



*Inclusive post-secondary education for adults with developmental disabilities:*

**A promising path to an inclusive life**

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Inclusive post-secondary education for adults with developmental disabilities:  
A promising path to an inclusive life

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## *Acknowledgments*

This book is dedicated to the parents who first inspired us, by their vision and passion, to create more inclusive and enriching lives for their sons and daughters with developmental disabilities.

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## *Summary*

Today, students with developmental disabilities are being fully included in universities, colleges and technical institutes. They attend regular classes in a wide variety of courses and faculties, make friends, belong to clubs and participate in the informal and formal social life of these tertiary education institutions and go on to be successfully employed. This book describes the value of inclusive post-secondary education, the responsiveness of colleges, universities and technical institutes and the difference this opportunity has made to the lives of many individuals with developmental disabilities.

In the pages that follow, information is provided on the principles and processes that guide the implementation and practice of successful inclusive post-secondary education initiatives. The benefits of inclusive post-secondary education and its impact on students with and without disabilities, their instructors and professors and families are described throughout. Many more adults with developmental disabilities deserve the opportunity to follow their dreams and to pursue an inclusive post-secondary education if they so desire. Hopefully, this book will help open new possibilities to a more inclusive adult life.

## Introduction

Today, students with developmental disabilities are being fully included in universities, colleges and technical institutes. They attend regular classes in a wide variety of courses and faculties, make friends, belong to clubs and participate in the informal and formal social life of these post-secondary education institutions. Many go on to careers, employment and a richer life in community. The reader is encouraged to view the included 12-minute DVD *Living the Dream*, which provides an excellent overview of inclusive post-secondary education featuring students, parents and faculty.

The following front-page newspaper article on inclusive post-secondary education features Lindsay Ray speaking about her experiences in being fully included at college.

# The Edmonton Journal

Monday, September 05, 2005

## Students with developmental delays prosper in post-secondary classes

*Employment prospects, social lives improve dramatically, advocates say*

by Jodie Sinnema

EDMONTON -- Lindsay Ray walks through the halls of MacEwan college downtown, her purse slung over her shoulder, a confident look on her face as she contemplates heading back to class this month.

"Being here is awesome," says Ray, 20, who has Down syndrome. "I've been so smart every year."

Ray has been a MacEwan student for two years, writing papers on Zeus and the mummification process in ancient Egypt, doing projects on diabetes, taking political science and sociology classes and volunteering with the students' association.

Outside of class, she's a campus pool shark, sings Celine Dion songs at year-end karaoke parties and helps in the college's beer garden by handing out popcorn. Just last month, she moved out of

her mother's house for the first time, crediting her college experience, in part, for the increase in her independence and her landing of a job at Rexall Place.

"I get along with everybody because I have a friendly face," says Ray, whose goal is to graduate from college and work with children -- or become a pop star.

"I feel comfortable. I meet some new friends when I get to school."

Ray is one of nine developmentally delayed students at MacEwan. Many more in Alberta attend 10 other colleges, universities and technical institutes such as NAIT.

Alberta, in fact, has led the world in offering inclusive post-secondary education.

In 1987, the University of Alberta was the first post-secondary institution in the world to admit students with developmental delays such as autism, cerebral palsy and learning disabilities as well as Down syndrome.

Some students can't write or read on their own and may require verbal exams. Others may need help eating through a tube or with their personal hygiene, but attend classes with the general post-secondary population.

Most audit the courses rather than taking them for credit, but they're encouraged to write exams or papers and push themselves to achieve. Many professors mark assignments, challenging students far more than they were used to in high school, where many students remain segregated except in classes such as phys-ed or music.

Bruce Uditsky, executive director of the Alberta Association for Community Living, helped launch the U of A On Campus program almost 20 years ago -- a time when there were no such educational opportunities elsewhere.

"The options at that time were to go into day programs, which would be like arts and crafts for the rest of your life, or sheltered work situations in which they would engage in meaningless activity over and over again for the rest of your life, with little or no income," he says.

In the general population, about 70 per cent of people with developmental delays are jobless

and heavily reliant on government support services, Uditsky says.

"You're almost destined to a life of poverty."

But among graduates of specialized post-secondary programs, the statistics are reversed, with 70 per cent employed out of 62 people tracked across Alberta as of this past January. Jobs included data entry at a computer firm, clerical work in a surgeon's office, taking shipping orders at a warehouse and shelving books at a library.

Mindy Carriel, a 27-year-old graduate of MacEwan's office assistant program two years ago,

now works part-time downtown. Before, she'd had only non-paying volunteer jobs at the SPCA and the Fringe.

With her new job she, like Ray, was also able to move out on her own.

"I think I'm more mature and I'm not so shy," says Carriel, who describes herself

as a slow learner. "I like to do my own stuff."

Uditsky says the public starts thinking differently about developmentally delayed people when they hear the students talk about history, biology or English literature.

"You have to rethink your idea about people's capabilities," Uditsky says. "Our natural prejudices tend to inhibit us from seeing their potential."

The potential is obvious. One University of Calgary student took such meticulous notes that other students borrowed them, Uditsky says.



CREDIT: Chris Schwarz, the Journal  
Lindsay Ray, a 20-year-old student who has Down syndrome, returns to MacEwan college this month.

At MacEwan, some keeners sit at the front of the class and eagerly ask questions, making other students feel more comfortable doing the same, says Dolores Patterson, co-ordinator of the College Connection program.

Instructor Lisa Micheelsen said Lindsay Ray never missed a class in her classics course, handed her papers in early and often offered perceptive comments that had other students saying, "Good point."

"She takes nothing for granted," says Micheelsen, who was inspired by Ray's example to try harder herself.

"She's so excited to be there. She really sort of savours it."

Self-esteem and confidence get a huge boost, as do opportunities to make friends away from family or caregivers, Uditsky says.

He says the improvement is so dramatic that they can lead the same full lives as other students, heading to the gym with classmates -- and even skipping class on Friday afternoons to go for beer and pizza.

The idea is to have the students attend classes with as little outside support as possible. Students with severe learning disabilities may need an aide, but most are on their own to better integrate with the other students. Volunteer classmates may lend notes to the students, invite them to study groups or make sure they have someone to sit with.

Franciess Fay-Verschuur, co-ordinator of the U of A program, says she knows students who have been transformed by the program.

One student was completely uninspired by university. But with his upper body strength, he enrolled in a kayak and canoe class. When the students tipped him over on the first day of class -- the usual initiation ritual -- the student was

hooked because he was being treated the same as everyone else.

While his cerebral palsy made speaking difficult, his vocabulary improved, as did his confidence.

Another student didn't make eye contact with anyone, couldn't put a book in his backpack or cross a busy road by himself before going to university. After majoring in political science, not only could he name every Canadian prime minister and U.S. president of the last few decades, he also went to class by himself, perfectly able to look both ways before crossing.

Even little details change, Fay-Verschuur says. Students who arrive on campus in T-shirts and sweatpants soon begin sporting modern hair styles and pierced ears.

One mother described an incalculable change in her son.

"He smiles every day, which he didn't do before," Fay-Verschuur remembers the mother saying. "He was bored out of his mind. He's become a young man."

"Before, he was just a person in a wheelchair."

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This guide provides information on the practices and principles of inclusive post-secondary education with the hope that increasing numbers of young people with developmental disabilities (the terms intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities are used interchangeably) will have the opportunity to further their education.

In a review of a United States national survey, the authors described 25 “programmes” for students with intellectual disabilities on campuses across the US and found that only eight were defined as fully inclusive (Evans & Wehman, 2005). These programs were further limited in that students were enrolled in high school and post-secondary education simultaneously and typically only had access to post-secondary education until the age of 21. The authors of this survey (Hart, Mele-McCarthy, Pasternack, Zimbrich & Parker, 2004) concluded that there is a dearth of information on post-secondary education for youth with intellectual disabilities and minimal data on the effectiveness of the options that do exist. A review of the literature, conducted in preparation for this guide, failed to identify significant numbers of inclusive post-secondary educational initiatives in other countries, although a few examples have been developed in Europe (Saloviita, 2000; Boxall, Carson & Docherty, 2004) and Australia (Grantley, 2000).

The material for this guide is based on our 20 years experience in developing and implementing inclusive post-secondary education for students with Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities (Uditsky, 1988; Hughson, Moodie & Uditsky, 2006).

