



Exploring the Benefits of Work Based Training/Employment and Independent Living of Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) in a Transition Program

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Introduction

- 15% of students aged 3-21 received special education or related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) during 2022-2023 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024).
- IDEA mandates that transition services must be addressed within the Individualized Education Plan of each student before graduation (Shearin, et. al 1999).
- Successful transition of individuals with disabilities is typically defined through accomplishing certain developmental tasks, such as employment and independent living skills (Henninger and Taylor, 2014). However, the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework expands this view, defining occupational engagement as the performance of meaningful activities driven by choice (AOTA, 2020).

Problem & Purpose

Problem: Young adults with disabilities transitioning out of school programs are at risk for regression in functional skills. Despite known predictors of success, research is limited on strategies to support independent living and employment skills.

Purpose: This project aims to promote independent living and employment skill strategies for transition through strengthening caregiver resources, enhancing day program curricula, and fostering mutually beneficial relationships between the disability population and community employment partners.

Methods

Site and Population: Equip is a non-profit in the greater Birmingham, Alabama area. Equip partners with local school districts to teach life and vocational skills, and runs an adult day program, Thrive.

Project Design →	Recruitment →	Data Collection and Analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none">collaboration with staff, participants, caregivers, employers and the OTSCaregiver open house sessionsCommunity employment interviewsDay program evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Caregiver Open Houses: flyers, social media post, emailEmployment interviews: email	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Transcribed phone call or email (employment interviews)Written journal (day program observations)

Figure 1

Results

Caregiver Open Houses:

Open House #1: Independent Living Skills:

- Focused on independent living strategies from an occupational therapy perspective and introduced practical strategies for caregivers to implement at home
- Eight people in attendance

Open House #2: Employment Skills

- Focused on employment skills, including a short presentation with strategies to assist with job search and support and an employment panel with two adults with disabilities that are employed
- 21 people in attendance



Community Employment Partner Themes:

1. Mutual Benefit and Community Integration

- Taziki's emphasized "want[ing] to help [the disability population] learn life skills.. and also helping them get out of their comfort zone a little bit to be as excellent as we all know they can be".
- Heart of Dixie Railroad stated, "they are just so enthusiastic and have so much heart in the process... it's a blessing that goes both directions"
- Texas Roadhouse emphasized: "We all grow together and get stronger together".

2. Skill Development and Accommodations

- Taziki's emphasized that they "... make accommodations based on the person, for whatever their capacity is" and that "We have had instances where we have had people with walkers so they have to be sitting down for parts of their day, and we would make accommodations to meet the individual needs.. [such as] wiping off the tables sitting down, cleaning the windows or window sills sitting down, and so on".

3. Shifting perceptions and Disability Awareness

- Tread Ware noted that exposure "starts a dialogue with people who are a little different than you, and that is a good thing."

Results Continued

- At Bruster's, an employee's joyful approach to work countered assumptions regarding workplace stress, teaching colleagues that "each shift does not have to be draining and depleting."

4. Challenges in Access and Employment Opportunities

- Taziki's prides themselves at excelling in this area, stating "We take every opportunity we can, but I don't think many other businesses do"

Program Evaluation:

- Implementation of suggestions made to day program curriculum included splitting into small groups to promote increased participation, grading activities up and down based on the individual, and practicing job skills before an employment experience.

Discussion & Conclusion

Recurring Themes:

- Importance of Independent Living and Employment Skills
- Lack of Caregiver Resources and Education
- Limited Opportunities for Employment

Limitations:

- Low community employment partner responses
- Demographics of population reached/narrow geographical area
- Potential observer bias

Implications for OT Practice:

- Supports OT practitioners in delivering practical caregiver training for independent living and employment skills
- Highlights OT's role in transition planning for adults with disabilities and caregiver support throughout the transition process
- Encourages expansion into emerging practice areas that foster occupational identity and performance

Future Research:

- Obtaining lived experiences of caregivers throughout the transition process
- Expanding and continuing to provide caregiver education and support in the areas of transition, independent living, and employment skills
- Develop employer training for hiring individuals with disabilities

Acknowledgement & Contact information

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Scan for References:

