



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Global Postschool Pockets of Excellence

Identifying pockets of excellence in
postschool options for young people
with disabilities

Sydney School of Education and Social Work

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Introduction

Transition to postschool pathways can be an exciting yet challenging time for many young people. Postschool transition is a time in a young person's life when they are afforded the opportunity to plan and explore the many postsecondary pathways available to meet their personal strengths, interests, and goals (Morgensen et al., 2023). For those with moderate to severe disabilities and their families, however, this period of transition can be longer and more complex for various reasons (Strnadová et al., 2016). Rather than achieving increased independence, young people with more severe disabilities may continue to rely on the support and decision-making of their caregivers (Davies & Beamish, 2009).

After school, young people with disabilities and their families are at risk of low employment rates, social exclusion, living in poverty, and poorer quality of life (Meadows et al., 2006; Siperstein et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2019). It is understandable that families are therefore seeking residential options, social outlets, employment opportunities, and connections to service providers for their children with disabilities (McKenzie et al., 2017). For this population, the importance of supporting successful postschool transitions cannot be underestimated (Siperstein et al., 2013), and it is therefore unfortunate that transition planning is not mandated in Australia, resulting in a variable and fragmented process.

In Australia, the National School Reform Agreement (Council of Australian Governments, 2018) recognises the crucial need for planning transitions out of school for all young Australians. The aim is to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge for a successful transition into further studies, work, and life. States and territories have established policies and best-practice frameworks to support students with disabilities as they leave school. Common characteristics among these guidelines include the emphasis on early planning, a person-centred approach, and fostering collaboration among family, school, and services (e.g., NSW Government, 2019; Queensland Government, 2021). These components are echoed in the growing evidence base on the transition experiences of young people with intellectual disabilities (Morgensen et al., 2023).

Young people with disabilities may be participants of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) that aims to support their postschool lives. This is because transition to further education, training, and employment is identified as a responsibility of the NDIS according to the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013*. Some NDIS

participants will access the School Leavers Employment Supports (SLES), an intervention approach that supports NDIS participants' transition between school and employment. However, for young people with moderate to severe disabilities, employment may not be the objective. Rather, the National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) program is offered to support some participants as they move between school, further education, and employment. This program aims to facilitate the coordination and collaboration between schools and providers of further education, training, or employment.

Since the introduction of the NDIS in 2013, the postschool landscape for young people with disabilities has changed. Most significantly, there has been an increase in the number of service providers who offer postschool options for this population. With the increase in the volume of service providers, a consistency in service provision is difficult to maintain, and without comprehensive policies or guidelines, variability of key program components is expected.

This report on international programs provides a snapshot of postschool pockets of excellence that support the quality of life and ongoing learning opportunities of young people with disabilities after high school. The aim of this report is to provide an insight into the program components that are (a) evident in global examples of postschool programs for school leavers with moderate to severe disabilities and (b) supported by research evidence. The recommendations of this report include actions to guide the improvement of postschool service options for individuals with moderate to severe disabilities. These actions include ways of planning and organising postschool programs and services that encourage partnerships with families, provide opportunities for ongoing learning and development, and improve the skills and knowledge of those who deliver these programs.

Methodology

This desktop review began with a comprehensive database search for empirical research literature on postschool programs for individuals with disabilities. Search terms included variations of (a) postschool (e.g., postsecondary, postschool, school leavers), (b) programs (e.g., day programs, social programs, creative programs), and (c) adults with disabilities (e.g., adolescents with disabilities, intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities). In addition, internet searches for publications by governments, researchers, and organisations, along with the research team's networks, led to the identification of additional programs for inclusion in this review.

In the past, quality of life has been used as a measure to evaluate programs and interventions for people with intellectual disabilities (Schalock, 2005; Verdugo et al., 2005). While quality of life is a complex concept, it has been successfully broken down into various sets of indicators, such as personal development, interpersonal relations, social inclusion, and wellbeing (Schalock, 2005). In addition, quality-of-life measurement principles sit behind these indicators and include the provision of life experiences that (a) are personally valued, (b) contribute to a full and interconnected life, (c) consider the physical, social, and cultural environments, and (d) are common to all humans and unique to individuals (Verdugo et al., 2005).

In addition to quality-of-life measures, community-based nonwork programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities have been evaluated according to various other measures (Walker, 2007). Common measures of successful programs have included the pursuit of individual interest, the importance of place and social space, social relationships and community connections, individualisation, and independence (Sulewski, 2010; Walker, 2007). These measures align with the stated purpose of the NDIS within the Australian context and mirror key aims of the scheme, including person-centred planning, presence in the community, opportunities for choice and empowerment, and being in the community.

The Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 (Kohler et al., 2016) provides a framework for implementing transition-focused education that is based on the common components of transition programs found to be effective in the literature. This framework can be used as a model for designing, planning, implementing, and evaluating transition-based programs. The components of the framework include program structure, student-focused planning, student development, family involvement, and interagency collaboration.

For the purpose of this review, elements of the (a) Quality-of-Life Framework, (b) common measures used to evaluate community-based nonwork programs, (c) aims of the NDIS, and (d) Taxonomy for Transition Programming were used to develop a list of components that was then used to determine the inclusion of each program in this report. These components included

- partnerships with families,
- provision of mentors,
- progression in learning or skill development,
- opportunities for choice and empowerment,
- relationships and community connections,
- pursuit of independence.

For programs to be included in this review, they had to involve a combination of the components listed above while being a postschool program for individuals with moderate to severe intellectual or developmental disabilities with a stated commitment to providing ongoing learning opportunities and improving the quality of life of participants and their families. Data for the programs that met these criteria were then extracted and underwent reliability checks. Literature that supported the program or elements of the program were then compiled and are presented in the Findings section.

Findings

The following sections provide a summary of each of the included programs and the literature associated with the program or elements of the program.

Programs With Research Evidence

ASDAN

International

<https://www.asdan.org.uk>

Target group	Young people aged between 11 and 25 years, including those with a disability
Stated purpose	ASDAN represents a specific type of curriculum and assessment model, where all programs and qualifications are nationally approved. ASDAN programs and qualifications are learner centred and activity based, offering curriculum options that encourage learners to direct their own learning of key personal and social skills. ASDAN programs and qualifications recognise not only formal learning across schools and college curriculums, but also the achievements of learners within their communities, homes, and employment.
Those delivering the program	ASDAN members, who can be any organisation or service provider, receive access to a wide range of programs, courses, and qualifications to deliver the program
Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Opportunities for choice and empowerment– Progression of learning or skill development– Relationships and community connections
Research evidence for the program	James, D., & Simmons, J. (2007). Alternative assessment for learner engagement in a climate of performativity: Lessons from an English case study. <i>Assessment in Education</i> , 14(3), 353–371. https://doi.org/10.1080/09695940701592022

Qualitative, case study, evaluation of effectiveness of ASDAN activities, engagement in education (research external to program)

This study investigates the implementation of alternative assessment methods to engage disengaged young individuals in education, focusing on a case study in Bristol, England. It addresses challenges in evaluating such methods in a performance-driven climate, emphasising the project's combination of performance expectations and a supportive professional framework. The context includes issues like school truancy, the credibility of vocational qualifications, and proposed changes in the education system. The case study evaluates the effectiveness of ASDAN activities, indicating positive outcomes in terms of flexibility, compatibility, confidence, and achievement. While the project fell short of achieving Level 2 qualifications, it successfully improved attendance rates, reading age, and social skills. The authors highlight the significance of personalised attention, nurturing relationships, and the collective nature of learning. The findings also emphasise the role of professional mediation and challenge prevailing policy approaches, advocating for a more professional response to disengaged youth.

Other support for the program or elements of the program	National Council for Special Education. (2021). <i>Review of education in adult day services</i> (Report 29). https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Review-of-Education-in-Adult-Day-Services-Main-Report-RESEARCH-REPORT-NO.-29.pdf <i>Report</i>
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The National Council for Special Education (United Kingdom) conducted this extensive review of international literature to establish key criteria as essential features of a quality day program. These include recommendations for person-centred approaches to lifelong learning, negotiations of outcomes, building staff capacity to deliver lifelong learning, and considerations for organisational structure.

DO-IT Mentors

Washington DC, United States

<https://www.washington.edu/doit/programs/do-it-mentors>

Target group	Young adults with developmental disabilities who are enrolled in academic college programs
Stated purpose	The DO-IT Mentors program serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs. This is achieved by connecting college students with disabilities and mentors to facilitate academic, career, and personal achievements through individual and group mentor experiences that support success. The DO-IT Mentor program supports the development of relevant academic, personal, or social skills through individual and group mentor experiences that support successful lifelong learning. This program reflects best practice in its frequency and provision of many modes of contact (group, individual, in person, online).
Those delivering the program	The program is overseen by the University of Washington and is implemented by adult mentors who are college peers, faculty members, or professionals within the community. Many mentors also have lived experience of disability.
Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Provision of mentors– Progression of learning or skill development– Opportunities for choice and empowerment– Relationships and community connections– Pursuit of independence
Research evidence for the program	Burgstahler, S., & Cronheim, D. (2001). Supporting peer-peer and mentor-protege relationships on the internet. <i>Journal of Research on Technology in Education</i> , 34, 59–74. <i>Content analysis, email exchanges, surveys, focus group interviews, interaction outcomes associated with the computer-mediated</i>

communication during DO-IT mentoring (research internal to program)

The study investigates the use of computer-mediated communication to establish and maintain peer–peer and mentor–protege relationships for individuals with disabilities, particularly in the DO-IT program at the University of Washington. The analysis of email exchanges between high school students with disabilities and adult mentors reveals that electronic communication serves as a conducive environment for providing psychosocial, academic, and career support. The findings suggest that both peer–peer and mentor–protege relationships fulfil similar functions, with peer–peer interactions being more personal. The study emphasises the positive aspects of electronic communication, such as convenience, speed, and global connectivity, while acknowledging concerns like privacy and the impersonal nature of email. Overall, the research provides valuable insights for programs aiming to support individuals with disabilities in achieving personal, academic, and career goals through electronic communication.

Other
support for
the program
or elements
of the
program

Hillier, A., Goldstein, J., Tornatore, L., Byrne, E., Ryan, J., & Johnson, H. (2018). Mentoring college students with disabilities: Experiences of the mentors. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 7(3), 202–218.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-07-2017-0047>

Mixed methods, self-reported pre–post design, focus groups, impact of peer mentoring on mentors

This study explores the impact of mentoring college students with disabilities, focusing on peer mentors across seven cohorts. The findings reveal that mentors perceive mentoring as a positive experience, leading to increased commitment to their university, personal growth, and skills development. However, challenges such as communication difficulties and rapport-building issues are noted. The study emphasises the need for careful attention and support for mentors, offering insights for program improvement. The article also illustrates the importance of frequent communication, a structured

curriculum, and online platforms in effective mentoring programs for students with disabilities.

Lindsay, S., R. Hartman, L., & Fellin, M. (2016). A systematic review of mentorship programs to facilitate transition to post-secondary education and employment for youth and young adults with disabilities. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 38(14), 1329–1349.

<https://doi.org/10.3109/09638288.2015.1092174>

Systematic review, mentorship program outcomes, youth with disabilities

This systematic review examines mentorship programs' effectiveness in facilitating the transition to postsecondary education and employment for youth with disabilities. Searches were conducted across seven databases in search for peer-reviewed literature, published in English between 1980 and 2014. Screening resulted in the inclusion of 22 articles, with one of those studies about the DO-IT Mentors program. Structured formats, longer durations, and mentors serving as role models and offering support are identified as the key components associated with positive outcomes. However, the review highlights the need for more rigorous studies to fully grasp these programs' impact on school and vocational outcomes.