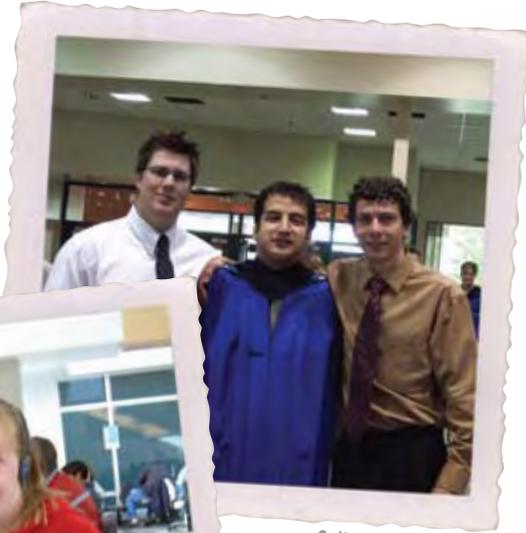
Most of the knowledge and experience for this book is drawn from our personal involvement as mentors of the ongoing initiatives in Alberta. It is our hope that the principles and practices of the last 20 years will inspire and guide families and their sons and daughters who wish to pursue this vision in collaboration with local authorities, educational institutions and relevant government sectors in their communities.

As of 2007, there were 17 universities, colleges and technical institutes fully including students with developmental disabilities across Alberta (with three more under development). There are inclusive post-secondary initiatives in other parts of Canada (e.g., British Columbia, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick). It appears Alberta may have more experience with inclusive post-secondary education for students with significant intellectual disabilities than any other jurisdiction. We hope that the reader will find our description of inclusive post-secondary experiences, while largely confined to Alberta, broadly applicable.

In reviewing the literature it is apparent that descriptions of post-secondary education for students with intellectual disabilities are, at times, ambiguous about the meaning and the nature of inclusion. What appear to be common terms among authors are often conceptually different ideas. The rhetoric of post-secondary education and inclusion does not readily translate into practice and lived experience. Few examples are available in the literature that describe practices sufficiently to understand the degree of inclusion that is occurring and the means to achieving that inclusion. We have tried to be clear in this guide as to our description of inclusive post-secondary education and its practice.

## Background

It is not yet common for young adults with intellectual disabilities to be fully included in university or college. For many families, teachers and other professionals it is actually an idea beyond their imagination (although increasingly it is not beyond the imagination of many young people with developmental disabilities).



College Graduation



Learning Resource Centre

For almost 20 years in Canada and elsewhere, adults with developmental disabilities have been successfully and fully included in university and colleges: attending classes, following programs of study with their non-disabled peers, taking courses from anthropology and archeology to sociology and zoology, choosing career training from early childhood educator to journalist, participating in post-secondary sports and cultural activities and participating in field studies and practicums.

Today, many parents of young children with disabilities believe they hold high expectations for their child to have an inclusive future. Yet it is not unusual to find these same parents, when introduced to the possibility of their child going on to college or university, to experience an awakening - finding they had unconsciously limited their child's future possibilities. They recognize, if they had unwittingly excluded college and university from their dreams and therefore from their child's future, in what other ways were they inadvertently shutting the door to life enriching opportunities - opportunities they would ordinarily have imagined for their other children.

Some of the reasons students and parents give for wanting to be included in universities and colleges.

"...Since I was so interested in getting educated, I just decided to continue with my education."  
Simon

"...I wanted to take courses and I wanted to find a job." Marci

"All of Murray's brothers and sisters had gone on to university and we wanted Murray to have the same experience." Parents of a son with severe disabilities who is unable to speak.

"I have wanted to own a hotel since I was a child." Rashaad, a graduate of college studies in the hospitality industry.

"I don't remember ever being as excited as when I first found out that I was accepted into NAIT (Northern Alberta Institute of Technology). Many of my friends from high school went on to college or university and I wanted to have the same chances as them..." Kyle, using his communication device.

"I am finally realizing my biggest dream." Anne

"I wanted to meet people and become independent." Jessica

"I wanted to go to college to see how it feels. I would like to get a job and get paid." Jane

They recognize, if they had unwittingly excluded college and university from their dreams and therefore from their child's future, in what other ways were they inadvertently shutting the door to life enriching opportunities - opportunities they would ordinarily have imagined for their other children.

Appreciating the opportunity for an inclusive post-secondary education enables parents and their children to challenge their assumptions and sustain their aspirations about what is possible, even if it means their son or daughter never chooses to go to college. Perhaps they will want to travel the world, get married or start their own business.

The social value and academic benefits of an inclusive education for children with developmental disabilities have been clearly defined in the literature (Wang, Anderson & Bram, 1985; Carlberg & Kavale, 1989).

Increasingly, adults with developmental disabilities and their families have been embracing a vision of a fully inclusive community life, rich with opportunities and possibilities despite its challenges. However, there has been limited understanding of the value and possibility for adults to have the advantage of being fully included in post-secondary education: to have the opportunity to be fully included in colleges, technical institutes and universities. The decision to develop a guide on inclusive post-secondary education reflects the importance of describing the experiences and outcomes of young adults who wish to pursue post-secondary inclusive educational opportunities as they take up their place in community life. This guide describes the value and benefits of inclusive post-secondary education, its practice, the design and creation of inclusive post-secondary opportunities and the stories of adults who have been successfully included in universities and colleges.

### Dean's Story

Dean, a quiet young man, always had a passion for sports. Although he hadn't been fully included in high school, his mom wanted him to experience the fullness of life by having the opportunity to be fully included in university life.

Dean enrolled in the physical education faculty at his local university and his shared passion for sports won him a place in the hearts of the students he shared courses with. He chose a variety of sports courses over the four years he was at the university and became actively involved with the university's national championship basketball team. Inclusion facilitators supported him and his professors in his academic work and his classmates provided support in the classroom and gym.



Many friendships emerged and at one point went he left home, he roomed with one of his friends from the basketball team. Dean found employment at the University Physical Education Centre and this job continued for many years after his completion of university.

In the last few years, Dean's life took a dramatic turn. He had to choose between staying in his job and living near his family or pursuing his love whose family had relocated to another city. He asked his life-long love to marry him and with the support of both families they are now happily married. Their love story has been featured on national TV as part of a series on love.



Our experience with inclusive post-secondary education began when a group of parents, of children with developmental disabilities who were completing high school and becoming young adults, expressed their frustration with the limited post-school options then available. These parents had successfully fought for greater degrees of school integration and the thought that their children would now stop learning and simply go on to a bleak future of sheltered employment, perpetual job training activities or segregated day programs was heartbreaking. They desired more enriching, dynamic and life-fulfilling possibilities for their sons and daughters. As parents, they were not willing to settle for the status quo even as some feared the unknown. Families have taught us that it is never too late to dream of new possibilities and to find the passion and allies to realize these dreams. In our experience, the vision of a more inclusive life, whether speaking of inclusive education or post-secondary education, has always been rooted in the aspirations and love of parents for their sons and daughters with disabilities. The leadership and natural authority of families (Kendrick, 2003; Hughson, 2003) can guide professionals and advocates to support innovative strategies often needed in the pursuit of natural pathways to inclusion.

In our experience, the vision of a more inclusive life, whether speaking of inclusive education or post-secondary education, has always been rooted in the aspirations and love of parents for their sons and daughters with disabilities.

One universal and historical truth is that many people continue to underestimate what adults with developmental disabilities can achieve and where and in what circumstances they might be successfully included. Low expectations have always produced limited results and parents with dreams have often been accused of being unrealistic and/or irrational, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Another common misconception about inclusion is that progress needs to be

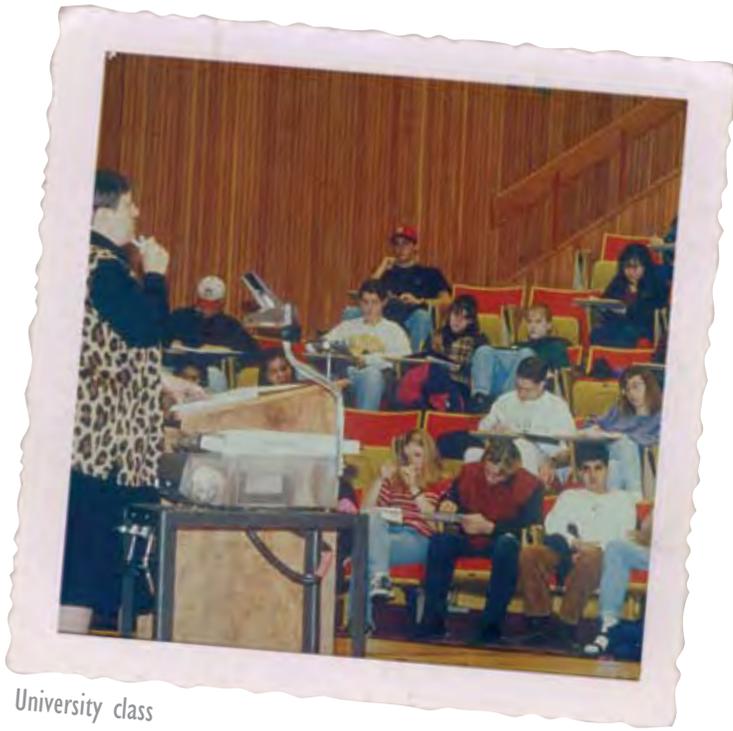
made incrementally rather than by leaping ahead. This has translated into the assumption that inclusive post-secondary education is unrealistic and not likely to succeed because we do not yet have universal strategies in place to implement quality inclusive education for all children. How can inclusive post-secondary education be successful when inclusion at high school remains an ongoing concern? In addition, the typical perception that post-secondary educational institutions are designed to accept only the brightest and the best invites many to reject the notion that students with significant learning difficulties would be welcome, let alone full participants in campus life.

