

00:00.66

Sasha Long

Hi Andrew, thanks so much for joining me.

00:03.54

Andrew

Hey Sasha, happy to be here. Thank you for having me.

00:06.52

Sasha Long

So can you share a little bit about SportSocial and what inspired you to open this program?

00:13.18

Andrew

Sure, easy. Sports Social, we're an organization for kids, teens and adults with an autism or specialty diagnosis. And our mission is happiness and friendship and making that be a reality for them and their lives.

00:26.84

Andrew

We use sports, art and music as a way to reach our students. And we're all powered by the science of applied behavior analysis. We're an indoor 22,000 square foot facility with things like a skate park, rock climbing wall, bounce houses, basketball court, music and art rooms, cafe for job training, and quite a few other opportunities that provide meaningful, fun, social opportunities for our kids to learn important skills.

00:56.02

Andrew

Because again, um we are we believe fun is important, um but we also want our students to make progress and learn and grow in their life. So that's who Sports Social is. We've we've been in business about 16 years or so. um i started an ABA tutor in high school back before there was such thing as a RBT.

01:14.28

Sasha Long

Thank you.

01:15.26

Andrew

And i I loved it. I loved the kids. I love the families. But to be honest, I hated school growing up and I hated teaching the kids I worked with traditional school things. um It just wasn't what I wanted to do, you know, and and I felt to me like these kids spend so much time and in in therapy rooms and You know, at that time, 40 hour a week programs were pretty heavy and pretty common. and And kids I was

working with were going to school and doing 40 hours a week. And and I was their kind of their break from from their life, you know, their hard life that they have of therapy.

01:49.88

Andrew

um and so that's kind of how sports social started i was a skateboarder in high school and aba tutor and started teaching taking things that i loved which was skateboarding and these kids with autism that became like my little brothers and sisters and and started teaching them um and and that slowly grew and that was you know i don't know 20 years or so ago when i first started and um and it's grown into what sports social is today that's kind of like the quick version

02:16.02

Sasha Long

i I love it so much. Andrew was just, you were just asking me before, like, how did you hear about us? And it came somehow across my Instagram. And on first glance, it just, it looks like a cool, fun play place. Like I was like, why is this on my For You page? And then I was like, oh my God, they're all BCBA's and they're doing AVA therapy in this like bounce house. I love it so much.

02:39.77

Andrew

Thank you. Thank you. Yeah. Yeah. You know, um I don't know, it's just, you know, one of my friends came and saw my place. I hadn't seen him since elementary school. And he said, Andrew, you built our childhood.

02:51.55

Andrew

you You built a business that's basically everything we did as a kid.

02:52.19

Sasha Long

Mm-hmm.

02:54.87

Andrew

um and i And I guess that's kind of true, you know, and and I've seen and recognized the importance of ABA firsthand. i am no behaviorist. I am not a BCBA by any means, um but I understand the value and importance of it.

03:08.30

Andrew

And and I just am trying to provide an environment That is enriching and fun and lets kids be a kid and give BCBA's an opportunity to target

all kinds of skills and make all kinds of progress with students at the same time.

03:15.51

Sasha Long
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03:22.81

Sasha Long
I mean, talk about probably really limited work refusal and work avoidance behaviors when you're like skateboarding and doing art and being active.

03:32.59

Andrew
Yeah, it does have its challenges too, right? We're not a controlled and confined space. And so um sometimes, you know, gaining consistency with some students can be challenging when there's all kinds of places to, um you know, engage with and written run to. And so it can be difficult at times, but but one that provides a better opportunities for generalization, we would say.

03:56.31

Sasha Long
Yeah, that's exactly what i was thinking. I'm like, but the world isn't a controlled space. So when you think about sports and art as teaching tools, what do they offer students over that traditional table-based instruction?

03:59.54

Andrew
hey yeah

04:13.66

Andrew
You know, um ah you i it's I hate sitting at the table so much. I hated it as an as ah as a tutor.

