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I Get by with a Little Help from my Friends: Independent Living Success with Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

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INTRODUCTION

The Friendship House is a unique residence hall for both high functioning adults with cognitive impairments and non-disabled Hope College and Western Seminary students. The residence hall has six apartments housing 24 people. Six of these residences are adults with cognitive impairments. This housing provides independent living for adults with cognitive impairments who live side by side with liked aged students from Western Seminary or Hope College.

Studies show:

Poor independent living outcomes for people with disabilities (focus intellectual disabilities)

- Independent living is a vital aspect of becoming an adult in today's society. It is a shared goal for both individuals with and without disabilities to be able to live independently. However, residential independence is low for individuals with intellectual disabilities (O' Hara, Cooper, Zovistowski, & Buttrick, 2007; Copper, O' Hara, & Zovistoski, 2011; Woolf, Wolf, & Oakland, 2010).
- Majority of individuals with disabilities are living with family and count on family to provide financial assistance (Love & Malian, 1997, Sitlington, 1996, Frank, Sitlington, Cooper & Cool, 1990).
- In contrast to above findings—expectations are high that a person with disabilities live on his/her own from both parents and people with disabilities (Malian & Love, 1998)
- There are many challenges to residential independence for adults with intellectual disabilities including limited affordable housing options (Cooper et.al, 2011; Karaim, 2012; O'Hara et al., 2007). Other challenges are personal in nature and are required in everyday life. These changes include taking responsibility for daily tasks such as personal hygiene, cleaning the house, participating in leisure or community activities, communicating effectively and advocating for oneself (Wolf, Woolf & Oakland 2010).

Our Research Questions:

1. Do the individuals with intellectual disabilities (hereby known as "Friends") living at the Friendship House for over 7 years possess the needed independent living skills as defined by IDEA 2004 transition requirements?
2. Which strengths are areas of improvement according to IDEA 2004 transition requirements are necessary for these individuals with intellectual disabilities are these move forward in the future to live as independently as possible.

TPI Qualitative Questions

Please note that these questions aligned with the TPI-2 assessment and IDEA 2004 requirements which states...
...the transition services, including course of study, needed to assist the student in reaching his/her measurable postsecondary goals... related to training, education, employment, and, when appropriate independent living skills. IDEA 2004

Employment

Where are you currently working?
Do you get paid?
Do you enjoy going to work?
Where do you see yourself working in the future?

Further Education/Training

Do you want a different job?
If yes, do you see yourself doing special training?
Are there any training or schooling options that you are aware of?
If yes, do you know how to begin one of those programs.

Daily Living Skills

Explain your morning routine for personal hygiene.
Do you take your medication by yourself or does your roommate help you?
What types of chores do you complete on a daily basis?
How do you get around Holland? To work? To the store?

Leisure Activities

What do you like to do for fun?
How many of these activities do you do outside? Inside?
What places do you like to go for outside for?

Community Participation

Have you ever voted in an election? Are you registered to vote?
What laws are you aware of?

Health

Are you in a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend?
Do you know about sex?
What is appropriate to do on a date with a boyfriend or girlfriend?
How often do you exercise?

Interpersonal Relationship

Do you get along with your family? How about your roommates?
If you had just met someone, what kind of questions might you ask them to get to know them better?
If you were at a movie theater, what would appropriate behavior look like? What about at a basketball game?

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

1. Human Subjects Review was obtained.
 2. An invitation and consent form given to the stakeholders.
 3. Subjects who agreed were given the *Transition Planning Inventory* (TPI) qualitative questions. These questions align with the IDEA 2004 transition requirements and the TPI assessment.
 4. Subjects were interviewed with at least two researchers and were allowed others if requested.
 5. Notes were taken and an audio recording was completed for each interview for purposes of reliability of the interview.
 6. Notes from audio recordings were transcribed.
 7. Themes were noted.
- Inter-rater reliability rate of themes was conducted ($r=.90$)

SUBJECTS

- 6 roommates with disabilities
- 6 interviewed (100% participation)

RESULTS AND THEMES

Employment - This includes IDEA definition of Vocational education and Continuing adult education.