Latch-On™ (Literacy and Technology Hands-On)

Queensland, Australia

<https://www.latch-on.net>

Target group	Young adults with intellectual disabilities
Stated purpose	Latch-On™, established in 1998, is an evidence-based initiative that aims to positively impact the lives of participants by offering opportunities for ongoing literacy development in a postsecondary school setting. Leveraging computer technology, Latch-On™ not

only enhances literacy skills but also fosters self-confidence and independence and provides avenues for work placement opportunities. The program integrates traditional literacy and numeracy teaching methods with comprehensive technology instruction, supplemented by health and fitness education. Delivered in small groups, this part-time, 2-year program caters to students aged 18 years and older, with the option for a 1-year extension.

Those delivering the program	The program is delivered by qualified teachers who have undertaken Latch-On key teacher training and accreditation. Where available, teachers are supported by trained tutors.
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Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Progression of learning or skill development – Pursuit of independence
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Research evidence for the program	<p>Morgan, M., Moni, K. B., & Jobling, A. (2004). What's it all about? Investigating reading comprehension strategies in young adults with Down syndrome. <i>Down Syndrome Research and Practice</i>, 9(2), 37–44. https://doi.org/10.3104/reports.290</p>
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Action research approach, case study (research internal to program)

This study investigates reading comprehension strategies in a young adult with Down syndrome, focusing on the preliminary findings of one participant, Lewis, involved in the Latch-On program. In the intervention phase, employing question words, prediction, and retelling resulted in positive outcomes for Lewis, who demonstrated improvement in reading accuracy and comprehension. Despite initial difficulties with recalling text details, Lewis benefited from various program strategies, showcasing enhanced confidence in his ability to comprehend and recall information. The study emphasises the need for specific teaching and learning strategies tailored to individuals with intellectual disabilities and aims to contribute to improved practices and further research in teaching adults with intellectual disabilities.

Other support for the program or elements of the program	<p>Moni, K. B., Jobling, A., Morgan, M., & Lloyd, J. (2011). Promoting literacy for adults with intellectual disabilities in a community-based service organization. <i>Australian Journal of Adult Learning</i>, 51(3).</p> <p><i>Quantitative, literacy assessments, literacy skills of adults in a day program</i></p>
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Limited research has focused on the literacy skills of older adults with intellectual disabilities, prompting this exploratory project to assess their literacy needs and opportunities for development within community-based service organisations. Conducted in Queensland, Australia, the study gathered data from clients attending activity centres, utilising formal and informal assessments and environmental literacy audits. The results indicate that older adults with intellectual disabilities display an interest in literacy, particularly when combined with recreational activities, that could be further developed. However, community-based organisations showed a lack of emphasis on literacy development, with displays and materials not fostering literacy and staff having low expectations. The study suggests that these organisations should enhance literacy support, combined with recreational activities, based on clients' needs and interests to better promote the development of literacy skills in this population.

Moni, K. B., Jobling, A., & van Kraayenoord C. E. (2007). 'They're a lot cleverer than I thought': Challenging perceptions of support staff in community-based disability services. *International Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 26, 4, 439–460.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370701417269>

Action research approach, mixed methods, effects of staff training

The article explores a project funded by the Australian National Training Authority aimed at developing literacy programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The initiative focused on training support staff in disability-service programs to serve as literacy tutors for their clients. The outcomes revealed that as tutors gained confidence and clients demonstrated interest and skills,

resistance diminished. The training program, using video clips and a resource book, played a pivotal role in enhancing tutors' knowledge and clients' engagement in literacy activities. The study highlights the importance of tailoring training to support staff needs, providing ongoing support, and recognising literacy as a valued component of adult service programs. The findings demonstrate the potential for effective literacy programs through structured staff training, the provision of time for implementation, and access to ongoing support and resources.

The Miracle Project

California, United States

<https://themiracleproject.org/>

Target group	Teenagers and young adults with autism and other developmental disabilities
Stated purpose	The mission of The Miracle Project is to create a community where the authentic voices, passions, and stories of neurodiverse individuals and those with and without disabilities are celebrated, elevated, supported, and belong. The recreational classes are a fully inclusive theatre, film, and expressive arts program focused on building communication, self-esteem, and job and social skills for neurodiverse and/or disabled individuals, speaking and nonspeaking. Through shared experiences with peers and volunteers, individuals with diverse abilities and backgrounds find their voice, develop their talents, and rehearse for life.
Those delivering the program	Online and in-person classes are overseen by the program director and clinical supervisor and implemented by teaching artists using a curriculum designed by the founder Elaine Hall.

Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Progression of learning and skill development – Opportunities for choice and empowerment – Relationships and community connections – Pursuit of independence
Research evidence for the program	<p>Kim, A. J., Stemberge, S., Lawrence, C., Torres, V., Miodrag, N., Lee, J., & Boynes, D. (2015). Neurodiversity on the stage: The effects of inclusive theatre on youth with autism. <i>International Journal of Education and Social Science</i>, 2(9), 27–39.</p> <p><i>Quasi experimental, self-reported pre- and posttest questionnaires, observations (research internal to program)</i></p> <p>The study explores the impact of inclusive theatre experiences, including participation in The Miracle Project, on youth with autism and their neurotypical peers, investigating changes in areas such as self-esteem, empathy, comfort with others, trust, and socialisation skills. Utilising pre- and posttest questionnaires and structured observations, the study identifies positive outcomes in self-esteem, empathy, and comfort with others among youth with autism participating in a collaborative theatre program. The theatre environment is considered a unique space for social growth, allowing individuals to navigate between reality and possibility. While referencing Elaine Hall's work, the study acknowledges the lack of systematic evidence-based outcomes for theatre-based interventions for individuals with autism. The findings suggest that theatre programs can offer innovative and affordable support services, fostering a sense of belonging, self-esteem, empathy, and trusting relationships for youth with autism.</p>
Other support for the program or elements of the program	<p>Feinstein A., (2016). We don't want to fit in: A reflection on the revolutionary inclusive theater practices of The Miracle Project and Actionplay for adolescents on the autism spectrum. In <i>Creativity and community among autism-spectrum youth: Creating positive social updrafts through play and performance</i> (pp. 129–151). Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54797-2_6</p>

Book

Feinstein discusses that the strengths-based approaches used in The Miracle Project supported the participants to communicate and develop self-confidence. The author also notes the benefits of respecting and working with an individual's sensory preferences, as reflected in The Miracle Project's delivery.

Next Chapter Book Club

International

<https://nextchapterbookclub.org>

Target group	Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities
Stated purpose	The mission of the Next Chapter Book Club (NCBC) is to provide meaningful opportunities for lifelong learning, social connections, and authentic community inclusion for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities through community-based book club meetings that include readers of all skill levels. NCBC offers weekly or fortnightly meetings to discuss and read a book. The meetings take place in a library or coffee shop and are a relaxed, social experience intended to bring about social experiences and a love of literacy. Not all participants are required to read the book, and the book may be read to them. The NCBC was the winner of the Innovations in reading Prize (2016).
Those delivering the program	The programs are facilitated by NCBC trained affiliates; these are typically librarians, community or parent groups, and other service providers. Each group is assigned an NCBC program coordinator.
Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Progression of learning or skill development– Relationships and community connections

Research evidence for the program Conner, M., & Plocharczyk, L. (2019). Back to the future: Library book clubs for individuals with intellectual disability (ID). *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion*, 3(4), 68–77. <https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v3i4.33009>

Case study, surveys, interviews, comparative, successful components of book clubs (research external to program)

This article addresses the insufficient support for individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) in library services and emphasises the need for improved offerings for this patron group. The case study of a book club for adults with ID is presented, comparing data with similar book clubs and highlighting the effectiveness of such programs. The study reveals that book clubs for individuals with ID are a cost-effective and impactful means for libraries to fulfil their mission of serving diverse groups, fostering socialisation and intellectual stimulation. The findings emphasise the success of book clubs in both public and academic libraries, showcasing the positive impact on attendees' engagement, joy, reading skills, and socialisation opportunities. The study suggests that allowing participants to choose their readings and incorporate educational activities contribute to the success of these book clubs, making them valuable programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities in library settings.

Other support for the program or elements of the program Fish, T., & Graff, V. (2006). Next Chapter Book Club: What a novel idea. *Exceptional Parent*, 36(11), 46–48.

Review article of the Next Chapter Book Club

The authors describe the purpose and delivery of the Next Chapter Book Club and reveal the key characteristics and benefits of the program. The potential benefits of the program for people with intellectual disabilities are linked to its emphasis on improving literacy skills, providing community inclusion, and encouraging social interactions.

O’Riordan, A. (2010). Next Chapter Book Club: A model community literacy program for people with intellectual disabilities (2009). *The Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 77(5), 288.

Book review of the Next Chapter Book Club manual

O’Riordan found the manual to be comprehensive and provides a detailed guide for planning, implementing, and evaluating a book club tailored for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Going beyond a mere step-by-step process, the manual was found to reflect a philosophy centred on community inclusion, socialisation, self-determination, and self-advocacy. The manual was authored by contributors from diverse professional backgrounds, including social work, rehabilitation counselling, literacy, education, and publishing. The manual is described as both well informed and sensitive. O’Riordan states that the manual offers an engaging journey of fun and discovery for participants, supported by theoretical foundations and a clear organisational structure. While highlighting the NCBC’s strengths, O’Riordan shares that the manual acknowledges potential challenges, such as the training fee and implementation expectations, making it a valuable resource for those seeking to establish book clubs for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Project SEARCH

International

<https://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/careers/diverse-workforce/project-search>

Target group	Young people aged from 16 years with significant disabilities, chronic illness, traumatic injuries, or rehabilitation issues
Stated purpose	Project SEARCH offers employability skills training and workplace internships tailored for individuals with significant disabilities, with a particular focus on young adults transitioning from high school to adulthood. This program aims to empower people with disabilities by providing innovative workforce and career development opportunities. In doing so, Project SEARCH not only equips

Those delivering the program	The Project SEARCH curriculum is implemented by qualified teachers in school-based programs. Those accessing the program through other service providers are commonly instructed by allied health professionals such as behavioural therapists.
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Key	–	Progression of learning or skill development
program	–	Opportunities for choice and empowerment
components	–	Relationships and community connections
	–	Pursuit of independence

Research evidence for the program Christensen, J. J., Hetherington, S., Daston, M., & Riehle, E. (2015). Longitudinal outcomes of Project SEARCH in upstate New York. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 42(3), 247–255.
<https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-150746>

Longitudinal study, employment outcomes, students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (research internal to program)

This study details the employment outcomes of 124 students participating in the program, emphasising the collaborative approach of Project SEARCH's effectiveness in transitioning youth into competitive, integrated employment. Despite limitations in tracking employment gaps and comparing outcomes to other models, the evaluation strengthens evidence of Project SEARCH's success in preparing students with disabilities for competitive employment. Recommendations include expanding representation to strengthen results and addressing challenges when the broader business community is not engaged.

Davis, M. T., Park, N. M., Cumming, I. K., & Sheperis, C. J. (2021). Project SEARCH: Analysis of employment outcomes for students with disabilities across two districts. *The Journal of Rehabilitation*, 87(4), 48–57.

