



## Statement of Autism Employment Need in the City of Pompano Beach and Support for Rising Tide Car Wash’s Planned Development

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### Introduction

The [University of Miami Center for Autism and Related Disabilities](#) (CARD) is dedicated to supporting individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families by providing resources, training, and community-based programs that promote community engagement and independence. One of the most pressing challenges faced by individuals with autism is meaningful and sustainable employment. This report highlights the employment need for individuals with autism spectrum disorder in Pompano Beach and the potential impact of Rising Tide Car Wash’s planned development in addressing this issue.

### Statement of Need

Autism is a growing concern in communities across the United States, and Pompano Beach is no exception. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, autism now affects approximately **1 in 36 individuals**<sup>1</sup>. With a total population of 113,619<sup>2</sup>, Pompano Beach is home to an estimated 3,158 individuals with autism. Among these, approximately 2,355 are of working age<sup>3</sup>, yet most struggle to find meaningful employment. In fact, **the unemployment rate among individuals with autism is estimated to be 80.7%**<sup>4</sup>, leaving about **1,900 working-age individuals in Pompano Beach without jobs**.

The financial burden of this unemployment crisis is staggering. Individuals with autism who receive Vocational Rehabilitation services cost an estimated \$2,992 per year. Additionally, families who support unemployed adults with autism experience an average annual income loss of \$42,053.72<sup>5</sup>, leading to a

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Data & Statistics on Autism Spectrum Disorder.” *CDC*, 2 Mar. 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/autism/data-research/index.html>. Accessed 15 Mar. 2025.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. “QuickFacts: Pompano Beach City, Florida.” *United States Census Bureau*, 2024, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/pompanobeachcityflorida/PST045224>. Accessed 15 Mar. 2025.

<sup>3</sup> 74.6% of Pompano Beach’s population is over the age of 18 (84,760/28,859) according to Census data.

<sup>4</sup> Autism Society. “Employment.” *Autism Society of America*, 2024, <https://autismsociety.org/employment/>. Accessed 15 Mar. 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Holwerda, Annelies, et al. “Barriers to Employment for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Review of the Literature.” *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2015, pp. 311–326. *PubMed Central (PMC)*, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4596848/>. Accessed 15 Mar. 2025.

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cumulative financial strain of over \$85 million for Pompano Beach households. These economic challenges disproportionately affect low-income families and communities of color.

## Supporting This Population

One of the most critical factors influencing employment outcomes for individuals with autism is early work experience. Research from Drexel University underscores the importance of gaining job experience during high school, as **young adults with autism who worked for pay in their teenage years were more than twice as likely to secure employment later in life**<sup>6</sup>. Unfortunately, many individuals on the spectrum face delays in entering the workforce, with only about one-third securing jobs within the first two years after high school. Without early job exposure, they often encounter significant barriers, including employment gaps, lack of confidence, and difficulty navigating the hiring process<sup>7</sup>.

## Need for Rising Tide Car Wash

Rising Tide Car Wash offers a practical and proven solution to this employment crisis. According to Chief Operating Officer Tom D'Eri, the company's planned expansion into Pompano Beach will create approximately **25 jobs specifically for individuals with autism**. These employees will primarily be sourced from local high schools, including Blanche Ely High School, Coconut Creek High School, and Atlantic Technical College, through a partnership with the Broward County School District. By actively engaging young people in the workforce, Rising Tide provides them with the experience and training necessary to succeed in long-term employment.

Moreover, Rising Tide Car Wash fosters a work environment that is representative of the local community and creates opportunities for growth for its employees. The company's investment in employee training ensures that workers not only develop technical skills in sales, customer service, and maintenance but also gain critical employability skills such as receiving feedback, self-advocacy, and emotional regulation. Through structured leadership development, employees are empowered to take on greater responsibilities, and many advance into management roles within the company.

The long-term impact of Rising Tide's employment model extends beyond the business itself. More than 100 former employees have transitioned into jobs in various industries, securing positions at major organizations such as Northwest Medical Center, AutoNation, Tires Choice, Marriott, Publix, and Home Depot. The company's ability to train and prepare workers for broader career success underscores the effectiveness of its approach and the lasting benefits it provides to both employees and the community.

## Promoting Autism Acceptance

Beyond its direct impact on employment, Rising Tide Car Wash plays a crucial role in fostering autism acceptance within the community. By providing Pompano Beach residents with opportunities to interact

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<sup>6</sup> Drexel University, A.J. Drexel Autism Institute. *National Autism Indicators Report: Life Course Outcomes - Employment Fact Sheet*. 2024, <https://drexel.edu/~media/Files/autismoutcomes/publications/LCO%20Fact%20Sheet%20Employment.ashx>. Accessed 15 Mar. 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Davies, Jade, et al. "Career Progression for Autistic People: A Scoping Review." *Autism*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2024, pp. 811–826. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/13623613241236110>. Accessed 15 Mar. 2025.

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with individuals on the spectrum, the business helps break down misconceptions and promote greater understanding. In doing so, it creates a more welcoming environment for all neurodivergent individuals.

### **Endorsement for Rising Tide Car Wash**

I believe the addition of Rising Tide Car Wash to the Pompano Beach community would have a strong positive impact on its neurodivergent residents and the broader community. This initiative will provide individuals with autism the opportunity to gain meaningful employment, acquire valuable skills, and become a meaningful part of the local workforce. Moreover, it will contribute to helping Pompano Beach become an even more supportive community for neurodivergent individuals. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with Rising Tide to ensure the success and sustainability of this vital initiative, which already serves as a national model for autism employment.