

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Day Program Alternatives: Building Structure Without Formal Programs

How to assemble a weekly structure map from libraries, volunteering, faith communities, hobby groups, micro-enterprises, and home routines when formal day programs are closed, full, or wrong for your adult.

BY JIM PALASTY · OASIS FOR AUTISM · 9 MIN READ

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STRUCTURE MAP

One weekly map. Five days. Built from community resources and home routines. The map is the program.

How it works

THREE STEPS

List available resources

Library, faith community, nonprofits, hobby clubs, parks, neighbors. Thirty-minute radius. Every potentially useful door.



Build the weekly grid

Monday through Friday, hour by hour. Each block has location, activity, who is with the adult, transport plan.



Adjust monthly

Some blocks work. Some do not. The map is alive. Replace what fails. Keep what succeeds. Document either way.

What a weekly structure map looks like

Monday AM	Library volunteer program, shelving books
Monday PM	In-home schedule: cooking practice, laundry routine
Tuesday	Faith community food pantry sorting, 4 hours
Wednesday AM	Hobby group at the library, board games
Wednesday PM	Neighborhood walk with neighbor or DSP
Thursday	Vocational rehab job coaching session
Friday AM	Micro-enterprise work: eBay listings, packing

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE



We thought we needed a day program. We applied to three and waited four years. In the meantime we built the map. He volunteers at the library four hours a week. He sorts donations at our church food pantry on Tuesdays. He runs a small eBay business selling sports cards. When the day program slot finally opened, he asked if he could keep doing the library instead. We said yes.

GLEN, ALPENA

What matters, at a glance

The day program closed

Across the country, facility-based adult day programs have been closing at meaningful rates over the past decade as workforce, rate, and HCBS Settings Rule pressures stack up. Families increasingly assemble their own structure. The map is what makes that possible.

Library hours

Most public libraries are quiet, fluorescent-light-tunable, and welcoming. Volunteer programs at libraries are often accessible for adults with disabilities. Hours: free.

Micro-enterprise

A small business the adult runs: card printing, dog walking, eBay reselling, lawn care, baking. Income optional. Structure essential. Often pairs with vocational rehab funding.

Day program waitlist

In states with capacity constraints, day program waits run a year or more. Build the alternative structure now. The alternative may turn out to be better.

Faith communities

Many congregations welcome adults with disabilities into volunteer roles. Bible study, food pantry, choir, hospitality team. Ask. Communities mostly say yes.

Hobby groups

Model trains, board games, photography, gardening. Almost any interest has a meetup. The neurotypical adults in the group usually become casual peers.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Community resource inventory complete | ☐ Library connection confirmed |
| ☐ Faith / community group connection | ☐ Hobby or interest group identified |
| ☐ Micro-enterprise plan drafted (if applicable) | ☐ In-home schedule blocks defined |
| ☐ Transportation plan per block | ☐ Monthly review on calendar |

YOUR MOVE

When the day program door is closed

- 1 Inventory every potentially relevant community resource in a thirty-minute drive.
- 2 Schedule one trial activity per week for the next four weeks. Different door each week.
- 3 Map the weekly grid in writing, with location, hours, contact person, transport plan.
- 4 Document what works and what does not. Adjust the map monthly.
- 5 Run the map in parallel with any pending day program waitlist. The map can stay if the slot opens.

A good structure map outperforms a mediocre day program. Sometimes it outperforms a good one.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

oasisforautism.com · <https://oasisforautism.com>

Informational only. Not legal or medical advice. Verify current program rules before acting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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