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Literature Review Fact Sheet
Transition Programs for People with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities
Areas for Improvement and Strategies for Success

At a Glance

The transition from post-secondary education (PSE) to decent work was a key focus of this review. Many articles we reviewed focused on transition programs for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD). There are multiple benefits of hiring employees with IDD, including higher work retention rate, improved workplace safety, awareness of IDD, more positive workplaces, strong interpersonal environments, cooperative cultures, and more inclusivity in workplace practices (Readhead & Owen, 2020). However, people with IDD tend to have the lowest job outcomes among people with disabilities in North America. While there should be more cross-disability research on the transition from PSE to decent work, research should continue to focus on the perspectives of people with IDD. This fact sheet summarizes the types of transition programs considered in research and the areas for improvement and strategies for success for these programs.

PSE Transition Program Models

Various transition programs were identified throughout the review. Transitions from high school to work, post-secondary, or independent living were one level of transition. There were also programs that focused on post-secondary to independent living and work. These programs support the transition into PSE and are usually provided based on one of the following three models:

- *Substantially Separate Model* – This model is considered the least inclusive and has students with IDD exclusively in classes with other students with IDD (Wilczenski et al., 2017).
- *Mixed/Hybrid Model* - This model is considered to be more inclusive; students can take whatever classes they want and also attend specialized classes with other students with disabilities (SWD). This model primarily focuses on building important independent life skills (Wilczenski et al., 2017).
- *Inclusive Individual Support Model* – This model is considered the most inclusive. Students access PSE similar to their non-disabled peers whilst receiving specific individual supports from education coaches or other support staff. Many programs aligned with this model begin in high school to ease planning and transition, and they also provide life skills courses that are open to all students regardless of disability (Wilczenski et al., 2017).

Areas for Improvement

- *Lack of Transparency* - Transition programs for PSE students moving into work can be costly. For students to decide if it is worth enrolling in such programs, more data about the programs needs to be collected and made publicly available so their efficacy can be evaluated (Ryan et al., 2019). While some academic sources compare programs, more accessible and transparent information should be provided to ensure informed choices can be made.
- *Lack of IDD Perspectives* – The lack of perspectives from people with disabilities in the research is a theme that cut across this review. However, this is especially true for people with IDD. Very little research is directly engaged with people with IDD. Many of the articles consulted family members, support staff, and case managers instead of asking people with IDD about their lived experience.
- *Siloed/Independent Support Units* – Collaboration has also been noted as an important theme throughout this review, and this is especially important for transition programs. The lack of connection between PSE supports and vocational support can lead to uncoordinated care and will not be able to adapt as goals, interests, and prospects shift (Maru et al., 2018). One article found that increased integration leads to better mental health, more self-efficacy, and increased engagement of people with IDD (Maru et al., 2018).

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- *Focus on Self-Determination* – While self-determination is important for anyone transitioning from PSE to decent work, the research in this area tends to focus on this as the most important measure of success. Many studies uncritically relied on self-determination as the only measure and did not consider what may impact self-determination. While self-determination is an important predictor, more research should consider it alongside other important measures (i.e., knowledge of workplace rights, high expectations from stakeholders, multicultural competency) (Wlczenski et al., 2017).

Strategies for Success

- *Peer Mentorship* – Mentorship can be helpful for many people transitioning from school to work, but peer mentorship can be especially helpful in transition programs. Peer mentorship can help students fit into university life, help develop soft and social skills, and may help with completion rates (Sullivan, 2016; Thompson et al., 2018). Social and soft skills are also significant predictors of both academic and employment success (Nasamran et al., 2017).
- *Resources and Support* – Ensuring that people with IDD have the resources and support they need to succeed is incredibly important. In the US, one article found that higher spending on vocational rehabilitation (VR) was associated with higher likelihood of employment for people with IDD (Sannicandro et al., 2018).
    - Support is also very important to successful outcomes in employment. This includes community and social support (Lindsay et al., 2017), and support from family and friends (Kelley & Prohn, 2019).
- *Consistent & Long-Term Planning* – Many predictors of success are linked to opportunities early in life. For example, early paid work experience is a predictor noted by many authors (Southward & Kyzar 2017). Therefore, some authors suggested planning for transition should occur early in life and carry through to PSE (Lindsay et al., 2017; Wilczenski et al., 2017).
- *Support from Employers* – Early work opportunities, access to apprenticeships, placement opportunities, and internships can all lead to great work opportunities and can be a predictor of future success (Cocks et al., 2015; Petcu & Chezan, 2015; Lindsay et al., 2017). Employers should ensure that work and training opportunities are accessible, and appropriate accommodations are available.
- *Increased Support for Neurodiversity* – While many articles focused on IDD, very few used the language of neurodivergence or neurodiversity. These terms align with the social model of disability as neurodiversity suggests that there are different neurotypes resulting in behavioral differences that are often considered "disorders" (Singer, 1999). The term is often associated with Autism, which was the focus of several articles in this review. Future research should consider the neurodiversity movement (NDM) and workplaces should work on accommodating different neurotypes (Mellifont, 2021).
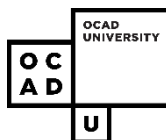

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