04:23.98

Andrew
Like it it made me want to pull my hair out, you know? um and And I just, i think that there's just, that things like sports and art, you can work on just about everything that you could do at a table.

04:27.18

Sasha Long
Mm-hmm.

04:37.75

Andrew

You can do it through an activity. And it makes it more fun. it makes it more engaging. It makes it more likely to stick. You're going to remember it. um It is a more difficult job. It is harder to figure out a way to take a skill and practice it in a way that's meaningful, in a way that you can get data, in a way that is like actually trackable.

05:01.01

Andrew

it's harder to do right it's a harder job for the bcba it's usually a harder job for the rbt um but in the end it's better for the kid it's better for everybody right um so i just think that that you can target every skill that you might want that you that you could imagine in a In a more engaging way right now, of course, there are students that they really need a a neutral, quiet environment there at the very beginning of some skills and and and maybe they need some of that, that table time for like what you might call.

05:31.67

Andrew

um But I think in most cases, there's there's just there's more engaging ways to do it.

05:36.50

Sasha Long

Especiallly as you said before, they're like they're already getting a lot of that table practice at school that this can be a break where we still build new skills.

05:46.78

Andrew

Absolutely, right? There's still a kid, right? When I when i got out school as a kid, I came home and I ran outside and I was playing in the tree and riding bikes and getting hurt and and having fun and and making friends, you know?

05:49.52

Sasha Long

Yeah.

05:59.34

Andrew

and And I hope that we can find a way to give these kids an opportunity to do that and also give them that that extra therapy that they need.

06:07.83

Sasha Long

I think that's a good point that you said how, you know, in a lot of ways, this is a harder job for a BCBA because you have to be so creative. It's easy to like print out feature function flashcards and

sit at a table. But thinking about, okay, movement is really powerful, important, a good reinforcer for this kid. How can we work on that within this structure? You've got to be really creative.

06:28.64

Andrew

Totally. it takes just time, right? I think if you take the extra time to think about it in a creative way and and you take something but you wouldn't normally do, right? Like,

06:39.74

Andrew

I don't know, um take an example of something that you say that the kid liked, you know, to play basketball, right? and

06:47.75

Sasha Long

Mm-hmm.

06:48.92

Andrew

and And you knew you had to work on a, you know, some goal of of following directions or work tolerance or whatever it might be. you If you thought about it for long enough, you could come up with some good, important goals to work on in that setting. ah You just need a little bit of extra time and and sure, creativity, but creativity, like...

07:07.67

Andrew

you you gain that skill with the more practice that you do i would say

07:13.24

Sasha Long

So talk to me about like the process of being intentional with, with programs and data while still kind of being creative. So like this example you're saying like basketball and following directions, what does it look like for your BCBA's on writing goals and taking data?

07:31.07

Andrew

Yeah. So um I am first not a BCBA, 100%.

07:35.26

Sasha Long

Yeah.

07:38.26

Andrew

But so they're going to write a goal and they're gonna they're going

to... ask the RBT to target it in a specific way um through a skill, right? And then they're going to um create opportunities for it. They're not going to just let it naturally happen, right? They're going to specifically go to the basketball court, create the opportunity maybe with another peer that's there or organize for another peer to be there.

08:02.90

Andrew

And then they're going to you know, run the trial just as they would if they were sitting at a table. um But they're going to, you know, they're going to give the SD and then they're going to see how they respond and then they're going to take the data through that activity. Does that make sense?

08:18.17

Sasha Long

Yeah, I mean, you do sound like a BCBA, I'll tell you. but ha

08:21.97

Andrew

Definitely not.

08:23.32

Sasha Long

look my My husband calls himself a lowercase BCBA, which I don't, he does not, he actually doesn't have any background, so I don't approve of that.

08:23.99

Andrew

They will tell you.

08:30.76

Sasha Long

But um when but when I think about, yeah, lowercase, when I think about you know movement activities and creative activities, to me, it lends itself really easily to like social communication, regulation skills.

