



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

Episode 13: Danny Combs - Teaching the Autism Community Trades (TACT) and Nurturing Careers

[00:01:33] **Bonnie:** Welcome back everybody. Today, we're going to talk with Danny Combs, the founder of TACT and the amazing trade skill opportunities for autistic individuals that they provide. But first, a word from our sponsors, Anchor and Dynamic Lynks.

Advertisement: At Dynamic Lynks, we are passionate about serving neurodiverse individuals in an inclusive and affirming way, and we want to help you. Do the same with the launch of our dynamic community. Our dynamic community is a monthly subscription program where you get easy to use session plans with five original songs and activities delivered directly to your inbox every [00:02:33] month. On top of all those goodies in the session plan, you also get one hour of group supervision each month, and a 15 minute mini lecture on a teaching topic to support your neurodiverse client. The theme for each month is based around that topic full of original songs, music, and movement activities, visual supports, and more. Ready to join? Visit dynamiclynks.com/community to sign up today.

Bonnie: All right. Welcome back to another episode of Navigating Adulthood and IDD. Today, I'm super excited to interview Danny Combs, the founder and CEO of TACT. And I actually got this quote off your website. I loved your mission statement. So if you don't mind, I'll read it real quick.

"The mission of TACT is to encourage and empower the full spectrum of individuals with autism through education and employment in the skilled trade. Our core values are essential to our identity, inclusion, integrity, respect grace, discipline and empowerment."

And I just, I really liked that [00:03:33] mission statement that was like, Ooh, I'm want to go ahead and do that as part of the intro so people can get an idea of TACT before we really start diving into it as well.

Danny: Sounds great. Well, thank you.

Bonnie: Awesome. Well, thanks for being on today, Danny. Would you mind giving us a short introduction?

Danny: Sure. Um, short introduction about myself, about TACT. About,

Bonnie: yeah, let's start with you.

Danny: Okay.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

Bonnie: Then we'll get into TACT.

Danny: Well, we have similar backgrounds, both of us, you know, in music. So my family background is, is in the trades. So I grew up as a tradesman fourth generation. I was free labor. My, pretty much entire youth, um, with my dad and grandfather and great-grandfather, and my family background originally was in aerospace.

And then that my dad was a general contractor and learned all of those kinds of things and just kind of took it completely for granted. Naturally, when you're fourth generation, you decide to go get a music degree and run off to Nashville and play guitar for a living. And that's what I did. And it worked out pretty well and fast forward a decade or so later, I have a beautiful baby boy named Dylan and that's born and changes my [00:04:33] life.

And as he gets a little bit older, we noticed some unique things about him that make him extra awesome and come to discover those things were called autism. And we're looking for ways of enhancing and empowering his strengths because he moved forward. He could say dad, or I love you, or any kind of communication with me.

He was able to visualize and conceptualize these amazing things and build these wonderful things. I don't know if it's, um, his autism or the family background or a combination or, or whatnot, and just started looking for programs that could, you know, utilize that and kind of help him and support him in that.

We couldn't find anything, and put together the idea of TACT and had a chance to meet Dr. Temple Grandin who's since become a pretty good friend and said, Hey, I've got this idea for this nonprofit of, you know, doing trades and technical skills with individuals with autism. And she's like, I love it. Stop what you're doing and go do it right now. So it was like, yes, ma'am. That we do it. Cause Temple told us to,

Bonnie: right, if Temple Grandin tells you to do something,

Danny: Okay. Now then you listen. So we're, we'll be [00:05:33] celebrating five years in April, so yeah. So TACT has been doing it, you know, rocking and rolling since then. So it's been pretty great.

Bonnie: That's awesome. In five years. Congratulations. That, that might be like right when this episode comes out too, depending on my schedule. So it could come out right in time to celebrate that's all two years of TACT.

Danny: Well, the next week is autism acceptance month, so,

Bonnie: Oh, true.

Danny: Yeah. That's perfect.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

Bonnie: That is perfect. Yep. So we can celebrate both. Awesome. What a cool story. I feel like it's very unique, having that experience of, of a loved one with autism and wanting to support them and kind of changing career paths, like pretty drastically.

Danny: Very drastically.

Bonnie: Although you guys make guitars.

