

Perspectives of Stakeholders on Youth with Intellectual Disabilities Transitioning to Adulthood

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KEY IMPLICATIONS

- Parents struggle with the dilemma of needing to let go but wanting to protect their child with intellectual disabilities (ID), so youth with ID may not have the opportunity to develop skills needed to build independence.
- Youth with ID are still growing up and many of them, due to their disabilities and experiences, require some continual support to function independently in the community.
- The family requires support and encouragement to empower the youth with ID to explore the available opportunities.

BACKGROUND

Transition is difficult for everyone, but it is particularly challenging for youth with ID and their families. When these youth transition out of school to post-school environments, they will move from a structured environment with clear daily routines, with school personnel who are tasked to teach and support them, to environments where on-going support and services are not readily available. Some of these youth enter work environments that can be impersonal and most of them are unprepared for the level of independence that is required of them. Many of them will find difficulty forming

social networks as an adult and feel isolated in the community. Many youth leave school with no employment in the near future and to further complicate matters, there may be limited places at alternative day activity centres for them. These youth may be inactive, socially isolated, and will continue to rely on family for any social and community interaction.

FOCUS OF STUDY

The purpose of this exploratory study is twofold. The first purpose of this study is to explore how the various stakeholders envision the future for youth with ID from the perspectives of the individuals themselves, their parents and siblings, and the school personnel. The second purpose is to explore the perspectives of the various stakeholders on what they feel are enablers and challenges to transition to adulthood for youth with ID.

KEY FINDINGS

The various stakeholders envisioned a future where the youth with ID will: (a) be meaningfully occupied and/or gainful employed, (b) be independent in managing themselves, (c) be emotionally and/or physically healthy, (d) be safe, and (e) have social lives. The enablers and challenges to transition to adulthood for youth with ID revolved around six key themes:

(1) The individual characteristics of the youth; (2) The family's beliefs and their support in the process of transitioning to adulthood; (3) The safety of the youth when surrounded by people at work and during independent traveling; (4) The general public's awareness and acceptance of people with disabilities; (5) The transition programme and workplace support; and (6) The influence of social media and technology.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

This study on transition to adulthood addresses a significant research gap in the field of special education in Singapore. The findings provide insights into the families' vision of the future for youth with ID and suggest that while working to increase post-school options is critical, more importantly, we need to support the family to empower the youth to explore the available opportunities. The findings on the families' and school personnel's perspectives of the barriers and enablers to successful transition to adulthood were specific to our local context.

PARTICIPANTS

Thirty-three participants from four stakeholder groups (i.e., eight students with ID, ten parents, six siblings and nine school personnel) participated in this study. The eight student participants were from three special schools.

RESEARCH DESIGN

We utilized semi-structured interviews and qualitative research methods to explore the perspectives of stakeholders on youth with ID transitioning to adulthood. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

About the authors

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