Retrospective records review, nonexperimental, employment patterns of participants (research external to program)

Rehabilitation professionals' efforts to address the employment gap for individuals with disabilities focus on competitive employment, and this study explores the outcomes of 158 students with disabilities who participated in Project SEARCH. Findings suggest the program holds potential for improving employment outcomes for young adults with disabilities, emphasising immersion in the workplace, internships, job skills training, and job coaching support. The study highlights the need for further research to assess outcomes for diverse disability types and offers implications for practice, recommending adaptations of the program by school districts to better serve their communities. The variety of industry partnerships demonstrate the program's adaptability across different locations, industries, and student demographics. The study concludes by discussing the broader context of vocational rehabilitation, highlighting the importance of building strong relationships with local businesses, advocating for better opportunities, and addressing the random match between participants and job types in Project SEARCH.

Ham, W., McDonough, J., Molinelli, A., Schall, C., & Wehman, P. (2014). Employment supports for young adults with autism spectrum disorder: Two case studies. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 40(2), 117–124. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-140677>

Case studies, employment effects of Project SEARCH, individuals with autism (research external to program)

The paper outlines case studies of two young adults with autism who achieved successful employment through intensive job coaching and support interventions as part of Project SEARCH. The

individuals, Kristen and Darnell, faced unique challenges, including cognitive difficulties and behavioural issues, which were addressed through behaviour intervention plans, positive behaviour support facilitation, and supervisor and coworker training. Both individuals achieved and maintained successful employment for over 2 years, illustrating the positive impact of Project SEARCH and its intensive supported employment for individuals with autism. The authors emphasise the importance of tailored interventions and supports to enhance independence, productivity, and effective communication in the workplace for individuals with autism.

Wehman, P., Schall, C., McDonough, J., Molinelli, A., Riehle, E., Ham, W., & Thiss, W. R. (2013). Project SEARCH for youth with autism spectrum disorders: Increasing competitive employment on transition from high school. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 15(3), 144–155.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300712459760>

Case studies, rating rubric, self-reported assessment, employment success (research internal to program)

The rising prevalence of autism has presented challenges for public school systems in facilitating the transition from school to adulthood. The authors suggest that Project SEARCH emerges as a promising program to address the employment needs of youth with autism, offering comprehensive job training and support within community-based businesses. This model, combining real-life work experiences, employability training, and independent living skills, has shown success in achieving competitive employment for students before high school graduation. The program's immersion in the workplace, personalised goal setting, and collaboration among various agencies contribute to its effectiveness. Findings show Project SEARCH's high success rate in achieving competitive employment and demonstrates its potential as a valuable school-to-work transition for individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

Other support for the program or elements of the program	Allen, P., Ciancio, J., & Rutkowski, S. (2008). Transitioning students with disabilities into work: The growth and success of the Project SEARCH model is a source of pride and excitement for those of us who have been associated with the program over the years. <i>Techniques: Association for Career and Technical Education</i> , 83(2), 22–25.
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Review article of Project SEARCH

The authors of this review discuss the features and key components of the Project SEARCH model and qualitatively report on success stories.

Tutti Arts

South Australia, Australia

<https://tutti.org.au>

Target group	Children and adults with disabilities
Stated purpose	Tutti Arts envisions a future where individuals with learning disabilities and neurodiverse conditions rightfully occupy a central role in arts and culture. The organisation's purpose is to illuminate the remarkable artistic talents of these individuals. Established by Pat Rix in Adelaide in 1997, Tutti has experienced continuous growth and flourishing. Presently, Tutti's studios host over 200 learning disabled and neurodiverse artists engaging in diverse art forms every week.
Those delivering the program	The Creative Director, Gaelle Mellis, and the General Manager, Linda Williams, lead a team of 50 staff, including teaching artists, board members, and executives.

Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Progression of learning or skill development – Opportunities for choice and empowerment – Relationships and community connections – Pursuit of independence
Research evidence for the program	<p>Darragh, J. A., Ellison, C. J., Rillotta, F., Bellon, M., & Crocker, R. (2016). Exploring the impact of an arts-based, day options program for young adults with intellectual disabilities. <i>Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities</i>, 3(1), 22–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/23297018.2015.1075416</p> <p><i>Qualitative, interviews, fieldnotes, thematic analysis (research external to program)</i></p> <p>This article investigates the impact of an arts-based day options program on the social and emotional wellbeing of young adults with intellectual disabilities. Participants in the Tutti Arts program, young adults with intellectual disabilities, reported various positive outcomes, including enjoyment of performance, friendship development, and acceptance as professional artists. Thematic analysis revealed six key themes related to engagement, satisfaction, choir singing, public performance, acknowledgment, and community inclusion. Participants expressed increased confidence, happiness, and motivation after joining Tutti, highlighting the positive experiences of singing in the choir and showcasing artwork. While acknowledging concerns about inappropriate behaviour, the overall findings suggest that the Tutti program positively influences participants' social and emotional wellbeing.</p>
Other support for the program or elements of the program	<p>Evans, T., Bellon, M., & Matthews, B. (2017). Leisure as a human right: An exploration of people with disabilities' perceptions of leisure, arts and recreation participation through Australian Community Access Services. <i>Annals of Leisure Research</i>, 20(3), 331–348. https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2017.1307120</p> <p><i>Qualitative, mixed methods, grounded theory</i></p>

This study explores Community Access Services from the perspectives of individuals with disability and their families. From this study, seven key themes emerged, including transition to leisure, arts and recreation; individualised services; local accessible services; positive organisational culture; community inclusion; innovation; and coproduction. Tutti Arts is noted in the study for its innovation in providing a meaningful leisure experience that empowers individuals to use the creative arts to change perception of disability in the wider community.

Innovative, Unique, or Compelling Programs

AMICI Dance Theatre Company

Hammersmith, United Kingdom

<https://amicidance.org/>

Target group	For adults 18 years and over with physical and or developmental disabilities
Stated purpose	AMICI Dance Theatre Company is a unique dance theatre company integrating able-bodied and disabled artists and performers. Biannually, they produce a full company show performed in the Lyric Hammersmith's main theatre while holding open workshops, residencies, and student placements and performances throughout the year.
Those delivering the program	Classes are led by world-renowned choreographer Wolfgang Stange and trained professional dancers. Carers of students with disabilities are invited to participate at no charge.
Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Progression of learning or skill development – Opportunity for choice and empowerment – Relationships and community connections

Research evidence for program elements	<p>Hickey-Moody, A. (2017). Integrated dance as a public pedagogy of the body. <i>Social Alternatives</i>, 36(4), 5–13.</p> <p><i>Literature review</i></p> <p>The article explores the transformative potential of integrated dance in schools, redefining dance and inclusive education by challenging traditional representations of disabled bodies. Integrated dance, involving individuals with and without disabilities, serves as both public and classroom pedagogy, offering alternative perspectives on bodies and disrupting dominant discourses of disability. Emphasising corporeal aesthetics, the study discusses methodologies like ‘cultures of intellectual disability’ and ‘reverse integration’, prioritising the unique styles of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Hickey-Moody documents the role that AMICI Dance Theatre Company has played in pioneering the first integrated dance theatre company that celebrates difference and promotes belonging and a strengths-based view of disability. The article concludes by advocating for alternative understandings and teachings of disability beyond medical discourses, emphasising integrated dance’s role in creating new cultural norms.</p>
Other support for the program or elements of the program	<p>Darcy, S., Maxwell, H., Grabowski, S., & Onyx, J. (2022). Artistic impact: From casual and serious leisure to professional career development in disability arts. <i>Leisure Sciences</i>, 44(4), 514–533.</p> <p><i>Qualitative, abductive research process, literature review</i></p> <p>This study explored how disability arts projects can be classified as casual leisure, serious leisure, or professional artistic engagement. The study identified key elements that support the development of creative arts skills that enable individuals to move from leisure to professional and the many benefits community arts programs offer people with disabilities.</p>

Bam Arts Inc.

Victoria, Australia

<https://bamarts.org.au>

Target group	Children and adults with disabilities
Stated purpose	Bam Arts aims to establish a community for individuals of all ages with disabilities who share a passion for creative and performing arts. Bam Arts offers performing arts classes and social events for all ages. For adults aged 21 years and over, Bam Arts also offers weekday and half-day programs.
Those delivering the program	All programs are delivered by experienced creative or performing arts teachers.
Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Progression of learning or skill development– Opportunities for choice and empowerment– Relationships and community connections
Research evidence for program elements	<p>MacGlone, U. M., Vamvakaris, J., Wilson, G. B., & MacDonald, R. A. R. (2020). Understanding the wellbeing effects of a community music program for people with disabilities: A mixed methods, person-centered study. <i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>, 11, 588734–588734. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.588734</p> <p><i>Mixed methods, mild to profound disabilities, community music intervention, wellbeing measures</i></p> <p>This study examines the wellbeing effects of a community music program on individuals with disabilities ranging from mild to profound and complex, and varying levels of independence from constant one-to-one care to living alone in sheltered accommodation. The authors discuss the benefits of music therapy, including increased self-expression (both speaking and nonspeaking), the development of confidence as a transferrable skill</p>

(social and decision-making), improved mood (calmness, relaxation, happiness), and enhanced social skills, along with the cultivation of musical abilities in any capacity. The study emphasises that self-expression, confidence, and mood are manifested through changes in behaviour, self-perception, or wellbeing. Lasting positive changes in mood and the creation of inclusivity through music workshops are highlighted. The results suggest that a music program is beneficial for individuals with disabilities, positively impacting mental health aspects such as self-expression, confidence, mood, social skills, communication skills, joint attention, and interaction with others.

Moore, J., Phillips, J., Tallent, J., & Coren, E. (2020). Impacts of participating in a choir on health and wellbeing of adults with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Music, Health, and Wellbeing, Autumn*, 1–26.

Mixed methods, questionnaires, focus groups, health and wellbeing measures

This study explores the impact of choir participation on the health and wellbeing of adults with intellectual disabilities. While the quantitative results appear inconclusive, the qualitative findings strongly support the positive effects of choir singing on wellbeing. The research emphasises the scarcity of quantitative evidence in this domain and stresses the need for more impactful interventions and research to support this population and foster connections within the broader community. The study utilised mixed methods, incorporating questionnaires and focus groups, and involved 35 participants. Despite the challenges in interpreting quantitative data, the qualitative responses reveal increased confidence, social interaction, and a sense of belonging, highlighting the choir's beneficial impact on participants. The study suggests addressing inequalities faced by individuals with intellectual disabilities and underlines the potential of inclusive choir programs in promoting positive health outcomes and community engagement.

Other support for the program or elements of the program	<p>Haythorne, D., & Seymour, A. (2016). <i>Dramatherapy and autism</i>. Routledge.</p> <p><i>Book</i></p> <p>Chapter 2 discusses dramatherapy and developmental drama for participants with profound or severe disabilities, including autism, and the pervasive positive impacts of drama instruction on social communication, sense of self, emotional literacy, and enjoyment.</p> <p>Chapter 6 follows the impacts of dramatherapy on one young person and the benefits it had on their sense of agency, confidence to share their perspectives and advocate for themselves, and the provision of choice in their practice.</p> <p>Chapter 13 reports on data that speak to the perceptions of participants with autism in dramatherapy. Findings confirm that participants with autism found predictable patterns and expectations comforting, that dramatherapy improved their social relationships, and participation improved outcomes for their families and schools.</p>
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College of Adaptive Arts

California, United States

<https://www.collegeofadaptivearts.org>

Target group	Adults with disabilities
Stated purpose	<p>The goal of the College of Adaptive Arts is to offer an inclusive and enduring collegiate experience to adults with disabilities who have traditionally faced barriers to higher education. The College of Adaptive Arts serves as an alternative to typical day programs, with individuals enrolled in various arts disciplines like fine arts, dance, theatre, digital arts, and video/television, alongside academic disciplines such as communications, science and technology, library arts, and health and wellness.</p>

Those delivering the program	The College of Adaptive Arts is made up of dedicated individuals, including staff, instructors, board members, and advisers. These passionate and talented individuals bring a wealth of experience, spanning from Fortune 500 corporations and small businesses to prominent not-for-profit organisations and academic institutions.
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Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Progression of learning or skill development – Opportunities for choice and empowerment – Pursuit of independence
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Research evidence for program elements	Kim, Y.-M., & Hong, H.-J. (2019). Effect of creative rhythmical movement program on perceptual motor ability, emotional experience and facial emotion recognition ability of adults with developmental disability. <i>Research Journal of Pharmacy and Technology</i> , 12(3), 1031–1038. https://doi.org/10.5958/0974-360X.2019.00170.7
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Randomised controlled trial, statistical analysis

This study examines the impact of participation in a creative rhythmical movement program on perceptual motor ability, emotional experience, and facial emotion recognition ability in adults with developmental disabilities. Thirty individuals (20–30 years old) diagnosed with intellectual or autistic disability were randomly assigned to experiment and control groups. Both groups engaged in the creative rhythmical movement program and yoga program. The experiment group demonstrated a significant increase in perceptual motor ability and a significant decrease in emotional experience, while the control group showed smaller changes without significance. Additionally, the experiment group exhibited a significant increase in facial emotion recognition ability compared to the control group. The findings suggest that the creative rhythmical movement program positively affects perceptual motor ability, emotional experience, and facial emotion recognition ability in adults with developmental disabilities, potentially enhancing self-expression and creative abilities related to movement, space, and direction.

Other support for the program or elements of the program	<p>Boon, E. T. (2015). Everybody is a musician, everybody is an orchestra: Musical and bodily dialogues with physically disabled children in Turkey. <i>International Journal of Community Music</i>, 8(2), 149–161. https://doi.org/10.1386/ijcm.8.2.149_1</p> <p><i>Descriptive report on the program</i></p> <p>This study recounts a series of music workshops delivered to children with developmental disabilities. The research explored the musical and bodily interactions between the music educator and the children, focusing on community music principles. The workshops aimed to facilitate musical and movement activities for the children, emphasising the transformative potential of music in fostering a sense of community and connection. The authors highlight the significance of recognising individual capacities and experiences of children with disabilities and advocate for inclusive and collaborative musical experiences. Despite socioeconomic challenges and barriers, the workshops were deemed rewarding, leading to the creation of a community outreach course and providing valuable insights into transcending disability bounds in both body and psyche.</p> <p>Chiang, E. S. (2020). Disability cultural centers: How colleges can move beyond access to inclusion. <i>Disability & Society</i>, 35(7), 1183–1188.</p> <p><i>Description of disability cultural centres</i></p> <p>The article describes how a disability cultural centre at The University of North Carolina Asheville served as a hub for students with disabilities and created a sense of belonging through the provision of supports that were learner centred, resisted and challenged ableist thinking, and encouraged a shift in programming towards universal design for learning.</p>
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McDonnell, J., & Hardman, M. L. (2009). *Successful transition programs: Pathways for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities*. SAGE Publications.

Book

This book provides a comprehensive outline of universal strategies that underpin all successful educational programs, including leisure activities. These include approaches that lead to social interactions and a sense of belonging and self-worth.

Community Care Trust

New Zealand

<https://cct.org.nz>

Target group	Youth and adults with intellectual disabilities and/or autistic spectrum disorders, and those with complex needs
Stated purpose	The Community Care Trust is a not-for-profit charitable trust that performs as a central hub offering a range of services such as supported living, independent living, high school transition support, and various community activities. The community facilitators focus on individualised community access and involvement. Additionally, the Community Care Trust hosts social group activities in different locations, fostering community participation and socialisation. Their approach emphasises transition planning, skill development, and a person-centred, holistic model for lifelong learning.
Those delivering the program	Skilled and qualified staff with specialised knowledge and experience

Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Partnerships with families – Progression of learning or skill development – Opportunities for choice and empowerment – Relationships and community connections – Pursuit of independence
Research evidence for program elements	<p>Rillotta, F., Arthur, J., Hutchinson, C., & Raghavendra, P. (2020). Inclusive university experience in Australia: Perspectives of students with intellectual disability and their mentors. <i>Journal of Intellectual Disabilities</i>, 24(1), 102–117. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744629518769421</p> <p><i>Qualitative, semistructured interviews, thematic analysis</i></p> <p>Rillotta et al. (2020) investigated the inclusive university experiences of students with intellectual disabilities in Australia, examining the expectations and experiences of students with intellectual disability, and their mentors, in an inclusive support program. The researchers emphasise the value of inclusive postsecondary education in delivering positive personal, social, and academic outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities while acknowledging the challenges they may encounter in general settings. This study highlights the need for inclusive practices training for instructors and greater disability education for fellow students to enhance the inclusive postsecondary education experience. The findings demonstrate the significance of such programs as a pathway to further education or employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities, despite certain barriers.</p> <p>Dyke, P., Bourke, J., Llewellyn, G., & Leonard, H. (2013). The experiences of mothers of young adults with an intellectual disability transitioning from secondary school to adult life. <i>Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability</i>, 38(2), 149–162. https://doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2013.789099</p>

Qualitative, semistructured interviews, parent perspectives, experiences of transition

The article examines the challenges faced by mothers of young adults with intellectual disabilities during the transition from secondary school to adult life. This transition, often more complex for individuals with disabilities, encompasses aspects such as independent living, employment, education, social supports, friendships, autonomy, and self-determination. The study emphasises the difficulties that families encounter during this period and their impact on quality of life. It employs semistructured interviews with parents of young adults with Down syndrome and Rett syndrome, highlighting disparities in experiences and outcomes. The findings illustrate the importance of parental advocacy, reveal concerns about limited information and funding for day programs, and shed light on challenges related to supported accommodations, employment opportunities, and independence. Despite the hurdles, mothers generally perceive their children's quality of life positively, advocating for improved support systems and acknowledging the resourcefulness of parents.

Other
support for
the program
or elements
of the
program

New South Wales Parliament. Standing Committee on Social Issues. (2012). *Transition support for students with complex needs and their families (Report 45)*. Legislative Council.

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/inquiries/2165/120306%20Final%20report.pdf>

Report

This report identifies the need for centralised places for support and in particular training to empower families with the skills they need to support their children. This report also discusses the need for better case management and transition to postschooling options that begins while still at school.

Creative Growth

California, United States

<https://creativegrowth.org>

Target group	Young people and adults with developmental disabilities
Stated purpose	Creative Growth has established a supportive environment for creative expression, community, and professional artistic development among individuals with developmental disabilities. The Creative Growth Studio houses over 140 artists working across various mediums, with professional artists facilitating and providing support, materials, and space for activities like painting, drawing, ceramics, woodwork, fibre arts, printmaking, and digital media. The day program features multiple daily classes, artist talks, workshops, and field trips to museums. The Creative Growth Centre includes a gallery, promoting community engagement, where artists are paid for the sale of their art. Additionally, a weekly class, available for a nominal fee on Saturdays, introduces art's potential to 35 young adults with disabilities aged 15 to 22 years.
Those delivering the program	The program is facilitated by professional artists.
Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Progression of learning or skill development– Opportunities for choice and empowerment– Relationships and community connections– Pursuit of independence
Research evidence for program elements	Hartnett, E., Gallagher, P., Kiernan, G., Poulsen, C., Gilligan, E., & Reynolds, M. (2008). Day service programmes for people with a severe intellectual disability and quality of life: Parent and staff perspectives. <i>Journal of Intellectual Disabilities</i> , 12(2), 153–172.

Mixed methods, interviews with parents and staff, standardised quality-of-life measures, comparative, effects of diverse day programs

This study explores the impact of community-based and campus-based day programs on the quality of life for individuals with severe intellectual disabilities. Interviews with parents and staff, supplemented by questionnaires, reveal that the community-based program has a more positive effect on quality of life compared to the campus-based program. The research underscores the importance of community integration and offers evidence for the effectiveness of diverse day programs. Key themes emerged, including improved social interactions, job opportunities, and satisfaction for community-based participants. However, the quantitative results showed minimal differences between the two groups. The study suggests the need for further research on services promoting integrated activities and social networks in the community, emphasising participant satisfaction and the involvement of individuals with intellectual disabilities in research processes. Additionally, it highlights the importance of communicating positive outcomes to similar programs and calls for more comprehensive evaluation of day services in Ireland and the United Kingdom. The list of sources provides additional insights into various aspects of day programs and their impact on the quality of life for individuals with learning disabilities.

Other
support for
the program
or elements
of the
program

Siebers, T. (2010). *Disability aesthetics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Book

Siebers describes the impact of Creative Growth on the artist Judith Scott who, after being rescued from an institution by her family, worked on her art intensively at the centre to achieve international acclaim.

Creative Steps

California, United States

<https://www.creativesteps.org>

Target group	Adults with developmental disabilities
Stated purpose	The purpose of Creative Steps is to foster a lifestyle encompassing work, play, and social engagement for each client, maximising their potential for a lifetime of growth, health, fitness, happiness, and achievement. Creative Steps is committed to enhancing the quality of life for every family. Their educational day program offers a structured schedule of both individual and group educational and social experiences. The employment program includes continuous employer training and ongoing employee support. Transportation services are also offered to ensure accessibility for all.
Those delivering the program	The program is facilitated by a qualified special education teacher, and each participant is assigned a one-to-one support coach that is either a registered behaviour technician or assistant.
Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Partnerships with families– Provision of mentors– Progression of learning or skill development– Opportunities for choice and empowerment– Relationships and community connections– Pursuit of independence
Research evidence for program elements	Tomasone, J. R., Man, K. E., Sartor, J. D., Andrusko, K. E., Ginis, K. A. M., & Latimer-Cheung, A. E. (2023). 'On-the-ground' strategy matrix for fostering quality participation experiences among persons with disabilities in community-based exercise programs. <i>Psychology of Sport and Exercise</i> , 102469. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2023.102469

Qualitative, consultation, program feedback

The study aims to develop a strategy matrix for enhancing participation experiences in community-based exercise programs (CBEPs) for individuals with disabilities, considering both physical and intellectual disabilities. The research involved identifying and linking strategies used in CBEPs to quality participation constructs. The final matrix comprises 85 strategies with examples and theoretical links to quality participation, offering a comprehensive tool for program providers to optimise participation in exercise programs for individuals with disabilities. The study emphasises the need for theoretical validation and practical understanding of the strategies to improve the quality of participation in CBEPs. The matrix was developed through a systematic process involving qualitative data analysis, feedback from program providers, and expert consultation. The strategies in the matrix target multiple quality participation constructs, providing a diverse and flexible approach for program providers to enhance the experiences of individuals with disabilities in CBEPs.