Danny: We do. We do, we do. So. I mean, still, I mean, that's a big part of my life, so I can't let go of that. So it's I teach, um, it's called "lutherie" to make the stringed instruments, at least. So we teach kiddos how to make guitars and ukuleles and cajones and glockenspiels and a bunch of different fun stuff. So that's fun.

Bonnie: That's [00:06:33] awesome. That's so cool. I know I've, I've been able to tour the facility before and that's what really caught my eye for sure. Cause I was like, Oh, that's such a cool trade.

Danny: Well, thanks. Not a lot of people don't even know it it's an industry, but I mean it's massive, you know, fender guitars had their best year to date last year during the pandemic, I guess more people than ever are learning how to play an instrument. So that's good. So.

Bonnie: So exciting. Oh cool. So what other kinds of programs do you guys provide at TACT?

Danny: That's a great question. So we're kind of diversified in our programming, so. We use trades and technical skills as kind of vessels for work ethic towards getting a job. That's kind of our end goal. So 90% of the autism community is un- or under-employed.

It's the highest under unemployed group in the country, which is just insane to think about the fact that, you know, CDC reports is one 52 kiddos with autism or young adults with autism. Some states are higher. So it's, it's a large part of our corporate population. I think 90% of them and unemployed is just, wildly insane, I think.

So we're using these skills [00:07:33] to try to break that we just don't find that acceptable in any, any stretch the imagination. So we have a bunch of camps and workshops and one-on-one lessons that we do nights and weekends. And the idea for those individuals coming to that starts as young as five.

And obviously we're not putting a five-year-old on a welding torch, render an engine, but we have a bunch of different trades, everything from textiles to instrument making, to flying drones, to audio engineering. A bunch of different things. And then moving that up that experience to get them excited and exposed to the trades.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

And then when they get to the age that they are the transition age that we have, what we call our career tracks program. And an acts is just that, a transition program for taking individuals that are of working age and transitioning them from a traditional high school type program into the actual workforce.

And that one's been very successful and we have an over an 80% job placement rate. I mean, we're pretty much a 180 from every other program, in the state. So it's exciting.

Bonnie: That is exciting. Congratulations. Yeah.

Danny: Thanks.

Bonnie: That's a great, a [00:08:33] great rate and just exciting that that's an opportunity for, for individuals with autism so that, you know, if they want to work, they can learn these trades and find that fulfillment, that fulfillment.

Danny: Yeah, and I mean, you don't have all of them end up being on mechanics and welders, but they will learn, I think a work ethic here that allows them to whatever path they choose to go in that they've learned work skills that enable them to be successful within that job. And we work with a variety of different partners and, you know, we teach the full spectrum of individuals with the autism spectrum here.

So we have some that, you know, are now changing airbags at Audi or you're working in a warehouse at Advanced Autoparts or wiring the new Amazon.com building or, you know, working on highway 70 or with CDOT. I mean, it's everywhere. When this summer we have programs set up with solar panel installations and it's kind of all over the STEM field.

We have individuals working in accounting firms and to me, just wild. So it's cool.

Bonnie: It's cool. So when the, when the individual comes into the transition program, do you [00:09:33] guys really work to find like what they're interested in?

Danny: We do. And we want to see what their passion is and what their strengths are. I mean, we're a strengths-based program. Traditionally, a lot of autism programs are deficit based programs. Where they will tend to look at what needs to be fixed, where we look at it as, okay, what is this person's strength? Where do they excel at? How can we build upon that so that they are successful in their career, in their life? Not saying that we are oblivious to those things that need to be perhaps strengthened, but we're not focusing on those.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

Quote un-quote "deficits," we're focusing on the strengths and then kind of naturally when you empower somebody based upon their strengths, then a lot of times those things that, you know, traditional autism programs would look at as deficits are naturally kind of supported. That being said, because of that, we've found so many success stories with that.

Right now there's a three-year longitudinal study that children's hospitals doing on us because we're kind of, and it's very subtle the way that we're looking at things based upon those strengths. It was very counter to the way a lot of our culture [00:10:33] currently looks at the world and what we need to do. So, yeah.

Bonnie: Yeah, definitely. Cause I could, I could see programs like focusing on like, okay, you need to know like these social skills to do jobs, but it's cool that you guys kind of a flip it and are like, what are you like, what is your strength? What can we build upon that? And it's exciting to hear too. That's naturally like some of the things that might have needed to be worked on just kind of naturally get worked on when we can focus on that strength in that passion and those interests.

