

Literature Review Fact Sheet and Executive Summary Transitioning From Post-Secondary Education to Decent Employment Strategies for Success and Areas for Improvement

At a Glance

The transition from post-secondary education (PSE) to decent work can be difficult for anyone, but there are specific barriers that can make this transition more difficult for people with disabilities (PWD). Literature on the transition from school to work is limited, and much of the available research focuses on private transition programs, especially those for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD). This fact sheet on transition planning summarizes findings on cross-disability strategies for success and areas for improvement for the transition from PSE to work.

Areas for Improvement

- *Focus on Deficit Model* – The deficit model of disability is connected to the medical model and suggests that there is something wrong with PWD that needs to be fixed for them to fit into society (Pfeiffer, 2002). This framework is often used by the authors in the literature when focusing on the experiences of people with IDD. For example, function labels are often used (i.e. mild, moderate, severe) and authors often suggest changing the actions or communication styles of PWD rather than considering the ways that attitudes and environments may need to change. Future research should focus on the social model of disability informed by intersectionality and human rights and consider using levels of support needs or level of complexity instead of functioning labels.
- *Need for Intersectional Services* - Very few of the articles reviewed considered cultural competency or intersectional programs or strategies. PWD are diverse and have different needs based on their personal identifies and experiences, and research and programing should reflect that reality. In one review, the authors noted that many transition programs centre White and middle-class values. For example, many programs focus on moving out of the family home to be independent, but in many cultures, this is not the norm (Hirano et al., 2018).
- *Lack of Disabled Voices* – Throughout our review, we noted the lack of disabled perspectives accounted for in the research. This is especially true when considering the literature on the transition between PSE and work. People with IDD specifically were often not consulted, and when they were, it was often via their family members or through indirect means, such as surveys. For example, one study surveyed parents/guardians of adults with IDD regarding their job experiences, marital status, and other important personal information (Ryan et al., 2019). Research should work with and meaningfully include PWD, especially people with IDD.
- *Income Caps on Support* – In order to qualify for disability support, many policies limit how much money PWD can earn while working. This practice limits the agency of PWD and has also been shown to create a significant barrier for PWD accessing decent work (Scheef et al., 2018). Benefits are insufficient and the limits on accessing these benefits forces PWD to work in low-wage jobs with minimal hours (Enayati & Karpur, 2019; Moore & Schelling, 2015). Removal of income limits when receiving support would remove a significant barrier for PWD.
- *Improved Workplace Policies* – Employers and workplaces should improve their support to PWD and work towards not only hiring and employing PWD, but ensuring that the workplace is safe, inclusive, and disability positive. Policy makers and employers should ensure that hiring and management practices are inclusive through policy and affirmative action from leadership (Perri et al., 2021).

Strategies for Success

- *Wrap-Around Services* – An issue that came up often in the literature was the lack of adult-oriented support services for PWD. While many students receive support and accommodations throughout their

time in school, they are often eliminated once they graduate (Lindsay et al., 2017). Adult-oriented community health centres/programs and ongoing support were both noted as important factors for ensuring success in transition for PWD (Lindsay et al., 2017).

- *Universal/Inclusive Design* – There are several different types of transition programs, with the most inclusive programs using the inclusive individual support model. This model encourages students to choose their own courses and work with education coaches who support and guide them (Wilczenski et al., 2017). These programs often also offer life skills courses that are available to anyone planning their transition, which also means that students do not have to identify as having a disability to access resources (Wilczenski et al., 2017)
- *Mentorship* – Mentorship programs can aid the transition from school to work for PWD. For example, one American study found that visually impaired students with mentors found jobs quicker than those without mentors (Antonelli et al., 2018). A systemic review of the literature found that long-term and group-based mentorship programs were the most successful, and that programs excel when adequate resources and staff are in place (Lindsay et al., 2016)
- *Collaboration* – Many articles emphasized the importance of collaboration, especially between employers, educators, and the community (Readhead & Owen, 2020; Petcu & Chezan, 2015; Lindsay et al., 2017). Collaboration with employers can result in placement or internship opportunities, this is particularly important because job experience during school has been shown to positively impact future job prospects (Pectu & Chezan, 2015).
 - Community services and support are also extremely important. Barriers like lack of affordable housing, inaccessible transportation, and lack of affordable mental health care need to be addressed to ensure success for PWD (Lindsay et al., 2017; Hall, 2020).
- *Personal Support* - Our analysis also found that support from family and friends is very important for ensuring successful transition from PSE to work. While focusing on PWDs experience is important, family support and family having high expectations of success can also greatly impact PSE attendance and success in transition (Kelly & Prohn, 2019; Lindsay et al., 2017; Hall, 2020). Collaboration, information sharing, and workshops for families can help with program engagement and can improve support for PWD (Kelley & Prohn, 2019; Hirano et al., 2018)

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