

LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL: PREPARING FOR AND NAVIGATING POST- SECONDARY EXPERIENCES

WESLEY DOTSON, PH.D., BCBA-D, LBA

AGENDA

Context

Predictors of Adult Success

Differences between SPED and Post-Secondary

Types of Post-Secondary Program

Types of Funding

Lessons Learned

Questions and Discussion

INITIAL THOUGHTS AND CONTEXT

Transition is scary and confusing

We've created the next problems—in a good way!

Number of adults with ASD growing

Participation in post-secondary is growing

OPENING IDEAS:

Individuals on the spectrum will live most of their lives after exiting formal educational services

The skills needed to live independently and to function in the community must be taught and learned just like academic and self-care skills

Community integration and involvement is a personal and varied experience

OPENING IDEAS:

The transition out of special education services has been described as “going over a cliff”

CONTEXT

Few individuals with autism are competitively employed in meaningful careers or develop friendships with same-aged peers

Competitive employment rate of individuals with disabilities within 6 years of graduating high school is less than 25%

The same study indicated that 85% of the social interactions of people with disabilities after high school is with family members and paid caregivers

PREDICTORS OF SUCCESS

Two biggest predictors of competitive employment, wages earned when employed, and hours worked for individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities:

Participation in post-secondary education

Vocational experience/access to VR services

(Migliore et al., 2012)

WHAT IS POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Postsecondary education refers to the range of formal learning opportunities beyond high school, including those aimed at learning an occupation or earning an academic credential.

-Institute of Education Sciences

<https://ies.ed.gov/topics/postsecondary.asp>

SKILLS TARGETED IN POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Job Skills

If you can't work, you lose ability to influence your life circumstances

Money = freedom

SKILLS TARGETED IN POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Life Skills

If you can't care for yourself, you lose privacy and the potential for most types of intimacy

SKILLS TARGETED IN POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Social Skills

If you can't interact, you lose opportunities for work, friendship, and community engagement

DIFFERENCES FROM SPED

Eligibility vs Diagnosis

School supports are delivered based on a determination of eligibility, for which a diagnosis may or may not be required

DIFFERENCES FROM SPED

Eligibility vs Diagnosis

Adult services REQUIRE a medical diagnosis to qualify

It can take 1-2 years to get a diagnostic assessment done
if you wait until they are adults

Encourage families to talk to PCP NOW

DIFFERENCES FROM SPED

Role of parents/caregivers

Once a child is a legal adult, parents have NO formal role or right to access without permission

Most adult service providers will insist on interacting with the individual served as primary contact regardless of guardianship status

DIFFERENCES FROM SPED

Role of parents/caregivers

Start preparing them for that lead role sooner than later

DIFFERENCES FROM SPED

Self-advocacy vs FAPE

You get only what you ask for and justify in adult services

There is no federal mandate to provide services

Burden is on the person to identify needed and desired supports

DIFFERENCES FROM SPED

State support services are overstretched

Budgets and caseloads

Most counselors have dozens to hundreds of clients

There is a fixed total budget for everyone

DIFFERENCES FROM SPED

Two primary outcomes adult service providers are judged on:

Avoidance of state burden

Client employment

You will experience much more success in accessing services and supports when you couch all requests in this context

DIFFERENCES FROM SPED

Adult services are funded differently and are in high demand

All quality programs have waitlists

Without an educational funding mandate, they use many mechanisms to support themselves

WAYS POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IS PAID FOR

Private pay

Set fee for services

Families are responsible for securing funding of any kind
from types described

WAYS POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IS PAID FOR

Work-study

Some university-affiliated programs offer work-study

Paid part-time job while in program

Sometimes comes with fee waiver, most times is just an earning opportunity to offset costs

WAYS POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IS PAID FOR

Financial Aid

Some university-affiliated programs offer credentials (degrees or certificates) that qualify for federal and private student loans

TYPES OF FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

State Funding

Vocational Rehabilitation

Adult DD funding

TYPES OF FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Vocational Rehabilitation

Pre-ETS funds

Job placement Funds

TYPES OF FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Vocational Rehabilitation –focused on reducing state burden through achieving employment and independence

TYPES OF FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Vocational Rehabilitation

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

For individuals 15-22

Funds any supports that make employment more
likely

TYPES OF FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Vocational Rehabilitation

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

Historically under-utilized

Usually facilitated through school-based VR
counselor

TYPES OF FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Vocational Rehabilitation

Job placement Funds

For any adult

Focused on achieving or maintaining employment

TYPES OF FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Adult DD funding

Long-term supports

Waivers

TYPES OF FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Adult DD funding –focused on reducing state burden through providing supports that keep an individual in the least expensive and community engaged placement