In today's world there is increasing recognition of the importance of a post-secondary education. Further education encourages accessible, life-long learning as a means of achieving a better future for most young people. In addition, many older and more mature adults are pursuing a variety of life-long learning avenues as a means of enhancing their career possibilities.

Post-secondary education provides the opportunity for adults to learn academic and practical knowledge and to learn more about themselves and their place in the world. Just as importantly, further education offers the context that can forge the social connections and friendships necessary to competing in the world of work and building lifelong, meaningful social networks. For example, the research is quite clear that more people find jobs through personal connections than any other means (Handcock & Redekopp, 1997). Yet rather than focus on adults developing friendships and social networks as a powerful means to gaining employment, too often human service agencies apply weak job search strategies and developmental activities to address social and behavioural deficiencies, all of which produce limited employment outcomes. Adults with developmental disabilities who have had the opportunity for an inclusive post-secondary education typically find better jobs of their choosing at better pay, require less human service support and keep their jobs longer than individuals who have sought employment through more traditional human service avenues (Hughson et al., 2006).

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In contrast to most assumptions about the possibility of successful post-secondary inclusion, we have found universities and colleges to be more welcoming and accommodating of students with developmental disabilities than many high schools.



University class

It has not been useful to wait until inclusive education has been perfected and commonplace within high schools for inclusive post-secondary education to be successfully implemented. Nor is it necessary for post-secondary education institutions to alter or reform their mission or practices. Inclusive post-secondary education has been realized in elite research universities and in technical schools. It would be natural to assume, given the competitive nature of post-secondary education, academic admission requirements and the limited availability of spaces, that post-secondary institutions would be resistant to the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities.

While there are no doubt resistant administrators and faculty, in our experience, they have been in the extreme minority. The barriers in accessing the regular classroom, so often evident in public education, have not materialized in our experience with inclusive post-secondary education. Most barriers are administrative (i.e., course registration, convocation) and manageable given the post-secondary institutions contemporary interest in providing access to diverse learners.

One possible advantage in Alberta has been the availability of funding, including individualized funding for adults with intellectual disabilities. This enables the provision of support staff and inclusion facilitators on campuses without any cost to the post-secondary institution. The actual costs of providing an inclusive post-secondary education are often less than the costs of providing other human service system supports as the students are making full use of the many existing campus supports and services, as well as the natural support of instructors and other students in their classes.

Harvey Weingarten, President, University of Calgary

“We support inclusive post-secondary education because post-secondary education is important. And it’s important that as many people who can benefit from post-secondary have the opportunity. Our job is to give our students, all of our students, as many opportunities to grow, to learn, to prepare themselves for the world ahead.

The University of Calgary benefits considerably. I’ve had occasion to speak to students, to the faculty members and all of them describe it as a learning experience, and a growing experience, maturing experience for everyone concerned.

What I found striking is how the instructors talk about how this has enriched and stimulated the learning experience for everyone in the classroom.”

It is also possible, given the struggle for inclusive public education (Uditsky, 1993), that many people simply assume post-secondary institutions would be resistant and barrier laden. As we have experienced so few barriers from post-secondary institutions, we have not developed a multiplicity of barrier-breaking strategies. Our principle strategy has been to approach, locate or develop key allies within the post-secondary institution who share our vision and are willing to act as internal advocates. This is followed by encouraging interested families in cooperation with internal allies to approach the post-secondary authorities to consider accepting a few students with developmental disabilities (i.e., students who are not academically eligible). To date, only two of 22 post-secondary institutions we have approached have said no but are still open to further discussion.

Most post-secondary institutions do have some community focused purposes and activities which go beyond the walls of the classroom, enabling them to consider inclusive post-secondary education as fitting within their expanding mandates. Further, many post-secondary institutions are recognizing the need to accommodate increasingly diverse students and non-traditional learners (Renner, 1995; Howe & Strauss, 2000). These changing times can serve to support the accommodation of students with developmental disabilities. Whether the purpose of a post-secondary institution is to foster the pursuit of a liberal education or a career, these purposes align with the varied interests and desires found among young adults with and without developmental disabilities.

The high expectations of post-secondary institutions often calls out the best in students with developmental disabilities resulting in students achieving a level of performance not often anticipated, both academically and socially. College and university students with developmental disabilities have taken an amazing array of courses across an expanding number of departments and faculties. Students have participated in a broad spectrum of extra-curricular activities from sports to cultural to political.

Our experiences with inclusive post-secondary education have challenged the very assumptions that underlie common explanations about the nature of developmental disabilities. Through inclusive post-secondary opportunities, students with developmental disabilities have consistently amazed their families with respect to their accomplishments and experiences: from completing various aspects of university/college study; to finding a



*University film studies class*

sense of identity and future careers; to becoming confident young people with friends; to being acknowledged and honoured by their professors, instructors and non-disabled peers (McDonald, MacPherson-Court, Franks, Uditsky & Symons, 1997; Hughson et al., 2006). As with non-disabled students, post-secondary education is not to everyone's liking and on occasion, students with developmental disabilities have chosen not to continue their education, but this has been a very small number. We hope this guide will provide the information needed to pursue and develop inclusive post-secondary educational options and that the reader will be as inspired by the stories of students and families as we have.

Danny grew up in a small town where he always expressed an interest in wanting his community to be as safe as possible. His parents encouraged Danny to dream and through his experiences in being included in school he developed the confidence to determine his own future. He said, when I finish high school, "I want to study security and police work."

Danny applied to be accepted at an inclusive community college that offered a police and security program but was a few hours from his home. He was accepted and fortunately was able to room with his brother who was attending university in the same city as the college.

As his brother wrote, "For three years he read textbooks, volunteered with student groups and socialized with his classmates, pacing through his adapted program with an intensity that amazed us." As a fully included student Danny gave class presentations, participated in field placements and worked with his peers on group projects.

Our experiences with inclusive post-secondary education have challenged the very assumptions that underlie common explanations about the nature of developmental disabilities.



Group presentation

Like most post-secondary institutions, Danny's college participated in career days where all the programs would host displays to attract prospective students. Danny was selected as one of the students to act as an ambassador for the program at its display booth. As a successful student on many levels, he was seen as someone who could attract potential students to pursue this field of studies.

Upon completing his college studies, Danny returned to his small rural community to pursue his career aspirations. With help from his parents, Danny began his own security company. He advertised his business and secured a number of contracts to provide security at public events and for parking lots. So in addition to Danny's other jobs, he is living out his dream of helping to make his community a safer place for everyone. He continues to pursue his love of learning by taking online university courses.



Career days

### *Rationales in support of inclusive post-secondary education*

As most studies of post-school outcomes for students with developmental disabilities continue to report, the employment picture for students with developmental disabilities who graduate from high school (many from segregated special education classes) is not optimistic. In general, follow up studies over the last 15 years indicate that high school graduates with developmental disabilities are often socially isolated, unemployed or earning wages well below the poverty line (Haring & Lovett, 1990; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). The major disparity in adult outcomes and opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities and those without has long been a focus of concern to students, families and advocacy organizations (Roehrer, 1996; Uditsky, Frank, Hart & Jeffery, 1988).

In general, follow up studies over the last 15 years indicate that high school graduates with developmental disabilities are socially isolated, unemployed or earn wages well below the poverty line.

One avenue for redress has been the exploration of inclusive post-secondary education at both colleges and universities. Some have argued that such an option is a logical extension of educational research that reports the benefits of inclusive education. The overall findings of several classic meta-analytic studies on the positive effects of inclusive education in the primary and secondary

grades (Wang et al., 1985; Carlberg, 1980) point to the logical assumption that inclusion at the tertiary level also seems desirable and necessary. In fact, for some time, those involved in initial efforts have argued that inclusive post-secondary education holds the promise of a brighter future for young adults with developmental disabilities in the same way as it does for all young adults (Frank & Uditsky, 1988; Uditsky & Kappel, 1988; McDonald et al., 1997; Weinkauf, 2001).

However, a review of current literature gives rise to a number of issues associated with different understandings of the meaning of post-secondary education for adults with developmental disabilities and inclusion in particular. The language and terminology adopted by those reporting on inclusive post-secondary education for individuals with developmental disabilities is revealing. Closer inspection of documented post-secondary projects/initiatives invites both a clarification of terms and a challenge to analyze the underlying beliefs, assumptions and principles reflected by the language of the authors.