08:34.07

Andrew

Same, you know. Yeah, yeah.

08:45.10

Sasha Long

Can you talk about how some of that looks in your program?

08:49.11

Andrew

Totally, yeah. I mean, so social skills is the the number one reason, right? Most families are coming to us because their kid is lonely and isolated. They don't have any connections or friends in their life.

08:59.61

Andrew

And so they're they're coming to us asking for help in this area, right? And so we we work on a wide range of social and communication skills. um Everything from, you know, greetings and saying hi um to using proloquo to communicate.

09:15.32

Andrew

um to targeting goals like joining in or teamwork or targeting goals like expressing your feelings, targeting goals like boundaries or social reciprocity.

09:26.26

Andrew

um There's a wide range of social skills that we work on. Both we use existing curriculums and we adapt and create our own. um And we have different levels of students that come to Sport Social. So we have nine programs in total that we offer. So many of our students are coming for like a weekly one hour lesson centered around learning some sports and learning some social skills to go with it. right um so Now some other students might be coming for a weekly social skills group where they they learn a social skill in the classroom like teamwork.

09:57.61

Andrew

The instructor is going to break that skill of teamwork down into three to five digestible simple steps. They're then going to go out and provide a specific opportunity to practice teamwork. So they're going to go and they're going to play a game of basketball. They're going to go and play a game of four square, whatever the opportunity might be. And then they're going to do one more opportunity to practice that skill of teamwork again. Then they get some free time to go jump in the bounce house or play video games or go on the rock climbing wall.

10:22.90

Andrew

And then they trade in their cool friend tickets, grab some prizes and the instructor debriefs with the parents on what they worked on that week. Um, so i I don't know if I answered your question exactly. Sorry, i went off a little bit, but, um,

10:32.44

Sasha Long

No, you did. I like, I know I like hearing about the structure of the

class. And again, I keep thinking about like preteens and teens, which can be harder, a harder group to get at. And it, it sounds fun. Like, it's not like, oh, we got to go to therapy now. It's like, oh, you get to go on a rock climbing wall. Like it, it sounds fun.

10:51.64

Andrew

yeah Yeah, we try to make the space not seem like it's a you know special needs space. right It's a skate park, right? And it's' it's a place that doesn't look or feel like therapy, um but but still provides that necessary component.

11:06.97

Sasha Long

And with like so many, I mean, playing Foursquare, for example, like you said, that does require teamwork. Like it's not like we're contriving this. This actually does. And so many kids like with or without a diagnosis struggle on losing the game, on working together on all of these important skills.

11:24.70

Andrew

Absolutely. Yeah, we're we're like an in-between zone, right? We're we're not exactly, you know, the the general, you know, playground, right? But we're not a clinic, right? we're So we're somewhere in between where we can create somewhat contrived because beforehand the RBTs and the BCPAs said, hey, guys, look, let's set this up. Let's run this activity. These are the things that we're going to do.

11:44.98

Andrew

But it provides real meaningful like practice and opportunities for our students. um And it's filled with lots of positive reinforcement, right? The students know that if they do these things successfully, they earn these cool friend tickets, they can buy all kinds of cool prizes. It's kind of like Dave and Buster's, but but with um cool friend tickets, we call them, um or other things, right? So I think that, um yeah, trying to create that that middle zone where there's enough contriveness to it, but it's but it's also like open and generalized enough.

12:14.17

Sasha Long

Yeah, it seems like a really nice balance of that because, yeah, it's not just like an open play place, but also not let's sit at a table in a room together.

12:22.12

Andrew

Yeah, yeah, finding that balance is hard, right? That's the struggle

that we have with most RBTs and BCBA's.

12:24.57

Sasha Long

Yeah.

12:27.84

Andrew

You know, somebody, they want to take it too serious or they're not taking it serious enough. And finding that balance, that sweet spot is what our kids need and deserve. And um that's usually where we have a struggle with our team members.