Other support for the program or elements of the program	Weld-Blundell, I., Shields, M., Devine, A., Dickinson, H., Kavanagh, A., & Marck, C. (2021). Vocational interventions to improve employment participation of people with psychosocial disability, autism and/or intellectual disability: A systematic review. <i>International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health</i> , 18, 12083. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182212083
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Systematic review, vocational interventions, effect on employment outcomes

Authors review vocational interventions for individuals with psychosocial disability, autism, and intellectual disability, encompassing 26 published randomised controlled trials. They primarily focus on the effectiveness of individual placement and support, with gaps in high-quality evidence identified for both employees and employers. The review emphasises the need for future research to improve the quality of vocational interventions, particularly targeting autism and intellectual disability. However,

challenges include inconsistent outcome measurements and limited studies on intellectual disabilities. Overall, the evidence gathered through this review illustrates the importance of consistent outcome measurements, research on emerging systems, understanding contextual factors, and policy reform to enhance employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

FIU Embrace EDUCATION

Florida, United States

<https://fiuembrace.fiu.edu/resources/fiu-embrace-education-faq/>

Target group	Degree-seeking college students with autism or nondegree-seeking college applicants with autism, intellectual disabilities, or developmental disabilities. Participants must be aged between 18 and 28 years of age.
Stated purpose	FIU Embrace EDUCATION is a comprehensive 3-year postsecondary transitional program, whether pursuing a degree or nondegree track, designed to empower students with a meaningful education and workforce preparation. This program encompasses an educational/academic curriculum with a residential component, providing support through mentorship, personalised learning plans, community assistance for residential students, and specialised training in employment skills. Additionally, the program facilitates social engagement through various clubs, fostering a well-rounded educational experience.
Those delivering the program	FIU Embrace EDUCATION students benefit from additional assistance provided by designated peer, academic, social, and faculty mentors. Additionally, they receive support from community assistants during their dormitory residence and ongoing assistance from the FIU Embrace EDUCATION program staff throughout their enrolment in the program.

Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provision of mentors – Progression of learning or skill development – Opportunities for choice and empowerment – Relationships and community connections – Pursuit of independence
Research evidence for program elements	Heron, L. M., Agarwal, R., Becht, K., Roberts-Dahm, L. D., & Burke, S. L. (2023). Exploring Florida's inclusive postsecondary education programs. <i>Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability</i> , 36(2), 135–151.

Qualitative, focus groups, thematic analysis

This comprehensive exploration of inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) programs in Florida reveals their progress, challenges, and support needs. The study sheds light on the importance of holistic support, collaboration, and addressing misconceptions to promote inclusion and program sustainability. It illustrates the need for stakeholder collaboration, internal funding prioritisation, and improved transition services to enhance the effectiveness of IPSE programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Heron, L. M., Agarwal, R., Greenup, J., Attong, N., & Burke, S. L. (2022). Leveraging the design thinking model to address campus accessibility challenges and assess perceptions of disability awareness. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1–13.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2022.2041111>

Qualitative, pre- and postsurveys, self-reported

The authors engaged students and staff at a university in the process of thinking about accessibility, disability awareness, and inclusion on campus. The workshop generated potential solutions, focusing on infrastructure, advocacy, mobile app improvements, and transportation. Participants reported increased knowledge of accessibility policies and heightened awareness of campus

accessibility issues. The workshop demonstrated the effectiveness of the design thinking model in generating solutions and enhancing understanding of university policies related to accessibility. Proposed solutions include restructuring crosswalks, improving a mobile map app for disabled access, launching an awareness campaign, and establishing a task force. Pre- and postsurvey results indicate positive outcomes, with increased awareness and improved knowledge reported by participants without disabilities.

Friendship Circle

Michigan, United States

<https://www.friendshipcircle.org>

Target group	Adults with disabilities
Stated purpose	Friendship Circle creates opportunities for friendship in the lives of individuals with special needs and those facing isolation while supporting individuals to become a contributing member of the community.
Those delivering the program	The programs are delivered by their 30 trained staff members and many teen, adult, and corporate volunteers.
Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Partnerships with families – Provision of mentors – Progression of learning or skill development – Opportunities for choice and empowerment – Relationships and community connections – Pursuit of independence

Research evidence for program elements Calabrese, R., Patterson, J., Liu, F., Goodvin, S., Hummel, C., & Nance, E. (2008). An appreciative inquiry into the Circle of Friends Program: The benefits of social inclusion of students with disabilities. *International Journal of Whole Schooling*, 4(2), 20.

Qualitative case study, appreciative inquiry, benefits of social inclusion

This research investigates the efficacy of the Circle of Friends Program (COFP), designed to enhance social inclusion for students with disabilities by connecting them to general education students' social networks. Employing a qualitative case study approach with an appreciative inquiry theoretical perspective, the study focuses on the positive core experiences of COFP stakeholders: sponsors, mentors, and parents of children with disabilities. The analysis includes participants from six schools across urban and suburban districts in a Midwestern state. Findings reveal reduced alienation among parents of children with disabilities, a transformative experience for participants, ecological conditions fostering social inclusion, and the potential for increased influence with additional resources. The study emphasises the role of the COFP in challenging traditional stereotypes and myths about students with disabilities, contributing to the program's primary goal of promoting social inclusion.

Garolera, G. D., Díaz, M. P., & Noell, J. F. (2021). Friendship barriers and supports: Thoughts of young people with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 24(6), 815–833.

Qualitative approach, semistructured interview

The researchers interviewed 11 adolescents with disabilities to discover their perceptions of friendships, their value, and importance as well the strengths participants derived from their families. The study found that many individuals did not have access to recreational programs, engaged in hobbies alone, or chose not to participate in social recreation due to negative past experiences. The research highlights the need to promote recreational activities

as these contexts are ones that may lead to positive social outcomes.

Golden Heart Ranch Social Living Club

Southern California, United States

<https://www.goldenheartranch.org/>

Target group	Teenagers and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities
Stated purpose	Participants of the social skills program engage in group activities that include cooking, gardening, laundry, and daily living skills that enhance problem-solving, coping, and development capabilities. This program focuses on organisation and planning, the enhancement of episodic memory, and problem-solving skills.
Those delivering the program	This program is facilitated by staff with qualifications in disability studies, psychology, social work, kinesiology, and art therapy. Program assistants hold either a formal degree in social work or experience working in schools or with adults with disabilities.
Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Progression of learning or skill development – Opportunities for choice and empowerment – Relationships and community connections – Pursuit of independence
Research evidence for program components	<p>Pillay, Y., Brownlow, C., & March, S. (2022). Transition approaches for autistic young adults: A case series study. <i>PLoS ONE</i>, 17(5), e0267942. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0267942</p> <p><i>Longitudinal case series design, self-reported assessment, statistical indexes, content analysis</i></p> <p>This research article investigates the transition experiences of autistic young adults aged 18 to 25 years over a 12-month period.</p>

The study uses a longitudinal case series design and focuses on changes in social support and quality of life during the transition, emphasising the importance of family and social support for a successful transition. Pillay et al. (2022) highlight the need for educationally and socially inclusive interventions to address the diverse challenges faced by autistic young adults. It emphasises the role of support services, functional independence, and the challenges faced by individuals with autism during this critical life phase. The findings demonstrate the need for targeted transition planning and socially inclusive interventions to support individuals with autism.

Gobec, C., Rillotta, F., & Raghavendra, P. (2022). Where to next? Experiences of adults with intellectual disability after they complete a university program. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 35(5), 1140–1152. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.13000>

Qualitative, phenomenological approach, semistructured interviews, thematic analysis

Gobec et al. (2022) investigated the postprogram experiences of adults with intellectual disabilities who completed an inclusive higher education university program in Australia. The findings reveal that participants formed lasting connections with mentors and staff, leading to opportunities for further education and personal growth. Some participants continued their university studies, while others faced challenges in transitioning to the wider university environment or employment. This study demonstrates the need for structured exit planning and enhanced support to facilitate this transition, as well as the importance of fostering social connections for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The researchers also suggest the value of embedding a transition pathway and exploring work experience opportunities within such programs.

SoSAFE!

Queensland, Australia

<https://sosafeprogram.com/>

Target group	Individuals with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities or those with autism
Stated purpose	<p>The SoSAFE! program, rooted in evidence-based practices, is tailored to individuals with moderate to severe intellectual disability or autism spectrum disorder. It employs visual and conceptual tools to foster social safety by providing explicit, rule-based guidance in navigating social, sociosexual, and safety skills. Given the vulnerability of this demographic to abuse, SoSAFE! addresses this need through a standardised framework, offering a comprehensive approach to communicative and physical intimacy. Aligned with expert recommendations, the program integrates social safety training into a broader sexuality education context. Its standardised language facilitates consistent communication among educators, caregivers, and family members, minimising inadvertent imposition of personal values. Designed with minimum prerequisite skills, the program ensures maximum assurance in protecting individuals from abuse. Utilising an egocentric perspective, SoSAFE! incorporates evidence-based practices, accounting for the unique characteristics of its target population, and aligns with expert opinions on program design, emphasising precision, structure, developmental appropriateness, parental involvement, and whole-school adoption.</p>
Those delivering the program	Instructors are required to complete the SoSAFE! training prior to delivering the program.

Key program components	– Partnerships with families
	– Progression of learning or skill development
	– Opportunities for choice and empowerment
	– Relationships and community connections
	– Pursuit of independence

Research evidence for program elements Grove, L., Morrison-Beedy, D., Kirby, R., & Hess, J. (2018). The birds, bees, and special needs: Making evidence-based sex education accessible for adolescents with intellectual disabilities. *Sexuality and Disability*, 36(4), 313–329.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11195-018-9547-7>

Curriculum assessment

The authors discuss how adolescents with intellectual disabilities face significant health disparities and encounter obstacles in accessing sexual health education, leading to higher rates of abuse, assault, and sexually transmitted infections. Barriers, such as stigma and misconceptions, hinder their education, emphasising the need for inclusive, evidence-based curricula. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, rooted in architecture and neuroscience, proves valuable in enhancing accessibility in sexual risk reduction interventions. The UDL curriculum, consisting of goals, methods, materials, and objectives, promotes interaction, expression, and engagement for positive behavioural outcomes. The UDL principles offer a comprehensive approach to address gaps in understanding and comprehension, emphasising diverse learning strategies, multimedia integration, and support for individual choice.

Strnadová, I., Loblinzk, J., & Danker, J. (2021). Importance of sex education for a successful transition to life after school: Experiences of high school girls with intellectual disability. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 49(3), 303–315.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/bld.12403>

Qualitative, interviews and focus groups, inductive content analysis

Sex education is pivotal for the effective transition of students with intellectual disabilities to postschool life, yet this study in New South Wales, Australia, reveals significant gaps in coverage, particularly in critical topics such as gender and sexual identity and masturbation. The study emphasises the inaccessibility of sex education classes for these students. High school girls with intellectual disabilities expressed the need for accessible and comprehensive sex education to equip them for life beyond school. Current limitations often focus on specific issues and neglect broader topics, hindering the development of self-determination skills for these students. Visual aids, individualised programs, and integration of sex education into individual learning plans are recommended to enhance understanding. This study, based on interviews and focus groups with high school girls, advocates for change and improvements in sex education for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Recommendations include simplified language, the use of visuals, and more inclusive research studies to explore perceptions and experiences of sex education.

Rowe, B., & Wright, C. (2017). Sexual knowledge in adolescents with intellectual disabilities: A timely reflection. *Journal of Social Inclusion*, 8(2), 42–53. <https://doi.org/10.36251/josi123>

Informed literature review

The authors discuss how adolescents with intellectual disabilities face significant challenges in sexual education, marked by social exclusion, conservative curricula, and a lack of accessible information sources. Despite having similar sexual desires as their nondisabled peers, their sexuality is often perceived as problematic. This review highlights the human rights aspect of sexual education, emphasising the need for inclusive curricula in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The authors demonstrate the urgent need for improved, evidence-based sexuality education interventions to address prevalent issues such as sexual abuse and low levels of sexual knowledge. This review calls for comprehensive

programs, emphasising individualised approaches and visual aids, and addressing social, gender, and sexual norms to foster a better understanding of sexual diversity. Additionally, it stresses the importance of broader societal inclusion, historical considerations, and appropriate teaching modalities in enhancing sexual education for adolescents with intellectual disabilities.