It is clear that a number of different terms are used to describe the educational activities that adults with developmental disabilities engage in after exiting the secondary school system. The terms most frequently used in the literature include: adult education, further education, tertiary education and post-secondary education. "Post-secondary education" in the American context tends to refer to the education young adults with an intellectual disability access during their final years of schooling, typically funded by the public education system and usually used to describe education received between the ages of 18 and 21 in age-appropriate settings (i.e., community colleges, technical schools or universities). This model is commonly labeled dual enrollment (Hart, Zimbrich & Parker, 2005). This education is often delivered on campus but by teachers funded by the public education system. In this model, the students are not necessarily taught by university or college instructors. Post-secondary education, in this context, is often considered as part of transition planning and other transition related initiatives as a means to help young adults with disabilities find meaningful day activities, a place to live in the community and social recreational pursuits: this is not inclusive post-secondary education as we would define it.

Tertiary education commonly refers to education received within the university, technical institute or college environment. The term "further education" is commonly used in the British context to describe education that occurs in the university, polytechnic or college environment. "Adult education" is a broad term used to describe education accessed by adults with an intellectual disability during their adult lives (e.g., adult literacy programs). Again, these terms do not imply that students with intellectual disabilities are fully included or even partially integrated. Generally, even the use of the term "inclusive post-secondary education" does not reflect any universal agreement amongst those who report projects in various countries or settings.

Another challenge to understanding published research on the topic of inclusive post-secondary relates to the language used to describe students with disabilities in the post-secondary or adult education sector. In many studies on post-secondary education and students with disabilities, adults with an intellectual disability may be included in the findings, but often as part of an ill-defined group of students with a range of labels including those with psychiatric disability, learning disability, physical disability and sensory disability. In Australia and New Zealand, intellectual disability is the common term, mental retardation is used in the United States and developmental disability is typically applied in Canada, while adults are commonly referred to as people with a learning disability in the British context. The term “learning disability” tends to have a different meaning in the tertiary or post-secondary education literature. Learning disability, in some countries, refers to people who do not necessarily have an intellectual disability but do have a specific difficulty with some aspects of learning and may need educational support as a result (e.g., students with dyslexia). Furthermore, many research articles, particularly in the area of tertiary education, describe including students with disabilities but this usually meant that the study included adults with physical or sensory disabilities.

Only a very small number of studies reported in the literature appear to demonstrate full inclusion at the post-secondary level.

In spite of the confusion of terms, an examination of reports on the development of inclusive post-secondary education initiatives often appears to follow the rather accepted line of reasoning that dominates special education practice for students with developmental disabilities, which is the practice of segregation and congregation. The main findings indicate that inclusive post-secondary education efforts are usually predicated on the belief in adult-appropriate transitional planning and transitional related services as an extension of typical special education practice, recreated in a community college setting (Neubert, Moon, Grigal & Redd, 2001; Mirfin-Veitch, 2003). In some US based projects, students (aged 18-21) are typically seen as eligible for support at community colleges in programs that provide some combination of “life-skills” training and community-based instruction along with employment training. In this model, the vision for including students with developmental disabilities into post-secondary settings appears to be

most commonly addressed by creating working contracts between school systems and college (typically education) departments for groups of students to be physically present on campus rather than creating individually driven, fully inclusive participation in college and university courses and programs (Hart et al., 2004; Hall, Kleiner & Kearns, 2000; Grigal, Neubert & Moon, 2002). Only a very small number of studies reported in the literature appear to demonstrate full inclusion at the post-secondary level.



College class

In contrast to the tradition of special (segregated) education, advocates for post-secondary education in Canada, Australia and Finland applied the principles of full inclusion, informed by a human rights perspective as well as an understanding of the “social model of disability”. This theory redefines the characteristics of disability by identifying the social, economic and cultural dimensions that impose inequality and limitations. In the few examples reported (Frank & Uditsky, 1988; Uditsky & Kappel, 1988; McDonald et al., 1997; Grantley, 2000; Saloviita, 2000; Weinkauff, 2001), this theory guided early efforts of inclusive post-secondary education for adults with developmental disabilities.

In summary, reported initiatives in some countries advocate for access and while a few projects have been situated in post-secondary settings, few have been fully inclusive. However, the desire for inclusive post-secondary education is growing. Clearly, the expectation for better futures increases and inspires the need for more knowledge and understanding about best practices in the provision of inclusive post-secondary education for adults with developmental disabilities. This leaves us with a caution for families and others who are interested in reading and learning about inclusive post-secondary education to understand the differences in meaning and language with respect to what population is being described, what is meant by inclusion and how it is realized. In Alberta, students are fully included.

This leaves us with a caution for families and others who are interested in reading and learning about inclusive post-secondary education to understand the differences in meaning and language with respect to what population is being described, what is meant by inclusion and how it is realized.

## *Foundational Principles*

The desire of students to be understood as sharing the same aspirations as their non-disabled peers leads to the following non-exhaustive list of foundational principles that underlie the development and implementation of a vision for inclusive post-secondary education. To quote some of the students with developmental disabilities who explain why further education is important to them: “I want to go to school to continue learning, to further my education, to develop a career identity, to know more about what interests me, to increase employment opportunities, because my friends are going, because my brothers/sisters went/are going, to please my parents, to avoid working right away, to make friends, to have experiences (without my parents knowing).”



College graduation

It is obvious that these desires are no different than they would be for any student. Clearly, educational and other related societal values and practices have been barriers to those who hold the same dreams and hopes but have been perceived differently.

### *Culturally normative pathway to adulthood*

Post-secondary education is one of the culturally normative pathways to adulthood and continuing education for young people in general. The post-secondary world, while not for everyone, provides an opportunity for young people to mature within the context of a learning environment. An inclusive life is much more likely to be realized when an individual follows normative and valued pathways to the maximum extent possible. It is also important for individuals with developmental disabilities to be culturally aware and knowledgeable. While post-secondary institutions have their own sub-culture, they also provide many opportunities, both formal and incidental, to learn about the broader culture.

Within this natural and socially valued context students have the opportunity to learn about the world and their place in it, to form friendships and learn from each other. In the post-secondary learning environment students with developmental disabilities learn what is culturally appropriate, for example, from language and dress to demeanor and attitudes. Some students will need assistance from peer, family and others to learn what is culturally appropriate and significant. Finding means and opportunities to do this can be done more naturally by peers and friends.

### *Valued contexts*

Post-secondary learning is highly valued in most cultures. Consequently, individuals who pursue advanced learning are often viewed positively. When individuals with developmental disabilities are included in socially valued contexts they, too, tend to be more positively viewed by the world around them. This facilitates their membership in society as well as contributing to positive self-esteem.

We have personally seen the impact of being included in this valued context many times over when individuals with developmental disabilities are introduced as university or college students. People in our society approach individuals with apparent developmental disabilities with a set of stereotypical assumptions. For example, when meeting an adult with a developmental



College class

disability, an individual may simplify their language and attempt to communicate as if they were talking to a much younger person. When the person responds with the fact that they are a university student studying ancient history or biology, the person they are talking to is forced to immediately and dramatically alter their perceptions. They may now realize that this person with developmental disabilities is not only a peer but also someone they can learn from, or at least someone who is interesting and knowledgeable. And you can often see the pride on the student's face when they share they are a university or college student. It is a way of saying and understanding that I belong, I am included and I am valued.

### *High expectations for learning and participation*

Post-secondary education offers a broad array of opportunities for learning in many academic, occupational and cultural domains. Typically, students are expected to make choices based on subject interest from which individualized timetables of study are created within the chosen program or faculty. Colleges and universities expect each adult student to participate in the learning process out of desire and/or quest for knowledge.

For young adults with development disabilities, such educational contexts offer new vistas. No longer restricted to a standardized curriculum delivered to specific age or disability groups, students begin to seek out ideas, skills and knowledge based on other motives. Post-secondary educational pursuits are more likely to be based on social connections, curiosity about content and/or career and occupational aspirations. Post-secondary environments have no history of segregated education; class composition is determined by available space and interest.

Furthermore, the self-directed process of learning in colleges and universities invites students to seek out peer interactions, dialogue and experiential activities as necessary to completing assignments outside of class time. Such expectations have the potential to bring people together based on interests and, again, open doors for students with developmental disabilities to make connections in ways that are far more challenging and exciting. They are meeting with others out of common interest not because they share the same learning problems, diagnostic label or because someone is paid to spend time with them.

It is well-known that the expectations of teachers, parents and others can have a significant impact on an individual's learning, success and self-image. Historically, individuals with developmental disabilities have suffered from the low expectations of others and the worlds into which they were placed. Watered down curriculums and trivial tasks resulted in limited learning thus fulfilling the expectation that students with developmental disabilities had limited learning potential and possibilities. In turn, students came to believe this about themselves.

Today, it is more likely that teachers, parents and others will hold higher expectations than in the past, but nevertheless, it is difficult to escape the reality of a society that still imposes limited perceptions on individuals with developmental disabilities. Inclusive post-secondary education environments hold high expectations in general and these expectations have proven to be very helpful to students with developmental disabilities. In our experience, it has not

been unusual for students with developmental disabilities in post-secondary education to exceed what were assumed to be previously high expectations of families and others. Families often remark on how their sons and daughters are either learning or behaving in ways they had not expected - from doing university and college assignments to exercising independence and judgment.

