

# A Strength-Based Employment Maintenance Program for Autistic Individuals

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## Introduction

- Autistic individuals have difficulty obtaining and maintaining employment
- Autistic individuals also struggle with emotion regulation, which may impact obtaining and maintaining employment
- Existing interventions are costly, ineffective, or deficit-based
- We developed a strength-based employment training program: Kessler Foundation Strength Identification and Expression Into Work (**KF-Stride® Into Work**)
- Helps autistic young adults identify their unique strengths and use them at work to enhance satisfaction, productivity, and well-being as well as aid in emotion regulation on the job

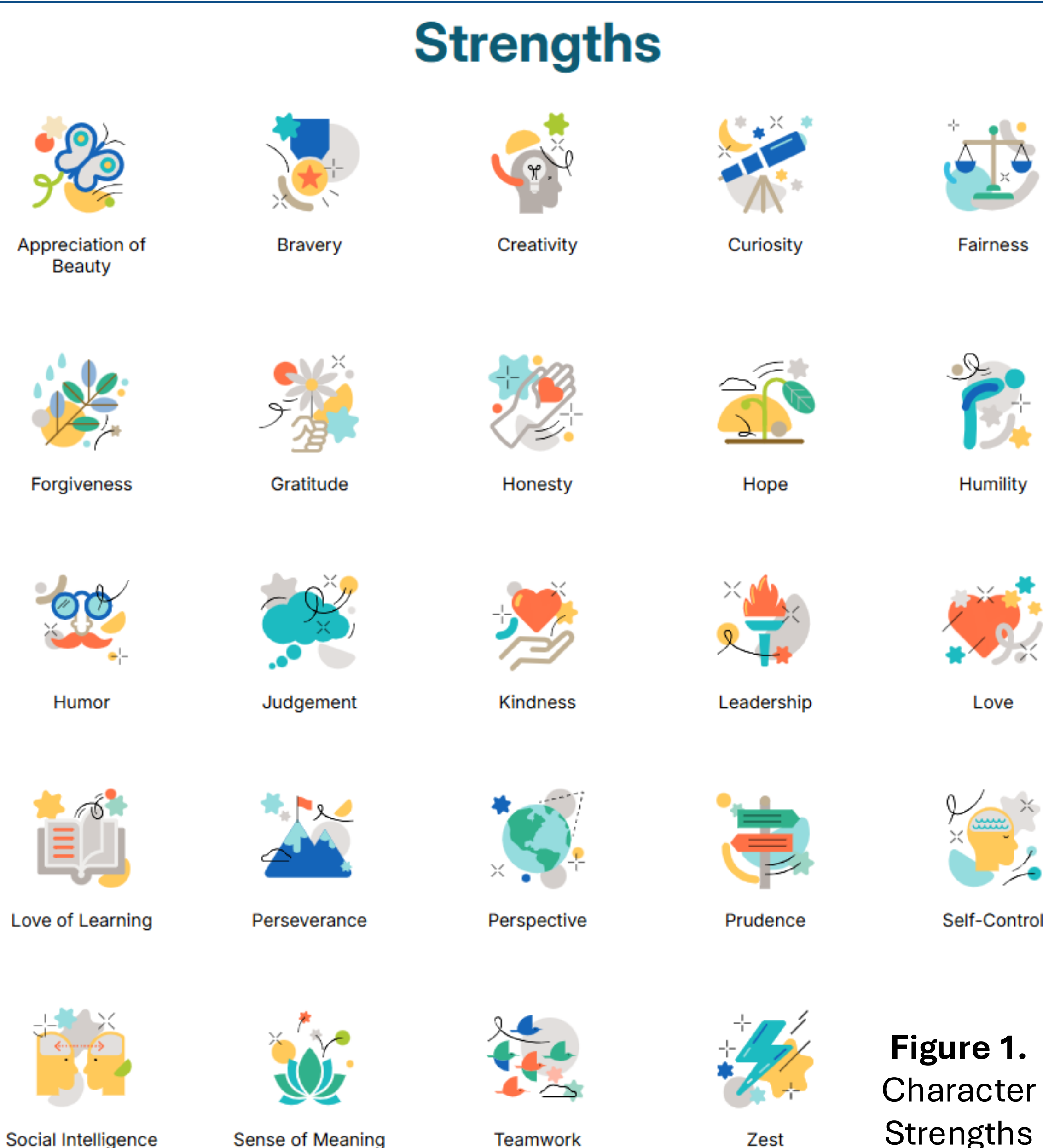


Figure 1. Character Strengths

## Strengths

## Results

Paired samples t-tests showed:

- KF-Stride group showed a significant increase in flourishing pre to post intervention ( $p = .01$ ,  $d = -.74$ ). SAU group showed no change.
- Those unemployed in the experimental group increased job search behaviors between pre and post intervention ( $p = .06$ ,  $d = -1.05$ )

Figure 3.

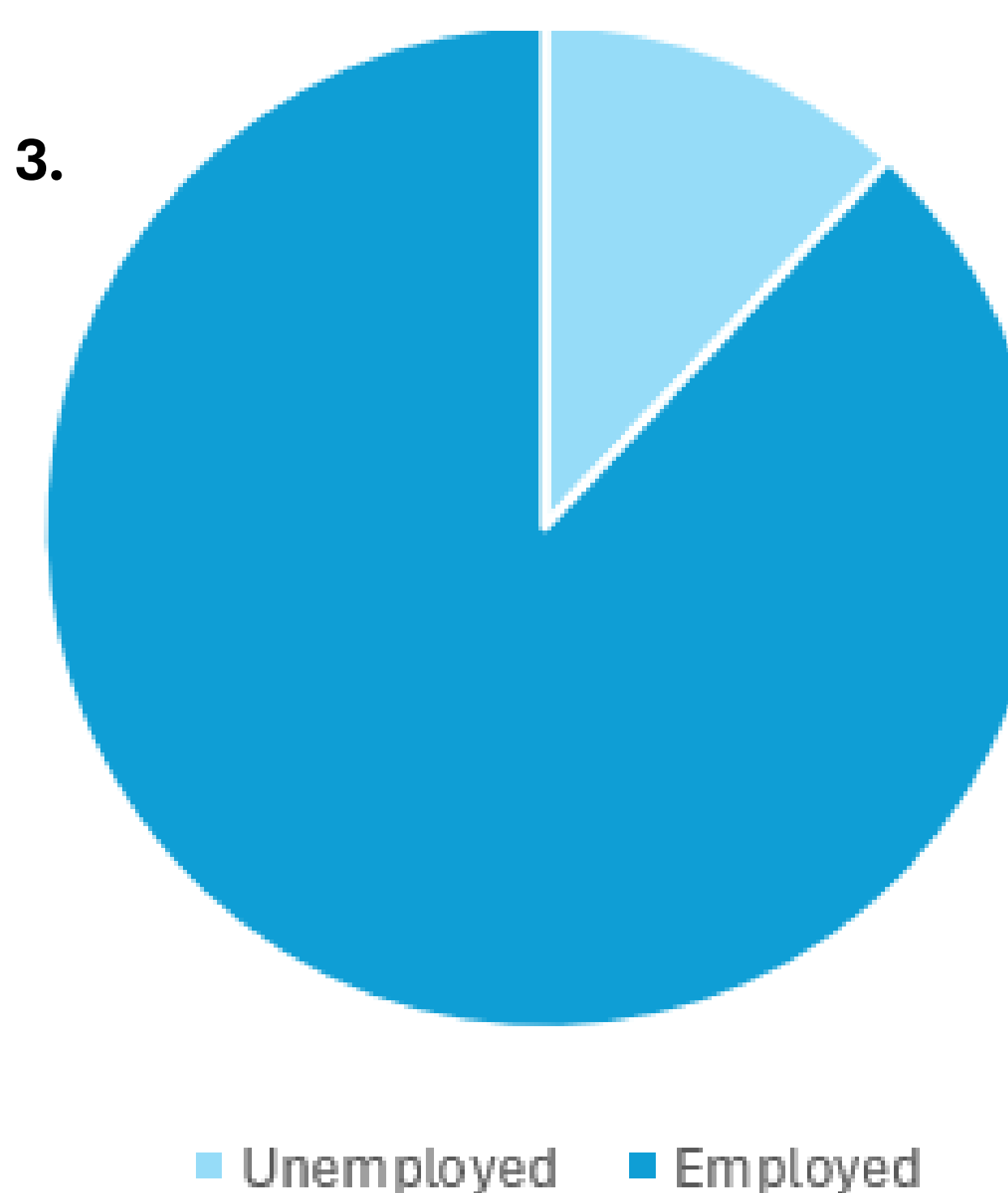


Figure 3. 88% of the intervention group employed at baseline maintained employment post-intervention \*75% maintained employment 6 months post-intervention

