training currently occurs in 2 government centres that employ a multidisciplinary team model. These agencies are the State Child Development Centre (SCDC, division of Health Dept of WA) and Disability Services Commission (DSC). These centres also conduct the majority of ASD assessments in WA. While there are a growing number of clinicians in the non-government sector who also provide ASD assessments, very few are able to provide training opportunities within their practices. Most private sector Speech Pathologists and Psychologists working in WA have previously participated in the informal training process provided through SCDC and DSC.

In addition to this initial training, there are a variety of quality control processes in place, across both government and private agencies, as part of an ongoing, informal "quality assurance" process for peer review, feedback and support. WAADF, Inc also provides support and networking opportunities for its members through attendance at its quarterly meetings and informal contact with other members.

Current Informal Training Options

Disability Services Commission (DSC)

Limited training opportunities are available to DSC employees, or contract service providers, who are professionals in the fields of speech pathology or psychology and wish to become recognized as specialist Autism assessors. For further information please contact:

- for metropolitan based services: the IFS Coordinator for the Autism Team at either Myaree (08) 9329 2300 or Joondalup (08) 9301 3800
- for country based services: the Country Services Coordinator based at head office in West Perth (08) 9426 9200

Health Department (Child Development Centres)

Speech Pathologists, Psychologists, Social Workers and Medical Practitioners may find some training opportunities within the Department for Community Developmental Paediatrics at the State Child Development Centre. Please call (08) 94812203 for more information.

Why Are These Standards and Guidelines Important?

The standards and guidelines described in WAADF's publications are intended to ensure a state wide, quality assessment process for all referred individuals. In addition, these standards and guidelines are considered by agencies when determining eligibility for funded services in WA. The acceptance of assessment reports, and their related diagnoses, by agencies such as DSC, is a crucial first step in those agencies' determination of a referred individual's eligibility for registration and service provision.

At this time, there is no "list" of recognized assessors within WA. Acceptance of a professional's ASD assessment and diagnostic reports is at the sole discretion of the receiving agency. As the majority of ASD related services are provided through DSC, it is recommended that any clinician who wishes to enquire as to the acceptance of their reports do so by contacting DSC directly at the following address:

Senior Eligibility Coordinator, Disability Services Commission,
146-160 Colin Street, West Perth, WA 6872.
PO Box 441, West Perth, WA 6005
Ph: (08) 9426-9223 Fax: (08) 9226-0391

Financial members of WAADF, Inc can also choose to be included in the public membership listing which is posted on the WAADF website. This list provides contact information and a brief description of services offered by the included members. Inclusion in the online listing is by direct request of individual members, and as a result, the list may not be fully inclusive of all current financial WAADF members. Also, please note the relevant disclaimers.

WAADF Membership and Publication Enquiries

WAADF invites all professionals who provide ASD diagnostic services to become active members of the organization as a means of maintaining contact with their professional colleagues, fostering mutually supportive professional relationships and ensuring their awareness of ongoing best practices in the area. Membership forms are available from WAADF's Secretary and from the WAADF website.

WAADF, Inc meets quarterly on the first Thursday of March, June, September and December of each year. The AGM and election of new office bearers is held during the September quarterly meeting. All financial members are eligible to nominate for Board Member positions, and all nominations are welcomed.

WAADF membership runs for the financial year. Applications for membership are accepted at any time during the financial year. Membership fees are \$40 per year. There is no pro-rata calculation of fees. A member's initial membership fee entitles them to a free copy of *The Diagnostic Process for Children, Adolescents and Adults Referred for Assessment of Autism Spectrum Disorders – Assessment Providers' Version* a \$55 value.

Additional copies of WAADF's publications are available for purchase by contacting WAADF's Secretary or Chairperson.

For Additional Information

Should you have any further questions or concerns regarding the information contained in this handout, and /or regarding WAADF Inc, please feel free to contact the WAADF Secretary or Chairperson at the email addresses below.



Sarah MacDermott
Chair, WAADF Inc, June 2006; May 2007
On behalf of the WAADF, Inc Board