### *Normative and valued identities and roles*

The theory of social role valorization, which was developed by Wolf Wolfensberger (Wolfensberger, 1998), one of the most influential thinkers in the field of developmental disabilities, states the social roles and identities an individual holds or is perceived to hold has a profound impact on many aspects of that individual's life. That is, if an individual with an intellectual disability holds or is seen to hold positive social roles (e.g., friend, colleague, classmate in a regular classroom, university student) then this is more likely to be viewed positively by others than would be true if the same person were to hold less valued roles and identities (e.g., unpaid "employee", client, student in a special education classroom, day program trainee). Similarly, individuals themselves are more likely to have a positive self-image and identity. This theory also suggests benefits are much more likely to be realized if the person with developmental disabilities is truly occupying valued roles in valued ways (e.g., actively included in academic post-secondary classes, participating member of a student association or club, employee who serves customers).



College friends

Post-secondary education offers individuals with developmental disabilities many opportunities to assume valued roles and identities in both the academic and non-academic world of the post-secondary institution. The power of valued post-secondary roles is most often seen in those students with developmental disabilities who have not had previous opportunities to occupy valued roles. Students who have only had experiences with segregated or special education programs and activities have typically had little opportunity

for valued social roles. Inclusion in post-secondary education provides students with the needed opportunity to explore their personal identities, from a career identity to an athletic identity to a relationship identity as friend or spouse.

## *Diversity of relationships*

While the importance of relationships in the lives of individuals without developmental disabilities has always been recognized, this has not been true for individuals with developmental disabilities until relatively recently. To be human is to be in relationship(s), as we cannot thrive or develop in isolation. Relationships are essential to the formation of a person's identity - we identify ourselves in relation to others (son, daughter, brother, sister, friend, girlfriend, boyfriend) and others identify themselves in relationship to ourselves. Freely given relationships are the source of all social and formal support. In times of crisis the people we often most rely on are family and friends.

There is much evidence to suggest that most people find jobs and employment opportunities through their social networks. The leisure and cultural activities we pursue in life are often related to our friends' interests and our social networks. When people are asked to identify the things in life that are most important, relationships are typically listed near the top.

While the isolation and loneliness of individuals with developmental disabilities has been known, many assumed the solution to this marginalization lay in segregated services with others "like themselves" and in a reliance on human services and paid staff. History now suggests this is a false premise. Certainly, individuals with developmental disabilities may include others with developmental disabilities as friends but not to the exclusion of the possibility of forming friendships and relationships with people without disabilities. In turn, more people with developmental disabilities should, as some do now, count those without developmental disabilities as friends and members of their social networks.

Individuals with developmental disabilities are far more likely to be safe and secure if they have had more inclusive opportunities and the supports to develop relationships and a social network of friends. In turn, they are more likely to enjoy a full and complete life when they have good friends and other non-paid relationships. For example, individuals with developmental disabilities are more likely to secure and sustain employment if they have the assistance of friends, social networks and colleagues.

Friendships are unpredictable and not under the control of programs or services. Within inclusive environments friendships are possible but cannot be guaranteed. Facilitating the possibility of friendships, for example, within college and university is an art form that requires careful thought and consideration particularly to overcome past practices and perceptions.

Participation in valued settings, in valued roles such as those afforded a student in college or university, opens up the greater possibility that a student with developmental disabilities will meet and get to know a vast number of people with different valued roles, interests, talents, backgrounds and affiliations. The participation in classes with peers and professors, the active membership in student associations, the social connections made while working in study groups, the relationships formed when volunteering in campus activities or attending a political rally are only some of the multiple ways that all students form identities and

experiment with relationships. Such relationships may only last while the person is at university or college and some may last way beyond graduation. In any case, there are many more opportunities for such relationships to “catch and hold” in ways that are far beyond the typical experience of a young adult with developmental disabilities who is relegated to

segregated settings and devalued roles even though he/she may be living “in the community”.



University break

It is still a challenge for friendships to emerge between people without developmental disabilities and those with severe and multiple disabilities. While there are some inspiring examples, there is still much to be learned. University or college is a time-limited opportunity and inclusion needs to be a life-long path.

### *Relevant and expansive curricula*

Relevant and expansive curricula are connected to many of the points discussed previously. Historically, it was not unusual to find educators believing that individuals with different labels required distinct curricula related to their diagnosis or degree of disability. As such, one could find curricula for individuals labeled as having a moderate developmental disability and other curricula for individuals categorized as having a more severe disability. This assumption supported the concept of having students with developmental disabilities in special education classrooms each with its own category of students being taught to a specific curriculum. This process of exclusion from the mainstream was disguised as an educational necessity - suggesting students with disabilities belonged in a separate or special place with specially trained teachers. The practice constituted the social structure of a school dividing students into an “us and them”. This social structure became so entrenched that challenging its assumptions has proved to be a major systemic issue, partly because to question this practice means contesting the very idea of special education and its separation from the regular curriculum, classroom, teacher and students. Essentially, the public school space then consists of a “normal” setting and a setting for the “others”. Schools and educators could no more imagine a student with developmental disabilities in a regular classroom learning the regular curriculum than they could imagine the regular curriculum being delivered in the special education classroom.

Historically, the special education curriculum content moved an increasing distance from the regular curriculum according to the severity of disability. This movement away from the regular curricula was based on the belief that students with developmental disabilities needed

to be taught life skills or functional skills. Somehow learning these skills would result in a successful life; yet in our experience, life skills have never added up to an interesting life in the community.

Inclusive post-secondary education, as is true increasingly for inclusive education in general, is based on the premise that the regular curriculum is the relevant curriculum for all students, irrespective of the degree of impairment. What is relevant for a curriculum may change over time and is, of course, different across cultures, but the principle remains the same - the regular curriculum is the relevant curriculum for all students. By learning the same curriculum in the same classroom students with developmental disabilities are exposed to a much more expansive curriculum that is culturally relevant. To learn successfully, as is true for inclusive education in general, students with developmental disabilities may require the curriculum to be modified and instruction to be adapted.

Although university/college program areas and topics of study are collectively designed to move from fundamental areas to advanced aspects of study, curricula is not standardized, and the content of a course syllabus is primarily driven by the professor's scholarly pursuits or professional experience. For students with developmental disabilities, often for the first time, this offers an expanded array of perspectives to many topics usually from an inquiry-based stance (i.e., the student is expected to seek new learning, to investigate ideas, to argue perspectives and to engage in experiential understanding with their peers).

This process of inclusion transforms the traditional differentiation of curricula as being for some and not others, a differentiation that has historically articulated who is valued and who is not, who is among the academic elite and who is not. In the regular university or college classroom the professor/instructor chooses to think about how to make the curricula accessible to all students, including those with developmental disabilities. The active and valued participation of



*Early childhood studies class project*

students with developmental disabilities communicates to everyone the curriculum, the subject matter, is relevant to all - that students with developmental disabilities have a place within this learning environment.

### *Pathway to a career identity*

The formation of a career identity begins very early in life for children without developmental disabilities. From the first months of life, families see themselves and their heritage in the faces and actions of their children. They comment, describe to others, imagine and create futures for their children. Out of this ordinary family experience, identities are shaped, fostered and defined. What children will study, what extracurricular activities they are signed up for and who will become their playmates are all guided mostly by families who have a future in mind as they watch their children and imagine them becoming unique and valued.

Too often children with developmental disabilities are excluded from these normative processes. While parents are imagining their children without disabilities growing up and choosing a career, parents of children with disabilities may have begun to dream less and imagine a place for their child rather than their child's place in the world. While children without developmental disabilities are frequently being asked "what do you want to be when you grow up" and are encouraged to dream, for children with developmental disabilities this question may not be commonly asked. If a child with a developmental disability expresses a dream, parents may feel they must encourage their child to be more realistic, that is, to temper their dreams. For a helpful parental guide on how to approach career development from childhood onward, take a look at the AACL publication: *Within Reach: A Career Development Resource for Parents of Children with Developmental Disabilities* (Helen Handcock and Dave E. Redekopp, 1998).

Similarly, many teenagers without disabilities have the opportunity to work on weekends outside of school, earn a little money and learn about the world of work. This option is not as readily available for teenagers with developmental disabilities. They may find themselves only offered work opportunities during school hours as negotiated by a special education teacher, rather than finding jobs that are "cool" or at least typical of the teen experience. One example of a successful strategy to create employment for teenagers with developmental disabilities is the Youth Employment Partnership that provides teens with developmental disabilities the opportunity for part-time employment outside of school hours with the support of other teens without disabilities. More information on the Youth Employment partnership can be found at [www.aacl.org](http://www.aacl.org) or by contacting the Alberta Association for Community Living.