Danny: Yeah, thanks. It's kind of old fashioned. I mean, I look at like, there would be no TACT without my family background. And I mean, you look at a hundred years ago, education, they found, what were you good at? And that's where you went. Right? And then you get into the nerdy education, you know, history of stuff, that's industrial revolution.

And people getting shoved into like little lines of where they're going to go and people get misplaced and, you know, not really supported the way they need to. So we're kind of looking at it holistically and a little old fashioned, which can be sometimes looking at things old fashioned is progressive and does.

You never know. So we're all reusing, you know, glass bottles now for all of our food, which [00:11:33] my grandparents did, but my parents didn't. So, you know, right.

Bonnie: Yeah. That's a good point. Kind of like almost learning from history. I feel like that phrase can be used a lot to be like, don't, don't repeat the past, but almost looking at like, Oh, but what was good in history too? Can we build upon that? You know, don't reinvent the wheel.

Danny: Right. Yeah.

Bonnie: All right, we've touched on this a little bit, but would you mind describing the importance and need for job training for individuals with autism? You threw out that very jarring statistic that 90% are unemployed. So what is kind of the importance of providing these trade skills?



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

Danny: Great question. So I think, you know, TACT, we do things a little bit different in the sense that we kind of front load the training as opposed to, put that on the bottom end. And what I mean by that is traditionally lots of bridge programs or transition programs that currently exist, the way that they work is, you know, it's very focused on traditional education and then we include soft skills, right?

So they're introducing the idea of, [00:12:33] eye contact of, you know, brushing your teeth, hygiene, I mean, different soft skill type things, communication pieces that are very important. They are. However they miss the training for any kind of job. Right. And what they do is they go out and they set up field trips, which can be great.

And they try to, to their credit, expose kids. Okay. What seems interesting to you? But what happens is, and I'm not trying to put them down, I mean, they're wonderful other than they have their own place, they go and they, you know, can we expose kids on this field trip to, okay. I want to be, let's say a musician, right?

So you and I both being musically inclined. Okay. I want to be a musician. So then they set up a quote, unquote "internship" or a placement, um, for somebody as a musician. But you and I both know that if you went to a concert and saw somebody that had no musical background put on stage and in playing with a band, they probably wouldn't be very successful.

The audience wouldn't be happy. The band wouldn't be happy. And then the person that was placed in that position also, wouldn't be happy. Nobody wins from that. And then, so more vans don't hire more clients. That [00:13:33] person ends up unhappy and wondering why they're so unhappy and just everybody loses. So what we do is we go to employers, we say, okay, what are the things you're looking for that you need?

And we train them on the front end for that. Right? So I'm assuming you went to music school. I went to music school when you're in a conservatory, like you learn all these things. Right. And then when you go into it, you're the idea is you're that much more successful. So we're training them here for that job.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

And then as they go into it naturally happens with that holistic approach is, within the trades, at least there's no way to build a structure without learning communication skills or math skills or kinesthetic skills. All of those things come naturally and holistically when our current models are completely segregated, right.

We've taken out math from language from physical education and we've moved them into separate entities at separate times in separate places, even with autism, we end up separating everything, right. It's a certain task analysis. So it's like, okay, I need him to, or she to learn X, Y, and Z before they can learn.

You know, [00:14:33] D E and F I mean, they break it down that way, but a lot of times then that trying to get it to come back together is loss and a lot of clients. So when it's taught in a way that's authentic to the actual workplace and people are happy that way they retain it. So what we find is if we're working with an employer or training an individual on our end for that job, and then place them into that position, they're hitting the ground, already running.

So then the employer sees that that person is successful, is on task, is engaged, has a high retention rate and it works. And then the employer comes to us and says, Can I have more, right. So, I mean, one of our success stories is there's a credit card company we work with and one of the only four in the nation and they are, you know, secure place.

Cause they're working with people's credit. Right? I mean, they have to be, and they're building credit cards and they came to us hired one. And within like a month of hiring, when they came back to us and said, literally, can I have 30 more? Because our students were that engaged and that, you know, productive and that's what people want.