Theme: Love their job.

Quote: I LOVE working at the restaurant. I like being around people, staff and the customers

Theme: No desire to find a different job.

Quote: I like my job and don't have anything else

Theme: Don't know where or how to obtain more job training. Don't know who to talk to, to seek this training.

Quote: I don't know of any training or school that teaches about different jobs but when I started at one restaurant job, I had job coach. Probably when I change jobs, I should have a job coach again.

Future Education and Training

Theme: Not able to articulate goals for the future. and happy with current job.

Quote: I am happy where I am with my job.

Theme: At times, trouble to articulate personal strengths and weaknesses but enjoy working with people.

Quote: I LOVE working at my job. I like being around people, staff and the customers

Theme: Get along well with coworkers and bosses.

Quote: I get along with my boss and the other people that I work with.

Theme: Do not know how much they get paid.

RESULTS AND THEMES (continued)

Home Living and Recreation and Leisure - This includes IDEA definition of Independent Living

Theme: Need assistance setting up appointments—the parents usually set up all their appointments.

Theme: Need assistance dealing with money—family members help with financial matters.

Quote: I do have money but parents keep track of the money. I also get social security and it is mailed to me but my parents keep track of it.

Theme: Prompted exercise.

Quote: I try to exercise everyday by going on the treadmill, bike, weight, track or swimming. My goal is to lose some weight.

Theme: Get along well with their family and roommates.

Quote: I get along with my family well! I talked to my parents a lot. Sometimes, I go to their house, at other times, I talk on the phone or face-time them

Theme: Struggle with articulating what they would do if they met someone.

Theme: They are either in a relationship or really want to be in one.

Quote: I have been dating and have a boyfriend for 12 years

Theme: Know what sex is and named who told them.

Quote: Yes, I know about sex. Never use it I have talked to my parents about sex.

Theme: Responsible for taking their own medicine and daily hygiene routine.

Quote: I have learned to take my medication by myself. I also do my chores daily like cleaning out the animal cage. I do it all--- shower, get ready, eat breakfast before I go out

Community Participation

Theme: Aware of laws but not aware of laws that they have not had to personally deal with.

Quote: Yes, I am registered and voted in an election. I voted for Obama and Bill Clinton and I will vote in this in the big presidential elections coming up.

Theme: Use the Max Bus for transportation.

Quote: One of my roommates to drive to the store, but I can walk pretty much everywhere else (job, leisure activities like basketball games, exercise/workout areas)

Theme: Are not connected to community resources.

Quote: I like to go the SEM (Special Education Ministries) and go to college basketball games

Post-Secondary Education

Theme: Friends were not interesting into looking to future training and post secondary education.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

IDEA Transition Requirements	Strengths	Possible Improvements
Employment	Satisfaction with job Relationships at the workplace are very positive	Access to employment training Awareness of current income
Home Living and Recreation and Leisure	Exercise regularly Get along with family and roommates Strong relationship with others Awareness of opposite sex	Some reliance of parents or guardians for financial information and health care Need to get prompted to exercise At times, struggle with social skills
Community Participation	Uses public transportation Participates in organized group activities with others Aware of specific laws that effect him/her	Lack of awareness concerning some laws Stronger connection with community resources
Post-Secondary Education	Not needed	Not needed

Living several years at the Friendship House has helped the Friends improve their transition related skills of employment, home living, recreation/leisure as well as communicate participation.

Areas of continual improvement include self-determination skills, future employment and social skills.

Overall, the Friends have grown tremendously and enjoy living in this special house. They have improved their transition related skill during their time living here.

Limitations: Finding are limited in generalizability because of subject sample number and access to this type of specialized independent living.