Immersion in normative processes, such as those of colleges and universities, embeds students with developmental disabilities in the powerful and ordinary ways of developing a career identity. Some students with developmental disabilities come to



Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT)

university or college with a fairly strong career identity while others are unsure of what they would like to do with their future. Those with a strong identity may pursue courses of study that fit their identity and future career aspirations. Other students may choose to pursue a more eclectic schedule of courses and later concentrate on a particular discipline or subject. Yet others may change their minds, and more than once, and like many others may end up in a career that has little to do with their course of study. What is true for most is that their career identity is strengthened or formed by their inclusive post-secondary educational experience. As noted earlier, this provides students with a culturally valued and relevant way of introducing themselves to others and the world in general.

On an additional note, just as university and college students may work during the months of the school year when they are not studying, this is true for students with developmental disabilities. Most, but not all, inclusive post-secondary education initiatives support students year round. This support provides students with the opportunity to find work during the inter-sessional times and/or pursue other personal interests.



*Graduate at work*

### *Enriching experiences*

When people who have been to college or university are asked later in life what is it they most remember about their post-secondary schooling, they almost always share an experience that involves friends, the adventures of leaving the protection of family or some event they never share publicly until years later. Their remembrances are filled with many moments of growth and challenge, sometimes sharpened by dreams realized or not. Their memories are not of what they learned in class but of what they learned about themselves, about others and what they experienced of “life’s ups and downs”. Experiences and the memories of them help us to construct our personal identities and characters. These are the experiences that shape our career choices and our aspirations in the material and spiritual worlds we inhabit.



*Volunteering with the students association*

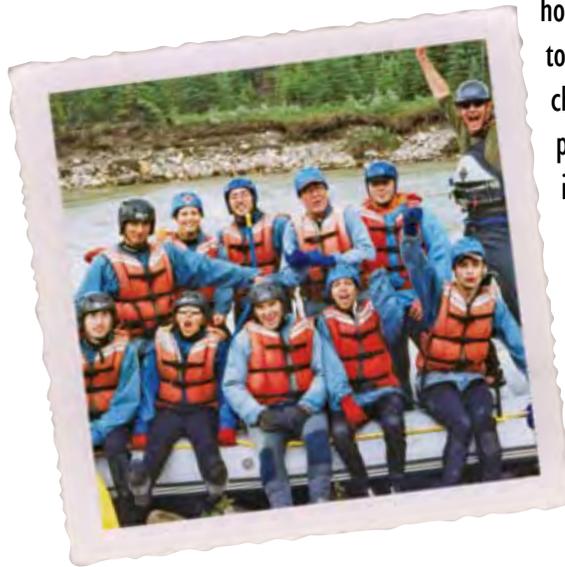
Inclusive post-secondary education provides students with developmental disabilities with innumerable opportunities to participate in and be exposed to a wide range of life-enriching experiences. Experiences

that will shape their unique character, influence their identities and provide memories for years to come. This is as true for individuals with significant disabilities as for anyone else - some individuals may be unable to express their memories or learning but this in no way diminishes the experience or the impact of memories on their internal being. Shared experiences also provide opportunities for friends and acquaintances to reminisce later in life.

### *Possibilities, choices and opportunities*

Given our understanding about the power of valued roles, identities, multiple relationships and diverse experiences, it follows that valued roles at university/college contribute immeasurably to the opportunities young adults choose later on in life. For individuals with developmental disabilities, it is even more likely that experiences in inclusive educational contexts have every possibility of opening doors, capitalizing on relationships and offering fascinating places where their skills can be applied.

The possibilities, choices and opportunities at university and college range from the mundane to the substantive, from the pragmatic to the subtle. Students can choose to participate in a host of extra-curricular activities from political to spiritual to cultural. Students may also choose to pursue non-credit activities and/or participate in recreational pursuits. There is the opportunity to join or volunteer with the students' association. Sometimes opportunities are unexpected or unplanned such as when a classmate extends an invitation to party on the weekend or simply to meet for coffee. Other possibilities for friendship may arise when a student has the opportunity for a field trip (say to an archaeological dig) or to travel with a varsity sports team.



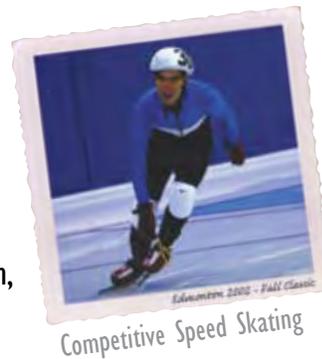
Whitewater rafting

Even the mundane and ordinary demands of university and college provide many opportunities for learning and expanding one's horizons - from choices about where, what and when to eat to using the library with its multiple computer resources. The functional skills that others assume must be taught in special or separate environments are learned, out of necessity, by participating with peers in the ordinary life and spaces of a university or college.

### *Economically sound*

Inclusive post-secondary education, like most other examples of inclusion, is an economically sound venture. These initiatives capitalize on the physical and human resources of the university or college community. There is no need to fund a separate building or location and most Canadian universities and colleges have provided access to the limited office

space needed by the staff who support the students, as well as access to other university resources (e.g., internet, internal mail, photocopying, etc.). As such, overhead costs are low with funding being primarily required for the staff who facilitate the students' inclusion. It would be extremely expensive to even attempt to replicate the resources of a university or college within a segregated setting and if this were to be attempted, those resources would be an impossible barrier to whatever inclusive efforts were attempted, by students and faculty. Any attempt to replicate a college or university in a segregated context would not only cost more but would fail miserably for many reasons.



As for any student, there is a cost for students with developmental disabilities to attend university or college. Tuition, financial resources for individual costs and means of funding associated with attending a post-secondary institution are addressed in another section of this module.

One systemic disadvantage for many students with developmental disabilities is that they are not always able to access the full range of financial resources (e.g., student loans, bursaries, etc.) available to students without developmental disabilities. Some inclusive post-secondary initiatives have established financial resources (in the manner of targeted scholarships, bursaries and grants) that students with developmental disabilities can access.

### *Life-long learning*

In today's world of rapid change and development, the need for a post-secondary education has become increasingly important, as has the expectation that adults will become life-long learners. We know, in general, that a post-secondary education creates much greater possibilities for young adults to have more promising futures. In Canada today, the demand for a post-secondary education continues to grow given the potential advantages it bestows on those able to participate. This is reflected in the value the labour market places on a post-secondary education, but the intense competition for limited spaces within post-secondary education institutions can create issues with respect to the acceptance of students with developmental disabilities. It is no longer sufficient to only pursue a time-limited post-secondary education but to become a life-long learner.

In the same vein as all university/college graduates, students with inclusive post-secondary experience may continue to take inter-sessional courses, sign up for individual continuing education classes, choose evening adult interest courses or pursue virtual post-secondary education studies from a distance after they have left the university of college.

Jodi began her university education after a number of years of struggling to be successfully employed in a job she loved. She lived at home and her parents were very supportive of her desire to further her education and pursue her career aspirations. Upon entering university, she took courses in women's studies, English literature and disability studies to name a few. Jodi developed a few friendships with women she continues to see many years after graduation. Jodi had a keen interest in computers and office work.

As with most students included in post-secondary education, Jodi accumulated a portfolio that contained samples of her work, transcripts of courses taken and personal references from professors. With this portfolio she applied for and secured an office position in the telecommunications industry. She loves this job, which she has had for over seven years during which she has received regular salary increments and promotions. Jodi is highly valued by her employers and fellow employees. She enjoys participating in the social life and functions of the company in which she works.

## *Inclusive post-secondary education in practice*

In our experience, there are a few principle ways in which students with developmental disabilities have been included in post-secondary education, in contrast to simply being on-site in a special education program. The post-secondary institution has support staff on-site to facilitate the inclusion of students with developmental disabilities. In our description of inclusive post-secondary education we frequently refer to them as “facilitators”. These student supports may be organized and funded differently, as we will explain later, but the main point is that there is an established arrangement or organizational capacity on-site to support the inclusion of students with developmental disabilities. These support arrangements and their staff (i.e., inclusion facilitators) typically provide for the accommodation of a small number of students with developmental disabilities to be included in regular courses and programs. This should be kept in mind when considering the points outlined below.

### *Admission*

As noted above, the only criterion for applying is an expressed interest in wanting to be a student, and of course, the availability of space. The wishes of students who are unable to easily communicate are interpreted by those closest to them as to whether they want to continue their education or not. There is no criteria with respect to degree of disability, age, previous scholastic success or personal circumstances (e.g., living at home, living in a facility). Students, with the support of their families and others, apply directly to the inclusive post-secondary education initiative.

Students interested in a post-secondary education complete an application form. Ideally, this application form mirrors the standard application form of the post-secondary institution but can be specific to students with developmental disabilities. As students with developmental disabilities cannot compete in the normative application process, that is, they do not meet the academic criteria for post-secondary admission, there must be an alternative but parallel route through which students apply and are considered. Upon admission, students with developmental disabilities are extended the same privileges and services as other students (e.g., student union membership, library cards, health services, tutoring services, learning resources, etc.). Students typically attend for three to five years depending on the college or university program they have chosen.