Right. And so that's what businesses look at because they make more money [00:15:33] because then they have less HR costs. They have the staff that's more productive, more engaged, more on task and less turnover. It's a win-win for everybody involved. Likewise, with those companies, it creates all of a sudden room for advancement, which is traditionally not existed within our community.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

Right? What happens a lot of times when an individual with autism is placed in a job they're placed in something that. They might be fulfilled at working at like a Kroger or, you know, folding napkins, or that might be what they want. And if that is, awesome. A lot of our clients are looking for more. And so or something different, I should say.

So we like to look and provide an opportunity that leads towards a career, not just a job.

Bonnie: That's awesome. Yeah.

Danny: That makes sense.

Bonnie: I love it. I feel like that tied up at the end really nicely too, of like looking for a career and not just like a job.

Danny: Yeah. Yeah.

Bonnie: You could place anybody,

Danny: Right. Yeah.

Bonnie: And like, like you said, that could be fulfilling, but like you could, you know, you can just put anybody there and be like, okay, work. Versus like building that career through the trades, [00:16:33] through their interests and their passions.

Danny: Yeah.

Bonnie: Very cool. And then it sounds like you've had a lot of success in the community where they're like, Oh, more workers and,

Danny: Well, we have, it's been, it's been neat too. I mean, the cooling thing, about the trades is, you know, they've already embraced language differences right. In the, kind of the diversity of language within our society and the trades. So the neat thing is everything has become visually based. I mean, it's almost set up perfectly for our students in the sense when you go to a electrical company and they're hiring our kids, it's not written instructions.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

And you look at Ikea, right? There's no language on that. It's just pictures and anybody from any background, they've already embraced it. Right? And so the trades are the same way that they're embracing this visual structure to bypass any language diversity that you can just know what to do. And that works perfectly, I mean, not all the time, but by and large, it works. It's a pretty darn good starting spot for our students in that, getting placed in a job that's successful. So the employers employer's happy because they don't have to invest in creating something you had different for our clients. [00:17:33] If that makes sense.

Bonnie: Yeah.

Danny: Hit the ground running.

Bonnie: Yeah, definitely. And you might've touched on this, but do you do any kind of training for the employer side of it or is it all kind of on the student?

Danny: No, absolutely. So we go out, we do a training on autism supports, autism communication. We have job coaches that go out with them as well. That kind of act like a liaison between the two. So all of those different things. Absolutely. That's part of it. Yeah.

Bonnie: Yeah.

Danny: I would say like, I think, you know, everybody knows somebody with autism. Yeah, everybody does. So there's a lot of stereotypes, a lot of misinformation that has been unsuccessful in communicating that with our community. So in the community at large. So it's nice to kind of, get it out there.

Bonnie: Yeah, definitely. And then it doesn't put the pressure like all on the autistic person to like perform.

Danny: Right. Yeah, no, absolutely. I mean, the thing is, again, that's the strengths-based approach, right? We're acknowledging what this individual is great for. And building upon that, we're not looking to change anything about them and say, okay, you know, to work at this place, you [00:18:33] need to adapt or adjust, or. Why, why would they need to do, that's not who they are.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

We're going to recognize them for their amazing ability. And that is an asset to the company who they are is, is the asset. So I mean, one of the things that. Can we do a TACT is even though we're a 501-C3 non-profit that is technically a charity and we do education training. So, I mean, it's, we're not like a school we're we're we're non-profit we don't ever go to an employer and say, Hey, you know, by working with this nonprofits slash charity, like that's a great thing to do.

You know, it looks good. That's that's not our pitch at all. It's it's, this is an amazing individual. Look at their on task time. Look at their productivity, look at their portfolio, look at how much better your workplace is going to be because of their talent. That's the pitch. I mean, that's what employers want.

You know, most of the employers that work with us end up a lot of times donating back to us and they don't even want tax receipts. You know, they just want, we'll give it to them obviously because that's what you do with property, but they're looking because they recognize it's the right thing to do as well, and it's made their workplace better and then they support it.

Bonnie: Yeah. Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. That's awesome.

Danny: Thanks.

Bonnie: Yeah. And [00:19:33] this is another thing I saw on your website and kind of ties right into, into this discussion right now, but would you mind speaking on neurodiversity and how TACT promotes neurodiversity?

Danny: Yeah, I mean, we're, we're also advocates, you know what I mean? That's a big part. Right? I mean, and I think when you look at it and kind of just everything we just talked about in the sense that that is all neuro-diversity right, when you're embracing that different mindset. I mean, we have a construction company we work with, they came out, they're a billion plus dollar company.

They hire a lot of people. They're starting late, like \$18 an hour for like sweeping, which our kids are aren't doing. So the kids get paid really well, but they came out and like, saw like our welding stations, for example, the way the kids have, they designed, like they realize, you know, what laying a welding torch on a metal bench, isn't the best thing to do. So our kids came up with just naturally little holders, which they've made themselves, that you don't buy in stores and put them on the benches. And then the construction company comes out and says, where did you get those? That is so cool. And it's like, Oh, our kids didn't like [00:20:33] laying their welding torch on the bench.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

So they designed it and built it and put it together. And they're like, we don't have guys that know how to do that. And it's they get it, right. They see that this way of thinking is outside the box and it's valuable and that's what they want. And I think that is what neurodiversity is at its heart. It's looking at this amazing way of thinking that's been traditionally kind of pushed to the side and disenfranchised and we're kind of empowering it instead.

Bonnie: Yeah. Oh, that's awesome. I love that example too. It's such a, like a creative problem solving that they just did because they were like, yeah, we're going to fix this.

Danny: And, and that's our kids. I mean, like, you know, they look at a problem they're like, that doesn't make any sense. It needs to be X, Y, and Z. And then they go and do, and you're like, Oh yeah, I completely agree. That makes total sense. Why would I do it the other way that doesn't make it? But I think the cool thing about our kids is they question, right?

They say it shouldn't be this way. I think it should be, you know, another way. They do it. They wanted to do it. So, yeah.

Bonnie: And then [00:21:33] by celebrating those different, different ways of thinking, but you get different solutions to problems that people traditionally hadn't thought of.

Danny: Exactly. Yeah.

Bonnie: Awesome. Awesome. So kind of a thought experiment, maybe TACT is awesome, you know, and you guys are doing great things in the community, but you know, that's not what every program is like everywhere. And so do you have any advice for employers? For job trainers to make sure that they could develop programs, that they can develop positions that also celebrate neurodiversity?

Danny: Yeah, I think most companies already have it. I think the biggest thing that they don't have as a way of tapping into it and acknowledging it. So I would encourage employers to themselves adapt into the way that they actually recruit our individuals. There's still, society that uses resumes. And, you know, I was talking to somebody the other day, another company that's out of Phoenix that, or Arizona, and that's going to be hiring our kids to do the solar panels, which I mentioned.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

And the whole idea [00:22:33] that, you know, we have to still write down resumes and based upon how our eye contact is in a job interview is very old-fashioned and not a good way in the sense that, you know, if our kids can restore classic cars, which they do, and they do exceedingly well. And if they're pulling our paper resume and they put five sentences, like I did engine, I did brakes, I did some suspension.

We're like, what does that really mean? But if you walk through and have a portfolio showcasing, okay. This suspension, I completely disassembled, reassembled painted, re geared. I mean, all of these different things, like that's real. How do you put that in a sentence, on a resume in bullet point form and a Microsoft office templates? Like that doesn't articulate the strengths of our students.

So I think just employers, I think they're getting it. I think they're realizing it, especially in this labor shortage that we have right now where companies can't find qualified workers. I mean, especially in the trades, they have to start opening it up the way that they're doing it as well. And start recognizing [00:23:33] that there is talent out there and talent wanting to be found.

But a lot of times, I mean, you know, working in the arts, artists look at the world different and how do they express that the employers need to be open to that as well. So.

Bonnie: I love that. Yeah. Just kind of open to maybe not doing your interview, like the same way for every single person and yeah. And judging it on like those arbitrary things like contact.

Danny: Oh, I'm terrible at eye contact.

Bonnie: Or handshake, isn't that crazy in school? I feel like there's a long, I like, I can't, I think I went to a career center,

Danny: right

Bonnie: in the university and they spent a VERY long time, like talking about the handshake and like it should be FIRM, and it's like, like, but why should that matter?

Danny: Right.

Bonnie: If you can, like, do this beautiful thing with a car, like who cares if you do have a firm handshake.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

Danny: You know, we always say too, like at the end of the day, if your toilets broken, you need your toilet fixed. Do you want the person that comes out and shakes your hand really well, it [00:24:33] makes great eye contact but can't fix or toilet or the person that maybe not shake your hands, the way that you want your hand to be shaken, but like fixes your toilet.