12:42.87

Sasha Long

Yeah, so question for you about your team. Do you have ever struggles with BCBA's or RBTs that come from more of a clinical world transitioning into this different mindset and kind of lifestyle?

12:54.82

Andrew

Definitely. um We've had a mix of experiences. um Sports social is overwhelming, right? It's a lot. It's there's it's the it's it's not controlled and it's it can be difficult for an RBT or BCBA that's coming from an environment where it's it's more standardized, you know, and it's more like predictable.

13:15.42

Sasha Long

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

13:16.98

Andrew

ah and And for our RBT's, they get more, they have more responsibility, I guess you would say. than in a typical ah environment. And so we see some RBTs struggle with that um and struggle with the the requirement that we're asking them to bring the fun and creativity every day for an RBT. So like we we do struggle. um to To be honest, we for the most part, we do not hire existing um RBTs. we We hire and train.

13:52.94

Andrew

athletes, musicians and artists that we think align with our values as a company. And then we put them through our training course and we certify them to become an RBT. That's our most successful way of growing our team. and We hire about two to five a month.

14:07.05

Sasha Long

Oh,

14:07.26

Andrew

um and And yeah, quite a few. And and then on the BCBA's, we're struggling. We're currently, we're looking for for BCBA's that we think, or that align with us, right, both ways, right, that that see the value and importance in and doing something in a different way and providing kids with an opportunity to to learn and grow, but to have fun at the same time and to to be social and and to engage in their time. um Because it's just not, it's not,

14:35.13

Andrew

Typical and and um again, it's a harder job for a BCBA, I would say more meaningful, but harder.

14:43.65

Sasha Long

Yeah. No, I get that. And I think it's, it in some ways is a similar struggle of a clinician coming from a clinic setting to a school setting. I'm i like a teacher first, BCBA second, I always consider myself.

14:56.26

Sasha Long

And public schools are messy and cluttered and

14:56.76

Andrew

okay

14:59.06

Sasha Long

You know, not controlled at all, not in a fun way like at your job.

14:59.19

Andrew

yes

15:02.50

Sasha Long

But when you if you come from a clinical setting, you're like, whoa, whoa, whoa. Like you should be taking data every day. And I'm like, I haven't gone to the bathroom in a month. What are you talking about? So there is like public schools have that kind of difficulty, too, I think.

15:17.37

Andrew

Yeah, yeah, I would say that that's a good point. And and ah and we have had ah some good success with BCBAs that have come from working in schools, because they they have a little bit more of that, that experience of what controlled chaos can look like and feel like and and how to roll with it you know.

15:31.70

Sasha Long
Yeah.

15:35.16

Sasha Long
And when I got my master's in ABA a long time ago, there was a lot of conversation. I'm like, you can work anywhere as a BCBA. But I was like, I'm only seeing jobs in clinics. Like, I'm only seeing jobs in in-home. And, you know, there are more and more BCBAs in public schools. But it would be so cool to see more BCBAs in roles like like in your company and in facilities like that.

15:58.07

Andrew
Yeah, please, we're we're hiring. We would love to to interview anybody, BCBA, that's interested in, and um you know and again, in doing something different and fun and and still providing meaningful opportunities for kids.

16:10.38

Sasha Long
Okay. Put the link in the show notes.

16:12.15

Andrew
where do you Where do you work? What do you do? what do you do What's your day job?

16:15.61

Sasha Long
My day job is this. Yeah.

16:17.61

Andrew
Yeah, yeah, really?

16:18.23

Sasha Long
Full time. Yeah. I was, I was, yep. I was a public school teacher in Chicago public schools for 10 years.

16:20.79

Andrew

wow

16:24.83

Sasha Long

And then I started the autism helper and now I do trainings and create curriculum and run this podcast full time.

16:30.25

Andrew

Cool.

16:31.06

Sasha Long

Yeah.

16:31.38

Andrew

Wow, that's amazing. Good for you.

16:33.72

Sasha Long

So work with a lot of teachers. So your advice for teachers, if you're if a teacher is listening to this now and they're well, I can't I'm not I'm not moving.