Admission processes vary among post-secondary institutions; however, post-secondary registrars have been very instrumental in developing processes to accommodate the inclusion of students with developmental disabilities. In some instances, students are accepted by the post-secondary support system first and later are assisted in entering different courses or programs. To be clear, this means students do not apply to a particular program or faculty but simply to be included on campus. Once they are accepted by the support services, the inclusion facilitators then organize for students to be accommodated in selected classes or programs of their choosing. With this strategy, the support staff or facilitators approach professors and programs after the student has been admitted to determine if they are willing to accommodate a student in their course or program. This overall approach is somewhat parallel to students without developmental disabilities applying for general studies with the intention of later focusing on a specific degree.

In other instances, and one that we prefer, students are accepted, in consultation with the support staff or inclusion facilitators, by the regular program to which they are applying. In this latter instance, the respective programs have agreed beforehand to accommodate students with developmental disabilities should they apply. This parallels the application process of most post-secondary students who choose to apply to a specific program or faculty. As a consequence, students with developmental disabilities are seen as integral members of the same program or faculty as any other student studying in that area. With this approach, professors and programs agree upfront to accommodate a student with developmental disabilities, should an interested student apply.

Upon admission, students with developmental disabilities are extended the same privileges and services as other students (e.g., student union membership, library cards, health services, tutoring services, learning resources, etc.).

At this point in the evolving practice of inclusive post-secondary education, students with developmental disabilities may be limited by what courses, programs or faculties are open to them. While, as we note later, the range of available post-secondary courses and faculties are growing, it is rarely inclusive of every faculty or program at any one specific institution.

The criteria for admission is not based on the degree of disability or the student's past scholastic performance but primarily on their commitment and interest in continuing their education or pursuing a course of studies. Where students are unable to express this for themselves, families and friends and others (e.g., past teachers) are invited to do so.

Typically, each inclusive post-secondary education initiative supports a small number of students. While this limits the number of students who are able to be included at any one institution, we have chosen to concentrate on expanding opportunities across post-secondary institutions. In addition, the small number of students within a university or college has helped to ensure quality inclusion. As students complete their course of studies and “graduate”, new students are then accommodated

at the respective institutions. The focus on expansion across institutions has resulted in a progressive momentum with more colleges and universities each year accepting students with developmental disabilities.

### *Inclusion facilitators*

Each post-secondary initiative includes one or more inclusion facilitators depending on the number of students being accommodated. Students with severe and multiple disabilities may have a personal care attendant or support staff primarily dedicated to them.

Facilitators play a significant role with each student and their family in enabling inclusion. Most importantly, they must believe in the possibilities that come from fully participating in campus life, academically and socially. Facilitators must be curious about changing the socially constructed notions of disability and be willing to interpret the world to students and interpret the student to classmates, faculty and friends all the while trying to make their efforts look “invisible”. Facilitators need to communicate openly with families on a regular basis. At times this may mean coaching families to support their sons and daughters to try new things, take reasonable risks and offer support when challenges unfold. Facilitators with their own experience in post-secondary settings, who are closer in age to the students, often succeed in finding natural pathways to connecting with classmates, faculty and new friends. In fact, we have found that facilitators with limited experience in human service systems or education in disability related fields to be more ideal supporters of students. Such staff have less interest in designing programmatic responses to the demands of finding socially and academically inclusive opportunities. Persistence, curiosity, enthusiasm, a keen eye for knowing when to seize the opportunity and lots of energy are all required to support an active life on campus.

Good facilitation is an art form. Facilitators need to know when to be present and interpret a student to others and when to get out of the way so that relationships can emerge naturally. They can assist professors and instructors in modifying assignments and while their primary objective is to facilitate the engagement of peers in completing assignments, they may also

assist directly depending on the circumstances. Facilitators are often key players in negotiating increased access across faculties and courses over time so that there is more student choice.

### *Fees*

As students are not admitted through the normative competitive and academic processes, their fee structure is consistent with the cost of auditing courses. In effect, they pay auditing fees but are nevertheless considered full-fledged members of the class or academic program. By the payment of these fees students are then entitled to all student services.

When students with intellectual disabilities audit a course as part of an inclusive post-secondary education, they are expected to complete assignments according to their abilities, participate in the course including group work and receive instruction and feedback from the professor. Auditing is used only as an administrative means to enable a student to have access to the course and all campus facilities. Students are full participants in the entirety of the course. As such, auditing in this context is not the same as its technical definition.

Auditing is a mechanism that has been found useful in reducing the administrative barriers that may prevent students with intellectual disabilities from accessing all of the benefits that academically eligible students enjoy.

### *Program of studies*

With the support of a facilitator and their families, students individually determine a program of studies, while course loads vary with interest and availability of classroom space. Inclusive post-secondary education is predicated on the principle that the students' interests, talents and desires are paramount. Some students attend full-time while others may choose to attend part-time. Others may add or drop courses over time and yet others change their primary study interests. The range of experiences and decisions are no different for students with developmental disabilities than their non-disabled peers. The process of determining which faculty, department, program or courses is no different than would be true for students without disabilities. No formalistic human service processes, such as person centered planning or individual program planning, are utilized.

The content of courses, related assignments and exams are modified and adapted by professors, instructors, graduate teaching assistants, peers and/or facilitators according to the needs of each student. Adaptations in post-secondary education are conceptually no different than those applied in elementary and secondary education. They may range from doing a portion of an assignment or exam (with the portion varying considerably) to providing an oral, visual or pointing response. Students have participated in everything from performing as a member of a public symphonic band (e.g., percussionist) to Olympic wrestling (e.g., a student with multiple and severe disabilities). As most students do not receive a formal grade or mark, given they are auditing courses, students are encouraged and supported to maintain

A student speaking about the support she receives.

“I get support with my studying, my assignments, getting to know my peers, my classes.”

Kelly Fitzgerald, student, Grant MacEwan College

a portfolio representative of their learning and accomplishments. This portfolio, in addition to a transcript of courses audited or taken, is beneficial to students when seeking employment. Students often receive letters of commendation from professors and instructors and letters of recommendation from summer employers.

Students are expected and supported to participate in class discussions, presentations and activities, field trips, practicum placements and to write exams and submit assignments to the best of their abilities. In addition, student peers may be invited by the facilitator at the beginning of each term to volunteer their support in class by helping with note taking, sharing information and naturally assisting with explanations of instructions, if needed. This type of support is often provided in various ways: during class time, with peer study groups determined by class assignments, supportive friends who study together to prepare for tests or projects, formal use of general tutoring services provided by learning resource centres on campus, facilitators providing additional help to access resources between classes and parents' offers to help with assignments.

Facilitators do not attend the classes with the students, as their classmates provide any needed supports. For those students who require the help of a personal care attendant, these supports are negotiated individually. For example, this support can range from having personal care support available in class to being available to assist in moving from class

to class, providing support with meals and transportation and making arrangements to connect with others to attend activities or functions. Although there are no formal agreements for instructors or professors to mark papers or tests, frequently they are more than willing to do so. It is also encouraging to note that the feedback from professors and instructors to students is consistently encouraging, constructive and challenges the student to stretch their understanding of the material. The same can be said of the classroom peers who also speak eloquently of the mutual rewards of studying together.

It is also amazing and interesting to note that the feedback from professors and instructors is consistently encouraging, constructive and challenges the student to stretch their understanding of the material. The same can be said of the classroom peers who also speak eloquently of the mutual rewards of studying together.

The following list illustrates the range of courses and faculties within which students with developmental disabilities have been included:

Communication Studies	Open Choir
Musical Culture	African Studies
Geology	Kinesiology
Music History and Appreciation	Russian
Music Performance	French
Political Science	Spanish
Historical Studies	Psychology
English	Archeology
Geography	Film Studies
Anthropology	Early Childhood

Sociology  
Women's Studies  
Classical Mythology  
Physical Education  
Religious Studies  
Canadian Studies  
Zoology  
Art Fundamentals  
Physical Education Activity & Theory  
Ballet  
Jazz  
Law  
Botany

Police and Security  
Teacher Assistant  
Hotel Management and Hospitality  
Fine Arts  
Agriculture  
Nursing  
Forestry  
Home Economics  
Journalism  
Graphic Arts  
Equestrian Studies  
Outdoor Education

### *Extra-curricular participation*

Along with participation in academic pursuits, each student is supported to engage with their non-disabled peers in the many diverse aspects of the social, cultural, political worlds of universities, colleges or technical schools. Typically, facilitators begin this process by getting to know the student well, appreciating their areas of interest, their gifts and talents, their hopes and dreams and their social networks. Students, friends and family with the support of facilitators look for activities, groups or events on campus that coincide with the interest of the students. Students, with support as necessary, then follow the normative processes that others use to join and participate in the extra-curricular life of the institution. The extra-curricular activities and groups provide new opportunities to form friendships, as well as contributing to the students' learning.