Sweetwater Spectrum

California, United States

<https://sweetwaterspectrum.org>

Target group	Adults with autism
Stated purpose	<p>Sweetwater Spectrum, a nonprofit organisation, is committed to providing innovative, community-based, and long-term housing for adults with autism or similar intellectual/developmental disabilities. The program focuses on fostering independent living skills and meaningful community participation, offering an environment designed to meet sensory preferences associated with autism. Sweetwater Spectrum manages a supported living community with an enrichment program aimed at promoting individual choice and community engagement, ensuring a 'life with purpose' for residents across the autism spectrum, irrespective of financial capabilities.</p>
Those delivering the program	<p>Programs are overseen by professionals with degrees in psychology and public health. Most on-campus and community access programs are delivered by community volunteers, family, and friends.</p>

Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Partnerships with families – Progression of learning or skill development – Opportunities for choice and empowerment – Relationships and community connections – Pursuit of independence
Research evidence for program elements	<p>Ghazali, R., Md Sakip, S. R., & Samsuddin, I. (2019). Creating positive environment for autism using sensory design. <i>Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal</i>, 4(10), 19–26.</p> <p><i>Qualitative, observations, case study, sensory impact, physical design</i></p> <p>The authors discuss the significance of sensory design in shaping a conducive learning environment for individuals with autism, particularly those with autism. It emphasises the necessity for designers to comprehend and address sensory issues in their designs to facilitate more efficient and less stressful learning experiences for autistic individuals. The study highlights the impact of sensory design on both the physical learning environment and the learning processes of autistic children, emphasising the need for low-stimulus environments. The research explores the importance of sensory spaces, such as sensory gardens, in reducing stress and promoting educational and social development. The study employs qualitative methods, including site visits and observations, promoting the role of physical learning environments, internal environments, sensory issues, and sensory spaces in supporting the learning of autistic children. Additionally, a case study on the physical learning environment discusses specific design considerations, such as stress-free entrances, separate secondary entrances to address sensory challenges, and the creation of a calming institutional building with straightforward layouts. The paper concludes by stressing the importance of creating educational environments that enhance autistic behaviours, emotional wellbeing, and overall living conditions, with the hope of optimising learning settings.</p>

Other support for the program or elements of the program	<p>Pearce, T. (2021). Housing for adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD): <i>Creating an integrated living community in Salem, MA</i>. [Master's thesis, University of Massachusetts Amherst]. 1067. https://doi.org/10.7275/22714169.0</p> <p><i>Book</i></p> <p>Pearce makes a compelling case for how effective changes to environment support the participation and quality of life and wellbeing for individuals with autism postcompulsory schooling.</p> <p>Steele, K., & Ahrentzen, S. (2015). 'Five: On the Horizon'. <i>At Home with Autism</i>. Policy Press. https://doi.org/10.51952/9781447307983.ch005</p> <p>The authors identify how Sweetwater Community Centre is an example of a model of best practice that bridges the gap in community participation and residential living.</p>
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Transition and College Access Center

New York, United States

<https://www.yai.org/resources/transition-college-access-centers-tcac>

Target group	Students with intellectual and developmental disabilities preparing for postschool transition and their families
Stated purpose	Transition and College Access Centers play a vital role in assisting schools and families to ensure a smooth transition for students from school to adulthood. They prioritise the overall development of students, fostering academic, social–emotional, and vocational growth to pave the way for multiple pathways to graduation and success beyond high school. The centres actively disseminate transition-focused information, provide valuable resources, and establish linkages for students, families, and staff, enhancing their access and preparedness for college and careers. Furthermore, the centres actively involve families in the transition and postsecondary planning process by organising student and family-centred

workshops. They also cultivate partnerships with businesses and community organisations to create a collaborative environment that supports the holistic development of students and employment opportunities.

Those delivering the program The program is delivered by teachers, schools' staff, staff from the centres, and their affiliate agencies.

Key program components

- Partnerships with families
- Provision of mentors
- Progression of learning or skill development
- Opportunities for choice and empowerment
- Relationships and community connections
- Pursuit of independence

Research evidence for program elements Codd, J., & Hewitt, O. (2021). Having a son or daughter with an intellectual disability transition to adulthood: A parental perspective. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 49(1), 39–51.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/bld.12327>

Qualitative methodology, interpretative phenomenological analysis

In this study, the researchers sought the views of parents about the transition of their children to adulthood. The studies found three themes in the data: (a) transition, the good, the bad, and unknown; (b) striving for independence; and (c) supporting the supporters. Parents expressed many uncertainties that related to their roles and responsibilities and their sons' and daughters' independence. Other difficulties included finding services for their children and accessing support for themselves. They recommended increased collaboration and consistency from statutory services and more support for the wellbeing of parents.

Other support for the program or elements of the program	<p>Saleh, M. C., Shaw, L., Malzer, V., & Podolec, M. (2019). Interagency collaboration in transition to adulthood: A mixed methods approach to identifying promising practices and processes in the NYS PROMISE project. <i>Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation</i>, 51(2), 183–198.</p> <p><i>Mixed-methods exploratory study</i></p>
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This study highlights the characteristics necessary for interagency collaboration that includes qualities necessary for effective transition. Other actions that support this process are increased opportunities for formal and informal communication, processes for information sharing between agencies and schools, and the importance of having a range of flexible, practical resources that parents and families can access. This may include online resources, individual meetings, and group sessions.

Discussion

A key area of concern for individuals with moderate to severe disabilities and their families is their access to high-quality postschool opportunities that are evidence based and enhance their quality of life (Davies & Beamish, 2009; Wolff, 2000). The findings of this report demonstrate that such programs do exist. The key components of these programs align with various measures of evaluation (e.g., quality of life, common measures of community-based nonwork programs). The following discusses each of the key components in relation to the included programs and relevant literature. Recommendations for practice are included throughout.

Partnerships With Families

Although family involvement has been identified as a necessary component of successful transition experiences for young people with disabilities (Cumming et al., 2020; Kohler et al., 2016), families often remain disconnected from the transition process, are rarely involved in collaborative efforts, and lack skills in advocating for their children during transition planning (Strnadová et al., 2016). Considering this fact, it is not surprising that only a handful of the programs included in this review emphasise partnerships with families as a core component. These programs include Community Care Trust, Creative Steps, Friendship Circle, SoSAFE!, Sweetwater Spectrum, and the Transition and College Access Center.

Families should be considered an essential part of the multisystemic approach to transition (Cumming et al., 2020), and several practices have been connected to family engagement in postschool transitions for youth with disabilities (Kohler et al., 2016). These practices include (a) participation of families in service delivery, (b) families as natural support networks, (c) supporting families to engage youth in community experiences, and (d) connecting families with adult service providers.

Friendship Circle involves a suite of programs that encourage family involvement and participation. Their programs are specifically designed to meet the needs of children, adults, and families with disabilities, stating that they ‘work individually with each family to understand their specific needs and concerns related to each child’s disability’. Their programs are designed to support and guide families to make connections with other participants and form relationships within the community. Friendship Circle also supports families who wish to volunteer in the service delivery of their children’s programs.

Similarly, Creative Steps promotes their commitment to enhancing the quality of life for every family they work with by acting as a supportive village for participants with disabilities and their families. The Creative Steps website suggests that they foster family participation through organising local community engagement activities and hosting social gatherings. Although comprehensive details are not provided, the SoSAFE! website states that the program has been carefully designed after consultation with relevant empirical evidence and the recommendations for school-based programs by Frida Briggs. One of these recommendations is ‘strong and ongoing parental involvement in programs’.

It is recommended that service providers who wish to design and implement a successful postschool program for individuals with disabilities include opportunities for developing partnerships with families through involving them in the delivery of services (e.g., volunteering, program facilitating, event organising), using families as natural support structures within the community and to make authentic connections to the wider community. Additionally, there is evidence to indicate that families’ input is an influential source of evaluation that can lead to ongoing program improvement (Agarwal, Heron, & Burke, 2021). As parents and caregivers of young people with disabilities are often responsible for the trajectory of the young person’s postschool life (Agarwal, Heron, & Burke, 2021), it would be advantageous to embed opportunities for family members to provide their evaluation of programs and program components.

Provision of Mentors

Mentors can play an important role in supporting young people with a disability to both pursue their educational or personal interests and support their ability to advocate for themselves outside school settings (Lindsay et al., 2021). A mentor may assist the mentee in a range of areas, which may include developing skills such as communication, awareness of social expectations, and the specific behaviours required for community, educational, or recreational settings (Agarwal, Heron, Naseh, & Burke, 2021). Numerous studies have found effective mentoring can contribute to the successful postsecondary education and employment of young people with disabilities (e.g., Hillier et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2020). For mentoring programs to be considered effective, they must intentionally encourage and include features that lead to increased confidence, improved social connections, and greater opportunities for the mentee (Lindsay et al., 2016; Wilson et al., 2020). Mentoring, either in person or online, will typically be included in a carefully designed program

with mentoring experiences that are well aligned with holistic program outcomes (Wilson et al., 2020), sustain the mentor and mentee relationship, and involve family partnerships and highly trained mentors, including those with a lived experience of disability (Hillier, 2019; Lindsay et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2020).

Evidence suggests that mentorship support should be extended to both partners in the mentor relationship. Mentoring, or coaching, the mentor and the mentee is a defining feature of FIU Embrace EDUCATION. This program provides extensive and collaborative training for both participants (i.e., mentee and mentor) to ensure a clear appreciation of each person's role requirements and responsibilities. Agrwal et al. (2020) found that mentors who received mentorship support (e.g., workshops, orientation, and peer support from other mentors) developed skills in disability awareness, communication techniques, and mentoring strategies. Suggestions for specific content to support the preparation of mentors include learning about inclusive practice, disability, disability-specific support, accessible teaching, universal design for learning, and improving the quality of the mentor–mentee relationship through application of behaviour change taxonomy guided by an adviser to the mentor (Wilson et al., 2020). Wilson et al. (2020) also raised the possibility of assigning more than one mentor to ensure that individuals are regularly supported—especially in the case of volunteer mentors who are often impacted by other demands on their time.

Creative Steps is another example of a program that uses mentors as individually assigned job coaches. These coaches are required to be present for all jobs shifts and provide support to the intern (i.e., individual with the disability) when necessary. It is important to note that this job coach does not replace employer training and is there to offer additional guidance for the intern as they develop new skills that are particular to their employment or business setting. The job coach may also support the employer to understand the needs of their intern and to consider making any necessary adaptations or modifications that may enhance their job performance. Some examples may be the use of visual signs, the level of noise and sound in the environment, and suggestions on how best to communicate effectively. Included programs that also involve mentoring opportunities are DO-IT Mentors, the Friendship Circle, and the Transition and College Access Center.

Ongoing mentor support has also been found to have many benefits in supporting autistic students to meet the demands of postschool education to maintain their participation and engagement (Thompson et al., 2020). Thompson et al. (2020) found

that mentors could support students, academically and socially, to develop their confidence in navigating the complex social relationships during further study. They found this relationship was of the most value when it was perceived by the mentee to be equal (e.g., similar age and status), led to a valuable friendship, contributed academic advice, and resulted in referrals to other resources and support. More generally, however, Foreman et al. (2014) found that those who acted as mentors for their peers with more complex disabilities (e.g., moderate to severe intellectual disability) provided socially appropriate modelling and supported their mentee's inclusion in mainstream settings.