16:34.58

Andrew

ah fun.

16:37.54

Andrew

Yeah.

16:40.80

Sasha Long

I but I love this idea. How do I bring the fun, the generalization piece to my classroom?

16:43.89

Andrew

Huh.

16:47.10

Sasha Long

But I don't have a facility. What advice would you give to them?

16:51.70

Andrew

um Well, first, if you have any control over hiring, i would encourage you highly to pick the right people to be on your team.

17:02.18

Andrew

So I guess I'm not sure. i don't know the role of the teacher. Like, do they get to pick their student aides? Do they get to pick?

17:07.13

Sasha Long

No, and they don't even get to pick if they have student aid sometimes.

17:12.63

Andrew

Okay. Well, that's difficult to work within because I would say the number one way that I create the environment that I've created is with the people that are in it.

17:21.70

Sasha Long

Mm-hmm.

17:21.91

Andrew

um so but But if you are in that environment and you hear this message and you see Sports Social and you think that it is um it is um in a model ah that is important and valuable and that you think you could evolve into yours, i would say that there are ways to do it.

17:40.79

Andrew

um And I would encourage you just to... To find things that you love to do is that but is the where you would find the most energy, right? Like for me, I loved skateboarding. And so I was willing and it energized me to find meaningful ways to engage with my students on their directions of work tolerance and following directions and social skills. and um you know, multi-step conversations through skateboarding because I loved skateboarding and then my kids loved it. Right. So I wouldn't always encourage a teacher or someone in this space that's helping kids to take what they love and to share it with their kids while teaching them something, ah because that's the only way you're going to have enough energy to keep doing it.

18:28.33

Sasha Long

I love that advice. And I think that's applicable even if you don't hire your own team.

18:31.82

Andrew

100%.

18:33.54

Sasha Long

But I was thinking back to a paraprofessional I worked with a really long time ago who loved doing bulletin boards.

18:34.64

Andrew

Mm-hmm.

18:39.62

Sasha Long

And I was like, great, let's do it. Why don't you be in charge of doing art projects with kids? Because you obviously are creative and like art. I'm not super artsy. And it was a great thing for her to connect with kids on.

18:50.42

Andrew

Yeah, yeah, that's a perfect example. Exactly. Everybody has something that they love, you know, and, and what I found is that like kids, they feel that and they know that and, and when you're sharing something with them that they love, like, there's a mutual bond and like connection that is created. and there's just an opportunity, you know, to then teach someone once you've created that connection.

19:11.51

Sasha Long

Great. I love this. um So where can people go to learn more about sports social and share where you're located and all that good stuff?

19:20.81

Andrew

Sure. Yeah, so Sports Social, I guess like the best way to kind of understand and see who we are would be through our like our Instagram, LV Sports Social, or our TikTok, LV Sports Social. Those places, there's daily content that shows you like what do our music lessons look like, our social groups, right? What do our insurance-based programs look like, right? There's a range of things that you can see on there. Our website, it's decent. It's lvsportssocial.com. It doesn't fully encapsulate everything that we do, but you can learn a little bit more about who we are.

19:49.53

Andrew

Um, and yeah, we're based in Las Vegas. We're in the Southwest side, right off of 215 and Rainbow. And if you're ever in Vegas for a, um, a wedding or a, or a vacation or something, you want to come stop by. I give tours all the time and i have a team of people that give tours of our place. Happy to, to show you around.

20:08.84

Andrew

yeah. We do, we interview BCBA's all the time from across the country and we do also have a paid trip to come out to Vegas for an in-person interview if you make it to the third step. So if you're interested in ah in a paid trip to Vegas, you can apply at Sports Social. Just check out our hiring page on Sports Social or go to Indeed postings as well.

20:33.11

Sasha Long

Awesome. I will link all of that in the show notes. Thanks so much for joining me, Andrew.

20:37.24

Andrew

Totally. Thanks, Sasha.

20:38.74

Sasha Long

Thanks.