STRENGTHS USE TOTAL SCORE

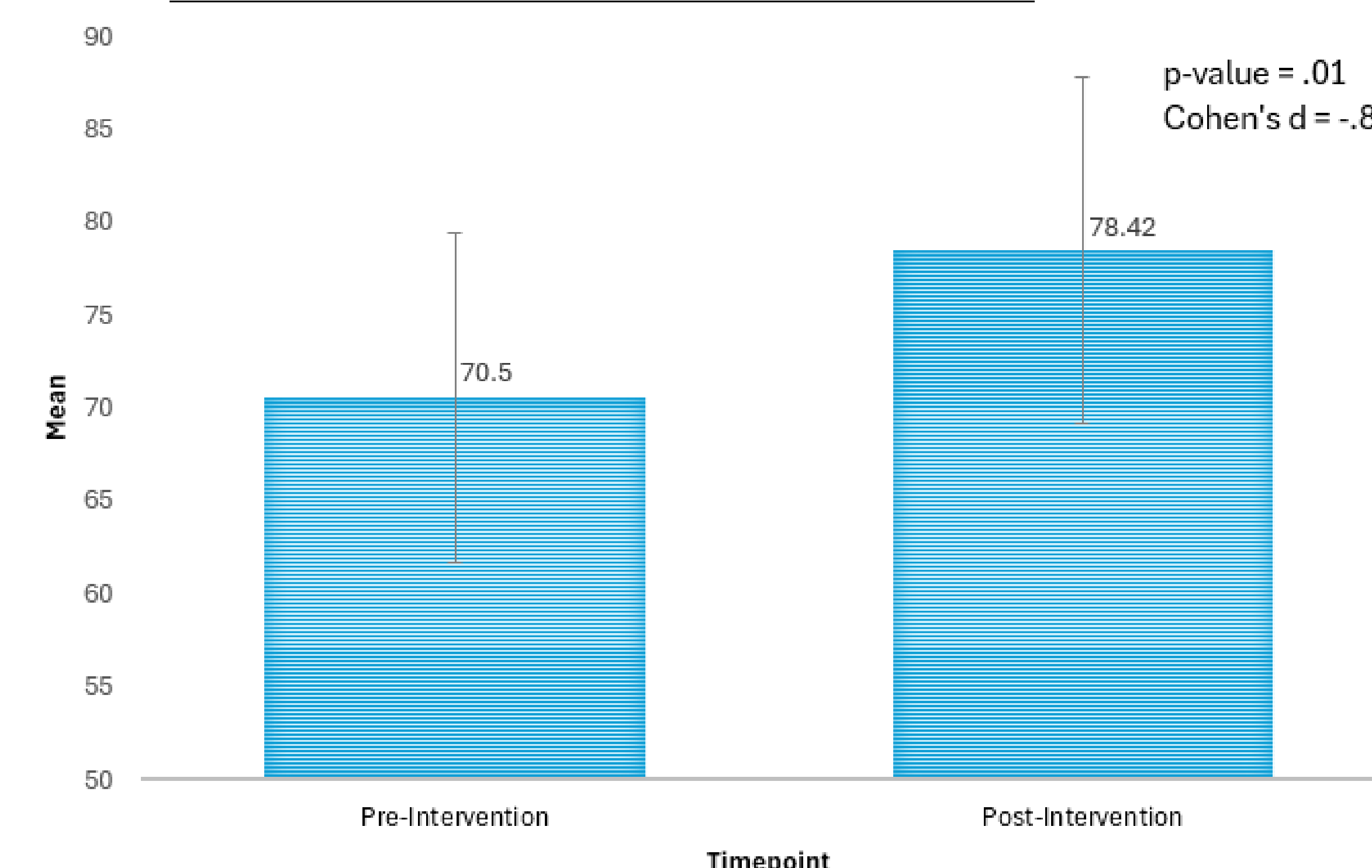


Figure 4.