TYPES OF FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Adult DD funding

Long-term supports

Funding to support a person in their community
placement

TYPES OF FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Adult DD funding

Waivers

Emergency funding for unique or high-intensity
cases

TYPES OF FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

State Funding

You must apply and be determined eligible for state services

Requires a medical diagnosis of disability

Each agency requires its own application and determination

Individual will be the primary point of contact and must manage communication

TYPES OF FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Once determined eligible for state agency funding:

Counselor assigned

Treatment/support plan developed

Resources delivered

Review and revision of plan

TYPES OF FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

State Funding

Some types of supports provided

Psychological assessment and supports

Job coaching and career placement

Social skills and professional skills support

TYPES OF FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

State Funding

Some types of supports provided

- Tuition/fee assistance and waivers

- Residential, travel, and/or living expenses to attend programs

Determined on a case-by-case basis

There may be cost-share

TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Off-campus

Usually not affiliated with a university or community college

May or may not be state-funded

Shorter-term and most often focused on job skills or life skills

TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

On-campus

Usually affiliated with a university or community college

Full or half-day enrollment lasting at least 1-2 years

More immersive and comprehensive

TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Off-campus

Tend to be targeted, short-term, and intensive

Some are individual programs

Some are group programs

TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Types of off-campus programs

Employment “boot camps”

Intensive job skills or job finding experiences

Often specific to one type of job or one population

TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Types of off-campus programs

Social skills classes

Targeted to professional and work skills

Usually short-term and focused

TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Types of off-campus programs

Individual coaching/counselling

Targeted to individual needs and goals

Often long-term and remote

TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

On-campus:

Parallel

Inclusive

Residential

TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

On-campus parallel programs

Half and full-day programs teaching job, life, and social skills

Give a “college experience”

NOT a degree-granting program

TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

On-campus parallel programs

Classes are separate and taught by program staff

Often includes job placement and community engagement

Paid peer mentors and staff

TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

On-campus inclusive programs

Designed to support degree-seeking college students

Programs focus on individual career and life goals

TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

On-campus inclusive programs

More emphasis on supporting campus and professional inclusion in whatever way student desires

Workshops, social events, mentorship, and case management to help access already existing campus resources

TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

On-campus residential programs

Both parallel and inclusive programs can include a residential component, but may not

Residential programs have students living in the dorms or a shared off-campus residence with staff support

Most intensive and expensive type of program

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A PROGRAM

Clear scope/outcomes

Clear expectations

Community relationships and connections

Rigorous application process that includes a visit

Support to secure outside funding

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A PROGRAM

Clear scope/outcomes

Can articulate their purpose

Open about their methods and process

Make clear what they can and cannot do

Know what they offer

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A PROGRAM

Clear expectations

They know what students need to do to succeed

They make clear what appropriate engagement looks like

Written guidelines, policies, and procedures are public, shared, and referenced

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A PROGRAM

Community relationships and connections

Program has many partnerships in the community

Partnerships provide specific opportunities to students

They use partnerships to achieve program outcomes

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A PROGRAM

Rigorous application process that includes a visit

Quality programs will have a wait list

Quality programs know what an ideal student looks like

Quality program will not accept a student sight-unseen

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A PROGRAM

Support to secure outside funding

They offer help navigating federal or state support programs for students attending

They have program administrative support to navigate funding issues

LESSONS LEARNED

It's never too early to start working on choice-making and self-advocacy

Umbrellas and hobbies

LESSONS LEARNED

Identification vs diagnosis

The school file vs. a Dr.'s note

LESSONS LEARNED

GET ON THE WAITLIST

It's easier to say no

LESSONS LEARNED

It's not always about the academics or the job

Girlfriends and support networks

LESSONS LEARNED

Fit matters more than anything

The talent show and the theatre group

TIME FOR QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

What do you want to talk about?

THAT'S ALL FOLKS!

- Thanks for your time and attention
- Please reach out with further questions to wdotson13@gmail.com
- A copy of the slideshow will be provided after the conference

RESOURCES

College Autism Network

Maintains a list of college support programs

<https://can.softtr.app/>

Think College

Maintains a list of over 300 post-secondary programs

<https://thinkcollege.net/college-search>

Review Papers

List a number of college support programs

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1088357620954369>

RESOURCES

TX State VR

<https://www.twc.texas.gov/jobseekers/vocational-rehabilitation-services>

TX Disability Services

<https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/disability>

Federal VR

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opers/rva/index.html>

Transition and VR resources at Wrightslaw

<https://www.wrightslaw.com/info/trans.index.htm>