SIMmersion's Conversation Training Helps People with Autism Build Key Social Skills and Succeed on Job Interviews

This World Autism Awareness Day, [SIMmersion's](#) virtual conversation training systems are helping people with autism spectrum disorders build social skills and succeed on job interviews. Research on Autism Social Conversation Training with Sam Martin and Job Interview Training with Molly Porter show that SIMmersion's technology is engaging and can drive gains in key social skills.

Columbia, MD ([PRWEB](#)) April 02, 2014 -- This year, World Autism Awareness Day comes just a week after new data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [reported](#) that the prevalence of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has increased to 1 in 68 children in the United States.

"Behind each of these numbers is a person living with autism," says Liz Feld, president of [Autism Speaks](#). "We need a comprehensive strategy… to address our community's needs across the lifespan."

SIMmersion has joined the effort to support the autism community with targeted virtual conversation training applications designed to boost key social skills for people with ASD. Research on Autism Social Conversation Training with Sam Martin and Job Interview Training with Molly Porter show that SIMmersion's technology is engaging for individuals with ASD and can drive meaningful improvements in social skills.

"Our systems are ideal for addressing the needs of people with autism," explains Dale Olsen, Ph.D., President of SIMmersion. The company's virtual characters are represented by video of actors, maximizing realism and relevance to authentic social situations. Users have a wide array of choices for what to say at any time and how to say it, capturing nuances of conversation. The technology enables users to have a realistic social encounter and learn from any errors without the anxiety of real-world consequences. Immediate feedback on every choice is provided by the character's dialogue and an on-screen coach, so no teachable moments are missed.

Two of SIMmersion's products, developed with funding from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), are specifically targeted to benefit users with ASD. [Autism Social Conversation Training with Sam Martin](#), available for free on SIMmersion's [Training Center](#), lets users build conversation skills as they practice talking with a friendly stranger at a party. [Job Interview Training with Molly Porter](#) was designed to help individuals with serious mental illness like ASD navigate a particularly vital and stressful social encounter: the job interview.

In Autism Social Conversation Training, users practice skills instrumental to collaborative conversation like showing interest, asking relevant questions, and avoiding non sequiturs or social missteps. Drilling these skills in role-plays with a virtual character can help users learn to employ the skills in face-to-face conversations.

Adults and teens with ASD in a [study](#) from Catholic University found Autism Social Conversation Training engaging, easy to use, and helpful. They also considered the virtual character, Sam, to be realistic and personable. "I felt like I was talking to a real person," said one participant. Developing comfort in casual social encounters helps people with ASD build the foundational social skills that can prepare them for success in more high-stakes interactions, like job interviews.

Research indicates that more than two-thirds of individuals with mental health concerns would like to work, but deficits in social skills can create barriers to obtaining work or retaining a job once acquired. Job Interview Training with Molly Porter helps users over that hurdle by allowing stress-free practice on a realistic conversation with Molly, a virtual interviewer. Users practice skills vital to interview success, like conveying dependability, demonstrating interest in the job, and sharing in a positive way. Users can also practice filling out a mock job application and fielding Molly's personalized questions about their answers.

In research at Northwestern University, participants with ASD who trained on Job Interview Training with Molly Porter went on to perform significantly better in live interview role-plays than a control group, and reported higher levels of self-confidence in their interview skills. Early follow-up data suggests that users of the system are more than twice as likely to obtain real-world employment within 20 weeks than their peers who didn't receive the training.

A public health crisis on the scale of ASD has no easy solutions. But this World Autism Awareness Day, SIMmersion is doing its part to shine a light on autism with training applications tailored for the needs and aspirations of people with ASD.

About SIMmersion

SIMmersion's mission is to train communication skills faster and more effectively by combining the world's most realistic simulated experiences with highly interactive training content and extensive user feedback. For more information, visit www.simmersion.com.

For unlimited free use of the Autism Social Conversation Training with Sam Martin, visit SIMmersion's Training Center at www.simmersion.com/training.

For a free trial of Job Interview Training with Molly Porter, visit www.jobinterviewtraining.net.

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