Figure 4. Strength use improved significantly in the intervention group ( $p = .01$ ,  $d = -.81$ ), indicating a large effect size (no change in SAU group)

## Methods

Sample: 21 autistic youth, aged 14-26.

- Participants were randomly assigned:
  - Experimental group (n=14) or a services-as-usual (SAU) control group (n=7).
  - The experimental group took part in KF-Stride Into Work (eight 1-hour sessions).

Primary outcomes assessed before and after intervention phase:

- Employment, flourishing, and strength knowledge / use (via self-report surveys)

Participants are taught their strengths using the **Aware-Explore-Apply** framework:

- 1) becomes **aware** of their signature character strengths by taking a validated assessment, 2) **explores** how they have used their strengths in the past, 3) practices how to **apply** their strengths to future scenarios

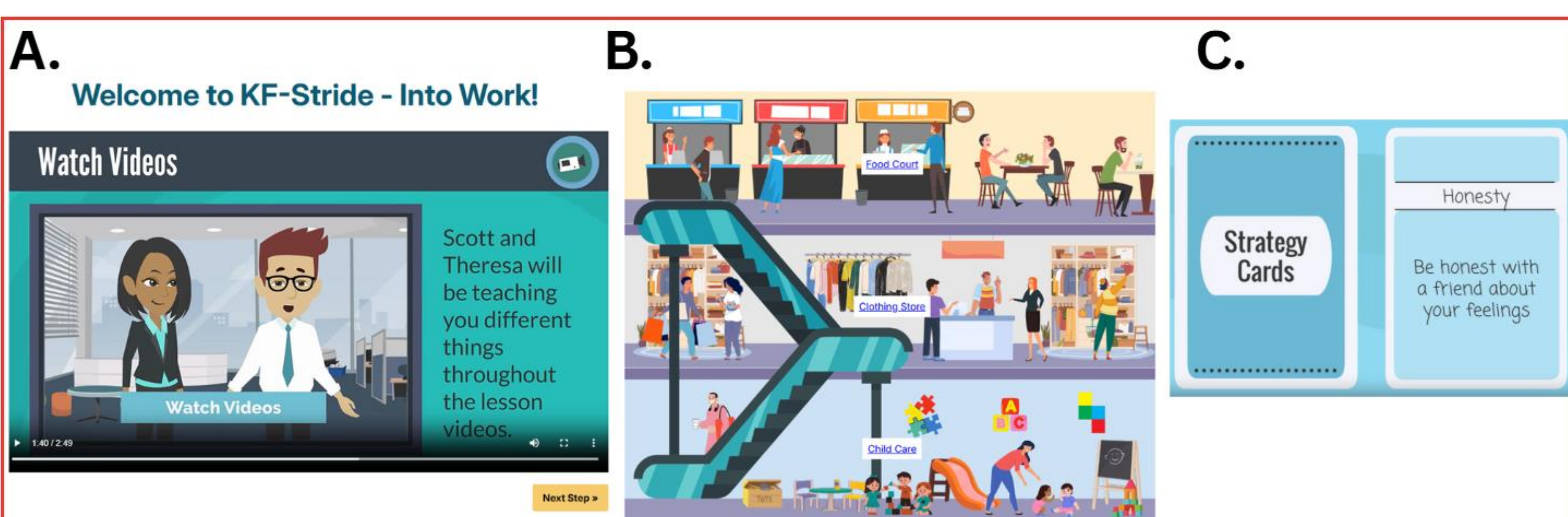
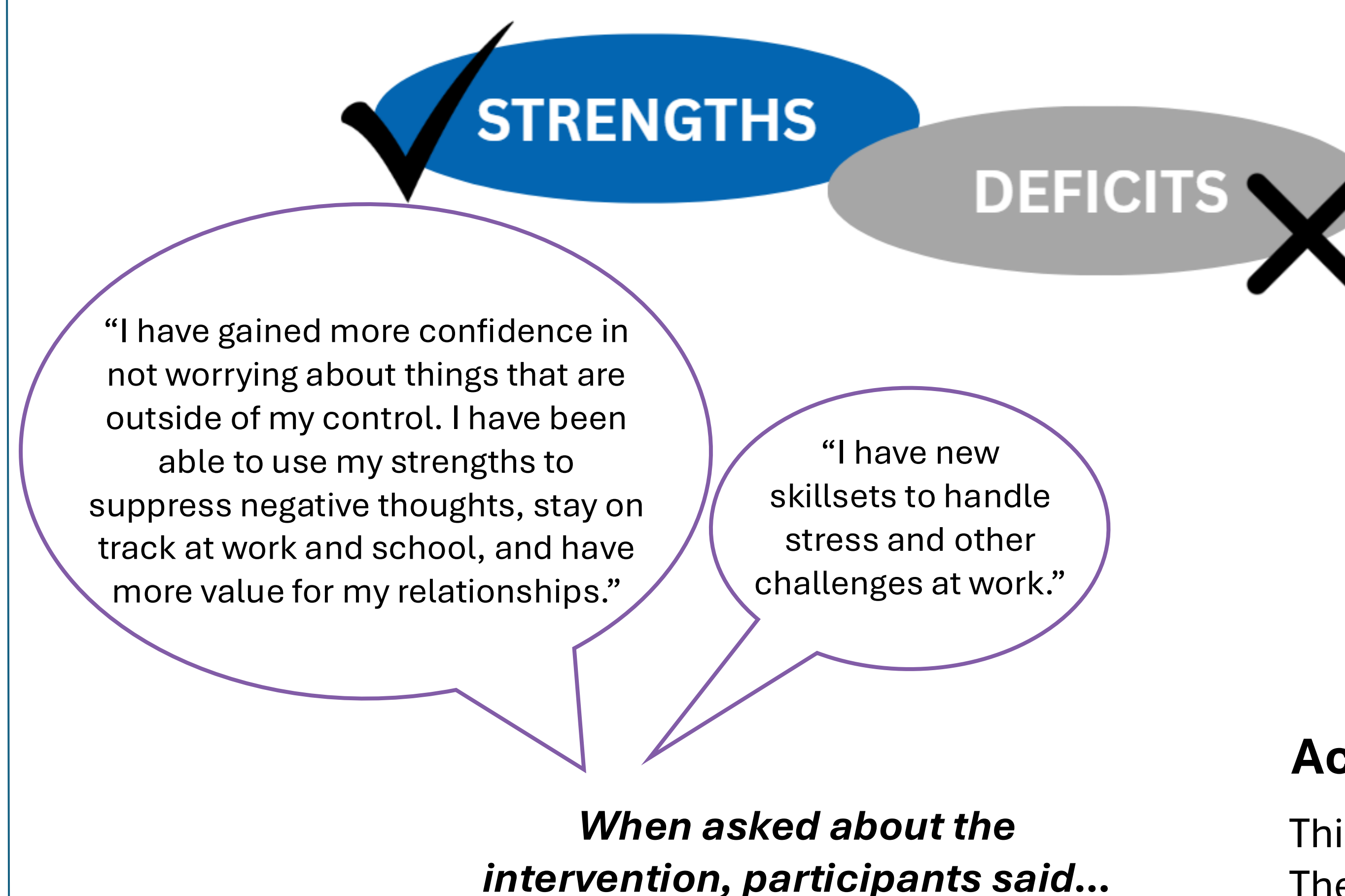


Figure 2. Example Visuals from KF-Stride Into Work:

- A. Didactic videos teaching about strengths;
- B. Three work scenarios where participants use strengths;
- C. Coping Strategies

These findings indicate that the **KF-Stride Into Work** intervention may help *improve flourishing, maintain employment, and increase strength use* in autistic young adults.



When asked about the intervention, participants said...

## Conclusions

- Intervention has a promising impact on improving job maintenance skills and well-being for this population
- Allows autistic youth to feel empowered to leverage their strengths within a workplace

## Acknowledgements

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