

Perspectives of Stakeholders on Youth with Intellectual Disabilities Transitioning to Adulthood

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Abstract

In the area of special education for youth with disabilities, people often think of transition as transition from school to work. However, according to the Council of Exceptional Children's Division on Career Development and Transition, transition refers to a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community (deFur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001). As an emerging adult, youth with disabilities require more than just having employment to function well in the community, they would also need to contribute to maintaining a home, engage in appropriate community participation, and experience satisfactory personal and social relationships, and for some youth with disabilities, taking on an emerging adult role may also include participating in postsecondary education (Wehman, 2006). Transition to adulthood is challenging, not just for the youth with disabilities themselves, but for their families and the larger community as well. The Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) of Singapore have in recent years placed more emphasis and resources in the area of transition from school to work for youth with disabilities. Recently, MOE, MSF and SG Enable, an agency dedicated to enabling persons with disabilities and building an inclusive society, co-developed the School-to-Work (S2W) transition programme to bridge the transition from school to work (Ministry of Education, 2014). The S2W transition programme will be implemented in 2015 for 40 school students in five special schools. This programme is helmed by MOE, MSF and SG Enable, which shows cross-agency collaboration that is a critical component for successful transition out of school to adulthood. It is within this context, that this study seeks to explore the transition to adulthood from the perspectives of youth with intellectual disabilities (ID), their parents, siblings, and school personnel (e.g., teachers, job coaches, school administrators) who support these youth. The purpose of this study is twofold. The first purpose of this study is to explore how the various stakeholders envision the future for youth with mild ID from the perspectives of the individuals themselves (i.e., youth with mild ID), their parents and siblings, and the school personnel who support these individuals during these important years of preparation to move on to adulthood. Multiple perspectives of key stakeholders' expectations and hopes for the youth with ID are important as they provide critical information that will enable us to better understand the services and skills necessary in transition programmes. This, taken into consideration with personal choice can contribute to better educational planning and decision-making (Wehmeyer, 1997). 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. The preparation for transition to adulthood involves more than just a transition programme for the youth (e.g., S2W transition programme); the many years of formal and informal schooling of the youth with ID and the involvement of families and community, and many other factors do ultimately shape the individual as they transition to adulthood.

Key words: Transition to adulthood, youth and intellectual disabilities.