And does it well, like you need a fix. That's what you need. So it's kind of just reprioritizing what's important.

Bonnie: Right. Exactly. Awesome. I think that's great advice for the listeners too, to think about. And I love, I love how you also acknowledged that employers are already trying to work towards hiring more neurodiverse populations and just acknowledging and being aware of where they can kind of improve that process.

Danny: Right?

Yeah. So what what's TACT up to now, and I mean, we're like coming up on a YEAR in a global pandemic. So, what does that look like? We've been really fortunate. So, I mean, we ended up doing that whole kit program where we would manufacture kits and have virtual instructions for people to keep doing things that way. We have VR now and as well.

So our students are using virtual reality. The kids. And then we adapted to private lessons or a summer camps. But we've been still doing in person stuff almost the whole [00:25:33] time. I mean, the neat thing about our program from the get go is despite the fact that we have over 700 kids in our program, we never have more than six kids per class.

So, I mean, we have had to embrace a lot of cleaning products and, you know, tarps and all kinds of different stuff too. And take down our fancy swings or maybe some of the more therapeutic things that we have set up, but TACT is still been getting kids jobs and still, fulfilling our mission. So it's been kind of neat to see that, you know, the traits are valuable, irrelevant, and we, we we've been going.

So we actually ironically, grew and hired more people have our biggest staff to date and kind of nice.

Bonnie: Yeah. That's, that's very exciting. And I'm glad to hear that you guys have been doing very well in the pandemic. I love that you guys have that sh that smaller class size, is that for just making sure like individual attention is provided?



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

Danny: Yeah, well, so I think, you know, from the get go, we wanted to set it up as a, you know, student dream and a teacher's dream. Right. I have a master's in education and I have experienced [00:26:33] in working in different educational environments and a lot of the ways, again, even in education that they do, things just didn't seem very wise. You know, when I taught music inner city in Nashville, and we did that, you know, eight preps, 35 kids per class, and you would go from like, You know, orchestra to general music, to strings, to piano, to music theory, to music history.

And it's just there. It's not set up for success. Let's just say.

Bonnie: Yeah.

Danny: So we looked at that and it's just, it's difficult for anybody. I don't care how, where you're at in life to be in a classroom, set up like that and be successful. So we started looking at it and saying, I mean, we've done this since our very beginning, never more than six kids.

And we always have at least two professionals in the classroom, sometimes three. So we found like the two to one, three to one ratio works very well. And then we set up the classroom where the kids are successful as well. We find that, you know, if you set it up from the get-go, no, I wouldn't say correctly, but with a greater outcome and greater chance of success, then the kids are more successful.

Right? I [00:27:33] mean, I can't imagine, you know, there are trade schools as is not original there's other trade schools in town, but, you know, for example, one of them, I know for a fact, their auto program has 60 kids per class with one teacher. That terrifies me. To like, think of just personally, like as a individual and educator, like being with 60 kids, How is that even possible?

I mean, even if you had six hours and you know, could somehow keep them engaged that long, like you have minutes, every, like nobody is getting any formal education they need. And no wonder that employers then come, go to those programs to hire. And those people get hired. And the employers, like they don't know anything and it's like, well, How could you expect them to know anything in an environment like that?

Nobody learns from that. So we're trying to set it up where there's the most contact time, most individualized differentiated time for every client that capitalizes and maximizes their experience here so that they're more successful.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

[00:28:33] **Bonnie:** Yeah. That makes, like complete sense. That that number made me like. Sweat. Like, you know, I'll do early childhood and. Um, I've had up to 15 kids in a class and THAT makes me very stressed when I, when I'm 15 littles. Can I write it if I had 60?

Danny: No, there's, there's a shop class on the West side of town in Jefferson County. They have like 35 kids and it's like, I'm sorry, like 35 kids around a table saw? That's a bad day. That is a bad day waiting to happen. Like, why would you even consider that? But they do. And I get it, you know, budget wise and all kinds of things. But at some point you have to look at it, I think, beyond the numbers and look at like, what's the right thing to do for the success of that person, because either they're going to pay for it on the front, or the backend.

So. Might as well set it up to be successful.

Bonnie: To be successful. Yeah. 100% Awesome. Circling back a little bit, I would love to hear more about the VR, the VR stuff that you guys have.