Programs and service providers interested in utilising mentors should invest time and resources into sustaining the mentor and mentee relationship while providing mentorship support by developing resources tailored to supporting the needs of individuals with complex needs. Mentors should engage in ongoing professional learning and support that includes technical and practical advice on the knowledge and skills that would be commonly required by mentors. Additionally, the use of mentors should be monitored for effectiveness, using measures such as mentor commitment, mentee confidence, mentee social participation, and employment, learning, or community engagement outcomes.

Progression in Learning or Skill Development

In the context of human rights, individuals with intellectual disabilities are entitled to accessible, suitable, evidence-based services that empower them to attain personal goals and experience a quality of life that are equal to those without disabilities (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD], 2006). There remains, however, a need for service providers and organisations to deliver programs that can consistently and with integrity demonstrate positive outcomes for this population (Townsend-White et al., 2012). Historically, comprehensive outcome data have included both individual and population outcomes, as well as service-level metrics such as frequency of service utilisation, efficiency of service, effectiveness of programs, accessibility to programs and services, equity, and appropriateness (Bickman et al., 1998; Hensel, 2001). Another form of program evaluation that plays a major role in postsecondary pathways is capturing parent perspectives. Parent perspectives have been considered a powerful form of evaluation as parents typically play a leading role in the postsecondary decision-making process for their children with moderate to severe intellectual disability and have the ability to influence the trajectory of their child's postsecondary

pathway (Agarwal, Heron, & Burke, 2021; Culnane et al., 2016; Jones & Goble, 2012).

Data that illustrate changes in an individual over time and as a direct result of a program or service are particularly held in high regard (Townsend-White et al., 2012). Such data should be gathered through consultation between the individual accessing the service, their family, and the service provider. Ideally, measures would be explicitly aligned with the individual's personalised goals and aspirations. Despite these longstanding recommendations, reported outcome measures are commonly aligned with the Quality of Life Framework, reporting on both subjective and objective indicators (Verdugo et al., 2005). While various measures can be used to inform program design and redesign, they should ultimately be used to inform service providers on when to progress an individual to higher levels of learning or skill complexity.

Of the programs included in this review, it is difficult to find examples of a comprehensive approach to measuring participant outcomes for this purpose. Rather, each provider has a unique way in which they measure success and progressively offer opportunities for individuals to work at higher levels. Sweetwater Spectrum, for example, offers group housing to those entering the program and provides opportunities for residents to then move to partnered housing and independent living as they demonstrate greater independence over time. Creative Growth helps individuals to establish themselves as skilful artists before supporting their art-making as a career. Both AMICI Dance Theatre Company and The Miracle Project provide performing arts classes to develop participants' skills and confidence before offering performance-based experiences in front of live audiences. DO-IT Mentors and Project SEARCH measure progress on employment outcomes and job retention, reducing or phasing out mentors as participants demonstrate positive employment outcomes over time.

The Latch-On literacy program is perhaps the most responsive to participant output of the included programs in this review. Leveraging computer-based technology to deliver tailored feedback and literacy teaching instruction, Latch-On, along with DO-IT Mentors, The Miracle Project, and Project SEARCH, are all programs that have evidence of internal research studies on the effectiveness or efficiency of the program on participants. While internal research is at risk of bias and subjectivity, it provides evidence of the organisations' interests in outcomes and measures. In many of the included programs, parent perspectives have been captured and reported in

the form of testimonials. Unfortunately, parent testimonials are typically only used to promote the program, and it is unclear what impact parent testimonials have had on program delivery or redesign.

Organisations and service providers who deliver programs to individuals with moderate to severe intellectual disability should endeavour to have progress plans and suggested trajectories in place for their participants. These plans should be based on participant outcomes and performance and measured according to both subjective (e.g., participant self-reported) and objective indicators (e.g., observations). In conjunction with evidence-based instruction and supports, participant progression plans should support individuals to work towards achievable, yet challenging, learning goals.

Opportunities for Choice and Empowerment

There are several benefits associated with giving individuals the opportunity to make their own decisions, including increased quality of life, an improved sense of autonomy, and better community integration (Heller et al., 2002; Neely-Barnes et al., 2008). Regardless of these proven benefits, parents and caregivers of individuals with intellectual disabilities often make decisions on their behalf (United Nations, 2014). Article 12 of the UNCRPD defines supported decision-making as having legal implications. Although similar in process, decision-making support and support for decision-making are less formal methods that enable individuals with disabilities to make choices about their lives (Browning et al., 2014; Gooding et al., 2016).

Within the Australian context, the primary aim of the NDIS is to empower people with disabilities to make decisions and have control over the supports that they receive, by making funding portable and personalised. This feature of the NDIS is often associated with person-centred planning and is essential in ensuring that individuals receive the supports they want and need to live more independently. Within this review, participant choice is a component that is evident in almost every included program, except for Latch-On (prescribed literacy program) and the Next Chapter Book Club (prescribed book and meeting location).

Two Australian creative and performing arts programs, Bam Arts Inc. and Tutti Arts, provide participants with opportunities for choice and empowerment about their enrolment in different programs (e.g., visual arts, podcasting, filmmaking, music, dance, drama) according to personal interests and preferences (e.g., weekly classes,

open studios, half-day programs). A U.S. program that demonstrates excellence in providing participants with choice is the College of Adaptive Arts. Like the other creative and performing arts programs, the College of Adaptive Arts offers an alternative to a typical day program for individuals with disabilities, offering participants creative/performance-based training alongside an adapted liberal arts program that seeks to cater to their diverse interests and preferences.

Unfortunately, there is little empirical research to inform how best to support the decision-making process for individuals with intellectual disabilities (Koritsas, 2023). However, a small amount of research has reported on the facilitators for and barriers against supported decision-making for individuals with disabilities (Bigby et al., 2021; Bigby et al., 2015). Some of the identified barriers include lack of time and resources, restrictive organisational procedures, worries about influencing the individual, concerns about how to communicate with the individual, and others' opinions of the individuals' decisions.

It is recommended that service providers empower participants to engage in collaborative decision-making processes that inform the personalisation of their supports and postschool life trajectories. To do this, staff must engage in training in how to support the decision-making process (e.g., use of decision-making tools), how to adjust their communication methods, and how to identify potential bias and conflict of interest. The decision-making capacity building is not limited to service providers; rather, individuals with disabilities and the decision-making supporters also need to engage in training that clarifies their roles and the use of decision-making tools.

Relationships and Community Connections

The UNCRPD (2006) acknowledges the significance of cultural participation for individuals with disabilities and the communities they belong to. It emphasises the importance of access to creative learning opportunities as a crucial factor in self-development, with potential positive effects extending to their families and broader social networks. This review revealed a range of high-quality creative and recreational programs (e.g., creative arts, fine arts, performing arts) that purposefully support social relationships and community connections. Examples of these programs include the Next Chapter Book Club, Bam Arts Inc., and AMICI Dance Theatre Company. These included programs, along with others, all emphasise the involvement of individuals with moderate to severe disability in activities of creative enrichment, progressing development of skills, and meaningful interactions with other

people (Hartnett et al., 2008). Two main types of programs were identified, the first being programs that embed social skill development into their curriculum while providing opportunities to practically engage with the community.

Creative Growth in Oakland, California, is an example of a visual arts centre that offers a schedule of ongoing creative arts classes for individuals with developmental disability, led by an experienced full-time staff of professional artists. The program operates in a similar format to a day program, with the point of difference being an arts focus. Attached to the centre is an artist gallery that serves two purposes, the first being to showcase the work of their artists and elevate their work to that of other professional artists. The gallery also serves as a place to connect the centre and artists to the community and promote meaningful engagement between the artist and the residents.

Another example is The Miracle Project, an evidence-based theatre arts program designed by child-acting coach Elaine Hall. The curriculum uses the dramatic forms of improvisation, movement, dance, storytelling, and song to teach and practise social and communication skills. Many of the classes culminate in a performance, with the performers scripting a piece of theatre to share stories and ideas with their families and wider communities. This program aims to give people with disabilities a fun, social opportunity to learn about being part of a group, develop their self-confidence, form friendships, and pursue an interest in drama and theatre arts.

Beyond arts-specific organisations is a second type of program involving larger social organisations that act as hosts for a range of recreational activities. Golden Heart Ranch offers a suite of options through their social living clubs, including a supper club, cooking club, track club, and adventurers club. Some of these recreational activities are offered on site at the ranch, while others are arranged offsite. Each of these social clubs includes a curriculum that develops both skills for life, such as problem-solving, organising, and planning, and the club members' ability to recall events and draw on these events to inform their future actions (i.e., episodic memory). The facilitators intentionally focus on providing participants with opportunities to develop pragmatic social skills and referencing others' actions, gestures, and facial expressions, and on attuning their behaviour accordingly to match the social situation. The clubs meet regularly, encouraging genuine friendships to evolve naturally from shared interests and enjoyable activities. The location of the activities adds to the sense of community as events and meetings take place in the local neighbourhood and surrounding areas.

Friendship Circle is another program that provides a wide variety of options for individuals to make social connections and participate in leisure activities at their centres in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Classes include yoga, visual arts, and music therapy as well as cooking workshops and social events at golf clubs and theme parks. The program also offers a ratio of 1:5 support staff. Participants that may require additional levels of assistance or requiring 1:1 support are invited to bring their guest to these events and to notify the provider at registration. The workshops are ongoing, run according to a monthly calendar and suited to a range of abilities.

For students wanting a more formal learning experience, the College of Adaptive Arts offers an accessible liberal arts education and model of lifelong learning that operates like a college by offering classes in fine arts, theatre, music, dance, business, science, and communication. The difference between this college and other institutions is the adapted curriculum of 1-hr classes that is designed specifically for students with disabilities to develop and build new skills over time. The unique model provides an education that is not available in other inclusive university programs.

Service providers and organisations wanting to deliver programs that result in the relationship establishment and connections with community may consider including creative or recreational activities. To strengthen participants' social outcomes within their communities, these activities could be offered alongside explicit social skill curriculum content. Opportunities to authentically engage with local communities should also be considered to demonstrate participants' commitment to serving others, inspiring others, and advocating for others.

Pursuit of Independence

Independence can be described as a continuum, with complete independence at one end and total dependence at the other (Aldridge, 2011). Independence has been linked to other concepts such as self-management and self-determination, which are closely related to having control over one's own choices and actions (Browder & Shapiro, 1985; Sexton et al., 2016). People with intellectual disabilities are often somewhat dependent on support from others to manage their affairs, participate within the community, maintain personal care, and access programs, services, and employment (Sandjojo et al., 2019). However, there is evidence to demonstrate that people with intellectual disabilities do value independence (Kuijken et al., 2016). Research has also shown that a greater level of independence can result in a greater

sense of satisfaction and happiness and improved quality of life (Haigh et al., 2013; Sigafoos et al., 2005).

There remains a scarcity of research dedicated to the promotion of independence for people with intellectual disabilities. Of the research that does exist, there is a lack of consistency in how independence has been taught and measured (Sandjojo et al., 2019). One conclusion drawn from a review conducted by Storey (2007) is that programs and services need to be personalised to an individual's specific needs and context to promote their independence. Personalisation of services to enhance independence can be achieved through providing information to the individual in various formats (e.g., visuals, easy read, speech), involving family members and carers in supporting an individual's self-management skills, and engaging the individual in education and learning that promotes the teaching and/or practice of self-management skills (Hale et al., 2011).

