



**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, speech pathologists and psychologists, however, its membership also includes social workers, occupational therapists, psychiatrists, 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 more than 10 years. This process has always been considered to be informal in nature. It has always functioned as a collegial 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 collegial 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 9489 8900 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 with a tertiary partner. In the meantime, there is an informal training process in place. WAADF recommends that all Western Australian based speech pathologists and psychologists who wish to provide ASD assessment and diagnostic services complete this training.

An example of an informal training program is as follows:

Phase 1:

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

Phase 2:

The trainee participates in two 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.

A portion of this training occurs in two 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). In addition, there are a number of clinicians in the private sector, some of whom 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.

WAADF provides support and networking opportunities for its members through its website and online forums, attendance at its quarterly meetings, and informal contact with other members.

Why Are These Standards and Guidelines Important?

The standards and guidelines described in WAADF's publications are intended to ensure a statewide 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.

WAADF Membership and Publication Enquiries

WAADF invites all professionals who provide ASD diagnostic services to become active members in 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 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. Current membership fees can be found online. 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*.

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, please feel free to contact the WAADF Chairperson or Secretary.