Danny: So during the [00:29:33] pandemic, and we bought a couple of different PRS net or VRS, naturally, TACT fashion, we had the students build the computers that work for them because we, you know, they need to know the things would just show up and we use them for welding and auto mechanics.

And the idea is that we can teach so much, at least the vocabulary. The tools that are used some of the safety stuff as well. And then we can actually quantify and qualify what the students are doing during that process. We're excited to be partnering with a company called R3 that does all the safety trainings for like NATO and the Navy that are going to be embracing that as well.

I mean, there's some amazing technology out there right now, that while expensive, can produce some pretty cool results and augment our students' education in a pretty amazing way if utilized, in my opinion, sparingly and appropriately. Right? I don't want it to be all auto mechanics online and VR. Like, that's not the same, but like, you know, Hey kids, we have to quarantine.

Let's keep going with some in VR for a week. Learn these different lessons. You can still at least dissect an engine, see how it comes back together. I mean, there's three technologies now [00:30:33] that are remarkable for that. And it's kind of nice again, to kind of put that on top of what they're getting with the hands-on of experience. Working. So it's expensive.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

Bonnie: Yeah, that is so cool. I feel like everyone's had to lean a little more into technology because of the pandemic, but I love just like that extra level of like, Okay, we're quarantining, we're going to do it this way, or we're going to lean into this. And like balance it with the, the, the real life work.

Danny: You have to find a way of making it creative and engaging. Right. Nobody likes sitting and being lectured. I mean nobody likes that. I mean, every educational study you could read in the world ever written will tell you that is like the worst thing that we can do for kids. Yet, we still do it. I mean, it makes no sense.

So we want to find ways of engaging the kids and kind of still keep those creative juices flowing. So they're successful.

Bonnie: Yeah. That's awesome. Sweet. Well, we're kind of wrapping up a little bit. Is there anything else you'd like to share or discuss today?

Danny: No. I just want to thank you for your [00:31:33] time and for sharing our story.

And I hope people can visit our website, which is buildwithTACT.org and learn more. And you know, our social media and see the kids in action. I mean, they are doing some amazing things, so we like to highlight them and showcase their abilities.

Bonnie: Awesome. I'll definitely make sure that's in the show notes so people can get to find TACT and get to it as quickly. And,

Danny: Thank you

Bonnie: To all the cool things that you guys are doing.

Danny: Well, thank you so much. We appreciate it.

Bonnie: Awesome. Thanks so much for coming on today, Danny.

My pleasure. Thanks for having me.

I hope you enjoyed that interview with Danny. He has such an infectious energy and attitude, and is very clearly passionate about the mission that he has with TACT and the amazing things that they're doing.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

I really want to just emphasize a few points from our interview, including kind of this idea that's been reoccurring on the podcast of having a strength-based model and really focusing on the strengths of adults with disabilities and to allow them to have [00:32:33] self-empowerment through different training, through different programs. And with that focus of how can we, focus on their strengths, build on their strengths and kind of nurture, nurture their strengths and lead to the self-empowerment so that they can have self-actualization have high self-esteem and have fulfilling lives and careers if desired.

And I think TACT also doesn't just nurture strengths throughout the interview, it was clear, they nurture relationships within the community, within with the clients that they're working with with the students they're working with. And they also nurture the careers of all the participants of TACT and kind of not just like, Oh, we're going to place them in a job, but really form around their interests, build up their skills and really nurture a career that they want. Which is crucial as discussed in this episode. And in previous episodes that the unemployment rate of autistic individuals is [00:33:33] 90%, which is super high and super unfortunate for those that want to be working or want to be in the workforce, but have to deal with the inaccessibility of a lot of job situations.

So I feel like TACT is just doing a really great job at individualizing their program to support these individuals, these autistic individuals, with what they choose as a career, with what they're interested in, with what they find fulfilling, and really building around that. And even down to their classroom size, I feel like just reflects the mission that TACT has and is doing in the community.

And I love Danny's advice to employers that they're already working hard to be more inclusive, but to maybe be a little more open in the job hiring process and how you're hiring and to reprioritize what's important were the words that I wanted to pull out from the episode. Reprioritize what's important to, is that eye contact is that a handshake or is it the actual job that the autistic individual can do [00:34:33] and bring in the actual task and not kind of the societal things that we build around job interviews. So I thought that was awesome advice to just be open in the job hiring process, because you never know what an individual brings to the table.