Within the programs included in this review, most promote the learning and/or practice of self-management skill as individuals pursue independence. Good examples of these programs include Creative Growth, FIU Embrace EDUCATION, Project SEARCH, and Golden Heart Ranch Social Living Club. A program that is particularly excellent for promoting self-management skills is Golden Heart Ranch Social Living Club, which offers a variety of programs that include a curriculum focused on developing skills related to self-management and self-determination such as problem-solving, decision-making, organising, planning, and memory. For the pursuit of independence, teaching self-management skills is suggested to be more powerful when combined with partnership with families and personalisation of programs and interventions (Hale et al., 2011). An example of a program that does all three is Community Care Trust. This program offers individuals with disabilities and their families a range of services such as supported living, independent living, high school transition support, and various community activities. Their approach emphasises transition planning and life-skill development, and is a person-centred, holistic model for lifelong learning.

Service providers and programs wishing to authentically support individuals with disabilities in their pursuit of independence should design interventions and curriculum that can be personalised to the needs of the individual, rely on family involvement, and plan to explicitly teach skills for life. In addition, there should be opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities to practise increased independence over time with varying levels of support and resourcing.

Other Considerations

Several other considerations emerged from the programs included in this review. First, there is a suggestion that beginning transition planning before young people leave compulsory schooling can have positive impacts on their transition into the community, into further education, or into employment. Opportunities for transition planning should therefore be considered earlier rather than later. After reviewing the qualifications, education, and training required of those delivering the included programs, it is evident that standards vary from program to program. Therefore, options for staff training and capacity building need to be considered. Finally, there are elements of programs that respond to disability-specific needs that also need to be considered when designing programs for a diverse population. Considering the frequency at which autism-specific supports were embedded within the included programs, examples of these supports are discussed as a consideration for future program development.

Beginning Transition Planning at School

The NDCO program's (Department of Education, 2023) final report highlighted a pervasive lack of awareness regarding postsecondary options, accessibility supports, and career planning. The report identified substantial attitudinal barriers impeding young people with disabilities from realising their postschool aspirations, notably stemming from low expectations and a deficit-oriented perspective on disability within society. To address these challenges, the report suggested collaborative efforts among schools, tertiary education providers, and various stakeholders, including organisations and service providers. Among the key recommendations were enhancing knowledge among individuals with disabilities and their families regarding diverse postschool opportunities and working towards an improved overall quality of life for all school leavers.

Studies in Australia and overseas (Davies & Beamish, 2009; Dyke, 2013; Lindsay, 2019) describe a poor postsecondary transition experience for young people with disabilities and their families, with many expressing inadequate support and limited resources and opportunities. Research conducted in Australia contributes valuable insights into the role of schools in equipping young adults with disabilities for postschool endeavours. These insights emphasise the importance of fostering skills that support communication, community participation, and independence. Additionally, schools play a crucial role in exposing students to diverse experiences,

aiding them in identifying potential areas for future employment, learning, or community involvement (Foley et al., 2014).

Literature included in this report (e.g., Mazzotti et al., 2021) demonstrates the importance of beginning transition to postsecondary options for students with disabilities while they are still at school. Beginning transition planning before leaving school allows young people and their families time to prepare for their journeys towards adulthood and independence. Postsecondary interventions that began at school have also been associated with greater student involvement (Wei et al., 2016). Unfortunately, postschool transition is unmandated in Australia, resulting in a fragmented and unregulated system that is reliant on each school's interpretation of the state's or territory's transition policy. This is not the case in other countries, and some examples include the transition requirements stipulated in U.S. legislation (i.e., Indicator 13; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004) and U.K. legislation (e.g., Additional Support for Learning; Scotland Act, 2004).

Several of the programs listed above (i.e., Community Care Trust, Project SEARCH, Creative Steps, The Transition and College Access Center) have demonstrated their meaningful engagement with this practice of beginning the transition process prior to the end of compulsory schooling to support positive transitions and opportunities for students with disabilities after school.

One example is Project SEARCH, an internship program that commences in the final school year with a host business, although the program can be adapted outside schools for other providers. Interns work in a cohort of no more than 12 and have a designated room at the site of their employment for learning that complements their work experience. Examples of this may include occupational health and safety, communication, teamwork, commuter skills, and other self-care or life skills programs. This is a collaborative model between students with developmental disabilities, their families, their schools, and a possible postschool service provider such as Australian Disability Enterprises.

Another example is Creative Steps, a program that has taken advantage of establishing connections with young people with complex needs while they are still at school to allow for extensive consultation with young people, their schools, and their families in the search for a business match or ongoing learning opportunities. Once this match is made, the organisation supports the internship with a 1:1 job coach,

which may or may not lead to employment. The focus is on supporting the individual to engage meaningfully with rewarding community experiences.

These programs make connections with young people and their families before students leave school and utilise a range of approaches that benefit young people's postsecondary outcomes. As a result, some key considerations that emerged from these programs and the associated literature include the benefits of allowing time to establish and sustain relationships for postschool success (e.g., Scott et al., 2017) and including personalised goal setting and transition planning (Wehman et al., 2013). It would be advantageous for service providers to assume the role of facilitators in this process by guiding transition planning for school leavers with disabilities and their families and schools. Their role should encompass supporting transition by building the capacity of those working with school leavers with disabilities, enhancing their individualised skills required for successful transition, and acting as advocates for students with disabilities by building on their unique strengths while honouring their personal interests and aspirations.

Qualifications and Professional Learning of Those Delivering the Programs

The quality teaching of adults with intellectual disabilities relies on the capabilities of staff who are delivering the programs (National Council for Special Education, 2021). In Australia, qualifications, skills, knowledge, and experience are not typically regulated beyond individual organisations and service providers. Further, the academic research on the staffing capabilities and training of disability support workers is extremely limited. Some areas that have some associated research include staff use of active support for decision-making and choice (e.g., Bigby et al., 2017; Koritsas et al., 2008), disability support workers' interactions with people with intellectual disabilities (e.g., Forster & Iacono, 2008), training and implementation of positive behaviour support (Mahon et al., 2022), and person-centred qualifications for disability support workers (Leahy, 2022).

The programs included in this report use a variety of staffing structures to design and deliver programs. While there are some programs with strict staffing criteria that insist on formal qualifications and degrees (e.g., Latch-On, Creative Steps, and Sweetwater Spectrum), others only require program-specific training (e.g., Next Chapter Book Club and SoSAFE!), and some rely on professional artists to facilitate the program (e.g., Bam Arts Inc., Tutti Arts, and AMICI Dance Theatre Company).

Comprehensive details of the staff qualifications and training beyond the management team are difficult to obtain from program websites and associated literature.

Service providers who wish to deliver high-quality teaching activities for individuals with moderate to severe disabilities need to articulate the qualifications, skills, knowledge, and experience that they expect their employees to have. In addition, there should be an expectation that staff engage with ongoing professional learning opportunities to ensure that they are up to date with procedures, regulations, and evidence-based practices. Employers should support staff who are responsible for teaching individuals with disabilities to maintain a sound understanding of the impacts that disabilities can have on teaching and learning. Employers need to ensure that their staff also have the skills to compensate for these impacts by knowing how to personalise learning for the unique needs of participants. It is also important for staff to identify when they do not have the skills and knowledge required, knowing who to consult and collaborate with to overcome barriers and limitations.

Autism-Specific Supports

Meaningful employment, community engagement, and social participation contribute to the wellbeing and quality of life of all young adults (Pillay et al., 2021). However, studies highlight how autistic adults continue to be underrepresented in the workforce and may experience social isolation, finding lower rates of paid employment and social involvement than individuals with other disabilities (Pillay et al., 2021; Wehman et al., 2020). It is necessary, therefore, to create specific, targeted approaches that support postsecondary education and employment opportunities for autistic young people that include activities that honour individual interests and skills and utilise these to guide meaningful postsecondary pathways (Pillay et al., 2021; Wehman et al., 2020). For autistic individuals, this personalised approach is one way to draw on the typical characteristics of autism that include intense personal preferences (Wehman et al., 2020).

Various models exist, with programs such as Project SEARCH that stand out as they coincide with an internship or on-the-job training during the last years of secondary school (Weld-Blundel et al., 2021) and use personalised supports to suit the learning and communicative preferences of the students, including visual aids, behaviour regulation training, and interagency collaboration (Saleh et al., 2019). Students

involved in this program move through a series of placements that introduce them to a range of possible postsecondary pathways. Another valuable component of this program is the ongoing support of the therapist who is knowledgeable about the impact of autism on individuals and families and provides feedback and extensive opportunities for individuals and families to collaborate during the process. Although a highly resourced program, Project SEARCH highlights how to establish the foundations for autistic individuals to join the workforce.

Sweetwater Spectrum is an example of innovative housing built to suit the sensory preferences associated with autism. The buildings are constructed to align with research and LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) principles and are intended to create environments that support the wellbeing and independence of autistic adults. A familiar layout and design are used throughout the homes and campus to help residents identify and cope with private, semiprivate, and public spaces. Fourteen houses are situated within this coliving community, along with a communal kitchen, media room, studio, greenhouse, orchard, and two swimming pools. The designated outdoor spaces can be used for yoga and other group activities, and situated around these wide spaces are smaller areas for individuals to relax outdoors. Indoor spaces do not have direct sunlight and include furnishings and décor that are calming and minimise sensory overstimulation. Inside the campus is a large community garden that opens to the wider neighbourhood and is intended to build connections with residents outside the campus. Many residents work in the garden and orchard alongside volunteers.

Programs seeking to support autistic young people should also consider developing programs that support social and employment-related skills while engaging families and strengthening community connections (Pillay et al., 2021). The sensory and communication preferences of autistic participants should be central considerations when designing postsecondary programs for this population. In addition, the ways in which programs are individualised and evaluated by participants need to be carefully considered to allow for multiple means of expression and the inclusion of participatory methods of response.

Conclusion

The purpose of this review was to gather evidence of postschool programs for individuals with moderate to severe disabilities that demonstrate excellence in their organisation and implementation of services and opportunities. This was determined by their stated commitment to (a) improving the quality of life of individuals with disabilities and their families and (b) providing ongoing opportunities for learning and/or skill development. In addition, these programs demonstrate evidence of a combination of key components that reflect measures of program and service quality such as partnerships with families, enhancing community connections, and providing opportunities for choice, empowerment, and independence.

After identifying the 19 postschool programs that met the inclusion criteria for excellence, literature and other publications were gathered to support each program, either directly or indirectly. Each of the key components has been discussed with reference to selected postschool programs that illustrate these components in action. From these programs and the associated literature on the key components of these programs, recommendations for practice are made.

The leading recommendations emerging from this review for service providers interested in designing or improving a postschool program or service include the following.

- Integrate opportunities for family involvement in planning, organising and delivering services, while clarifying their roles within the program and in the wider community.
- Train and support mentors to guide participants across a range of activities while monitoring their engagement in continued professional learning and the effectiveness of their mentorship on participant outcomes.
- Plan for participant progression in learning and/or skill development over time with embedded opportunities for monitoring their progress and responding to their individual strengths and aspirations.
- Engage participants in collaborative decision-making and evaluation to inform the personalisation and improvement of their postschool experience.
- Embed opportunities for participants to authentically engage with the wider community through creative outlets, recreational activities, or service roles.

- Actively promote increasing levels of independence among participants by providing individualised supports and resources.
- Facilitate and support early transition planning and processes for school leavers and their families.
- Clarify ongoing expectations of staff to improve their qualifications, skills, knowledge, and experience over the course of their employment.
- Honour the communicative and sensory preferences of all participants.

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Contact

Jessica Zanuttini PhD FHEA
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Sydney School of Education and Social Work

Camperdown, NSW, 2217

(02) 9351 7028
jessica.zanuttini@sydney.edu.au

sydney.edu.au

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