You never know their strengths, especially if you're not looking for the strengths. So, yeah, just a great interview, Danny. I'm so glad he came on and I loved hearing more about what's going on at TACT. Their website and social media will be in the show notes as well as more information on autism acceptance month as it is autism acceptance month.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

Right now, hooray!, April. So I'll link some more information on how to celebrate autism acceptance in the show notes, and then consider maybe for autism acceptance, donating to TACT, they're a nonprofit and donating to them so that they continue to build and develop and reach more autistic individuals with their programs.

So I'll put a link to that, as well in the show notes. And that could be one way of one of many [00:35:33] ways to celebrate autism acceptance this month. So consider that and maybe check it out, but definitely check out their website. Next I'm going to go over our spring music therapy session plan for adults with IDD.

So the outline this month is a hello song, Here Comes the Sun by the Beatles. Movement, Rockin' Robyn by Bobby Day. Instrument playing Spring by Eliza Cook, which is a public domain poem. And you could use poetry to create a soundscape. Then there's relaxation When It's Springtime in the Rockies. By Gene Autrey.

And for goodbye, I put so Long farewell from the sound of it music as a new idea for the goodbye song and by new, I mean not, Nana Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye, which is like on every other plan. I use that one a lot in groups, but I thought this could be an interesting song to do as well at the end of a group. And if you're interested in more information on how I would use these or how I've used these different intervention activity, ideas consider becoming a patron on [00:36:33] patreon.com/navigatingadulthoodandidd it's \$5 a month subscription based.

And I create these monthly session plans, as you know, and in the Patreon on feed, you get a breakdown of the session plan where I, write out more specifics on implementation, link to more resources, add visuals or lead sheets, depending on the plan. And then I do a video breakdown of the plan that's um accessible to patrons as well on patreon.com.

And then also Navigating Adulthood and IDD is celebrating its one year birthday this month. And to celebrate up until April 27th, you can become a patron. Well, you can, you can always become a patron of the podcast. But if you join before April 27th, you get access to a free mini course. It's a six video series.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

That's an hour long and it's technology and music therapy for adults with IDD. And I go over all kinds of stuff in the course, including digital audio workstations. Filming [00:37:33] videos, editing videos, editing audio, and the different resources for tele-health or if you're in person on an iPad or a tablet or a smart board, different resources and how you can use them clinically as well.

So if that sounds interesting to you for \$5, you can come and check it out for free. Once you are a patron and you can also have access to the session plans and all the previous breakdowns, there should be over 12 and you'll also have access to our monthly zoom meeting. It will be the last week of April, and there is an office hour for the course, the 28th at 5:30 PM mountain time, which is 7:30 PM, eastern. If you, join before the 27th, you can join us on that office hour and we can discuss more on technology as well, too. So like I said, it's \$5 a month and feel free to just, if you just want to check it out in April, you can always end your subscription on Patreon. It's through paid Patreon you could end it just know they charge on the first of the month.

So you didn't want to do that [00:38:33] before May 1st or they'll charge again automatically, but you know, it's totally okay to just come and check it out, to see if it's a good fit. See if the community groups are a good fit, if they're the resources that you're looking for. So feel free to do that as well, too.

If you just want to kind of come and check out what the community's about, we also have a Facebook group where you can ask more questions and connect more as well, too. So all of that's for \$5 a month and I call my patrons the "navigators." And it supports the podcast as well as helps continue to build this community where we can provide the best services possible for our clients, for the adults that we work with.

So that is my launch announcements. Thanks for listening. And thanks for listening to this episode. I hope, you too, have some good takeaways from it and celebrate autism acceptance this month to also celebrate there's actually going to be another episode. So look for that near the end of April and I usually post once a month.



NAVIGATING ADULTHOOD AND IDD

So then we got two this month to continue to celebrate and other ways to support the podcast, include listening, downloading, rating [00:39:33] us on iTunes, and sharing us with somebody you think would enjoy it as well. Thank you again for listening. I will see you next time. This podcast is by Rhythmic Roots Music services, LLC, with content and music by Bonnie Houpt. Transcriptions are made by my favorite little sister, Emma Houpt.

Thanks for listening.