The multiple ways that individuals get introduced to others and sustain their involvement in organizations, associations, social groups and volunteer roles are so individual and complex that it is not easy to describe. It is the most challenging aspect of the experience; it means taking risks, making mistakes, persevering, thinking creatively, talking about it with everyone, recognizing that it is not all logical or rational and includes a bit of "magic" when people connect - always finding the hope and humour in the possibilities. Overall, students grow and change, their interests may shift from year-to-year depending on the people they meet, the successes they realize and the social and emotional maturity that time and experience offers us all.



*Hanging out*

The following list illustrates the range of activities within which students with developmental disabilities have been included:

Students' Union Committees

Clubs (Communication Studies, Women's Centre, electronic games, faith groups)

Toastmasters

Fitness Centre

Private tutoring

Literacy tutoring

Acting classes

Piano lessons

Basketball team member/support

Symphonic band, choral groups

Radio station, newspaper

Volunteering (student food bank, civil liberties society)

Wrestling

Rock climbing, wall climbing,  
rappelling

Archeological digs

Sports trips with varsity teams

Figure skating

Canoeing

Skiing

Golf

Football

Baseball

Hockey

Intra-mural Sports



Weight room

### *Summer and part-time employment*

For many students summer employment is an expectation. So, likewise in our approach to inclusive education, it is assumed that all students will find either full-time or part-time summer jobs with decent wages. In many instances, students with developmental disabilities will seek jobs that are connected to their career interests. Facilitators play an important role in job searches, preparation for job interviews and connecting with employers and employees to ensure natural supports are in place and by providing “on the job” coaching for as long as needed.

## *Graduation*

Graduation experiences vary across institutions and according to individual institutional protocols. As students do not receive formal credits, unless they have registered in and completed a course for credit, they do not receive an official degree or diploma. At this point in time, we have not yet achieved a formal granting of a certificate or other governmentally approved recognition. Students do participate in graduation exercises with their non-disabled peers, including cap and gown ceremonies, crossing the stage (although this varies with some institutions) to receive acknowledgement from chancellors and presidents as well as the accolades from family and friends. Students also attend graduation parties with their cohorts.

## *Other approaches to inclusive post-secondary education*

We are also aware of students who have been included in post-secondary institutions and programs, usually as a result of family advocacy, where there were no established supports or arrangements to include students with developmental disabilities. These students typically had their own support staff that accompanied them and/or facilitated their inclusion. They may have taken a single course or participated in many courses over a matter of years. Some of these students have not had successful experiences because support staff lacked specific knowledge about facilitating inclusion into post-secondary environments. These individual and isolated examples have rarely led to the further inclusion of other students. Post-secondary institutions have not become more inclusive as a result of the inclusion of single students with developmental disabilities. In our experience, it takes the systemic effort of families and advocates to create continuing and sustained inclusive post-secondary educational opportunities.

Another approach to inclusive post-secondary education has been to arrange to have students with developmental disabilities simply audit courses, in the traditional and technical definition of audit. In most post-secondary institutions in Canada, anyone may audit a course with the permission of the professor and enough physical space for them to be present. The professor is under no obligation to address any part of the auditing student's education. A student with this status is not expected to do assignments or write tests. They occupy a seat and learn to the extent they are interested. In effect, they are a classroom visitor and are not considered a part of cohort of students.

While students with intellectual disabilities should be able to audit courses within the technical definition, as would be true for anyone else, this is not equivalent to an inclusive post-secondary education. Access to individual courses as a non-participating student does not provide for full inclusion in campus academic and social life. The two concepts, full inclusion in a post-secondary program or course of studies and taking a course or two as an auditing student, should not be confused.

## *Employment and career outcomes*

One of the important manifestations of an inclusive life is the opportunity to develop a career identity and be meaningfully employed. Generally, individuals with developmental disabilities experience very low rates of employment. As noted earlier, a number of studies of employment outcomes for people with developmental disabilities suggest an unemployment and underemployment rate of approximately 70 per cent. As a result, most adults with developmental disabilities are destined to a life where they will be dependent on government income support programs that typically are impoverishing. Even after 15-20 years in the development of supported employment services, these studies suggest the unemployment rate and the degree of meaningful workplace inclusion has remained largely unchanged. As such, these authors often articulate the need for additional and creative strategies to improve the employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

In contrast, Hughson et al., (2006) in their recent research study on inclusive post-secondary education in Alberta (see [www.aacl.org](http://www.aacl.org) or [www.pdd.org](http://www.pdd.org)), found that over 70 per cent of students who had been included in post-secondary education were employed either part-time (often in more than one part-time position) or full-time in a wide range of job opportunities. Their findings also revealed that many students, now alumni of post-secondary institutions, were supported in their jobs naturally by their co-workers. Most required less support than parents had estimated and less support than they required prior to their inclusive post-secondary education experiences. Salaries ranged from minimum wage to twice that rate of pay. Some “graduates” (students who had completed their course of studies) have chosen to volunteer their time in community work, while a few former students remain unemployed. A small percentage of graduates have started their own businesses.

Not only has the rate of employment far exceeded the outcomes typically reported by efforts to establish meaningful work for young adults after school completion, but the range of work opportunities are diverse - much like the broad range of courses/topics that students chose while at university or college. “Graduates” were employed by video stores, recreation centres, university services (physical education, archives), day cares, school districts, libraries, grocery stores, restaurants, golf clubs, beauty salons, beverage companies, software development companies, business and government offices, gas stations, telecommunication industries, architectural firms, bookstores, sporting goods outlets, clothing stores, museums, movie theatres, transportation services, manufacturing industries, insurance companies, surgical supplies offices and data entry services.



Graduate at work

Through the experience of providing inclusive post-secondary education opportunities we have consistently found the following factors contribute to positive employment outcomes. The first relates to the degree of support and involvement forthcoming from the student's family. Students are more likely to be gainfully employed if their families are encouraging and supportive. Families may encourage and support their sons and daughters by holding high expectations, emphasizing their son or daughter's strengths, discussing possible career options, sharing their belief in the value of work and paid employment, using personal connections to explore job possibilities, accommodating transportation needs where this is an issue, ensuring students have access to the tools or equipment they need to do their job, following up with the employer or whoever might be providing on-the-job supports, if necessary and so forth. Parents can help as well by acknowledging when a student may need to advance or acquire a raise or even change jobs. In our experience, wage subsidies should be avoided, as these rarely lead to sustained employment. Families and allies should focus their energies on obtaining a real wage, which again in our experience, has been possible in all instances.

Too often the assumption is made that students with severe and multiple disabilities are unable to work and be gainfully employed. While this can prove difficult and not everyone may be able to work and certainly not full-time, many individuals with severe disabilities can do more paid work than is commonly thought. Students with severe disabilities may require more direct on-the-job support in order to participate in the activities of their job. Being able to participate with support or partially participating in a meaningful work activity is still a valid proposition. For those times when work is not possible or for those individuals unable to work, in spite of creative thinking, it is vital that they have every opportunity for a meaningful day subsequent to their inclusive post-secondary education.

Secondly, achieving these positive outcomes requires responsive and flexible supports in such a way that those who work with the student encourage and sustain the natural support of co-workers in the workplace as much as possible. Often, facilitators find they could gradually reduce their presence on the job while maintaining consistent contact with the employer, who is often better able to determine when and if additional supports need to be reintroduced. Additional but temporary supports may be needed if there are new tasks added to the job, there is a change in management or a promotion is offered.

A third factor significantly related to students finding decent jobs with competitive wages is the need for students to have related previous summer jobs and/or practicums or field experiences. Many times these jobs become stepping stones for further connections and relationships essential to finding meaningful jobs upon graduation. Students, armed with relevant and varied summer experiences, are more likely to find long-term jobs with career potential, particularly if their previous coursework or area of study relates to the nature of the work they undertake.

Many times support workers found they could gradually reduce their presence on the job while maintaining consistent contact with the employer, who is often better able to determine when and if additional supports need to be reintroduced.

## *The role of families, faculty and peers*

### *Families*

As with most post-secondary students, families play a key role in encouraging and supporting the value of a post-secondary education. Students are more likely to aspire to continue their education after high school if their families have been emphasizing the possibility of this option. This is particularly true given the still limited societal belief in the possibility of students with significant intellectual disabilities being fully included in post-secondary education. If families do not harbour the dream of an inclusive post-secondary education for their sons and daughters with intellectual disabilities it is unlikely to be realized.

Families need to be prepared to listen to the aspirations of their sons and daughters and respond to the best of their capacity. As we have said elsewhere, increasingly students with intellectual disabilities themselves are expressing an interest in continuing their education - much like their peers or siblings. In the past, this might have been perceived as unrealistic, as potentially an idea that should be ignored, dismissed or reconceptualized. Now we know this expressed hope should be seen as an expression of self-confidence, a desire to be included and a possibility to be realized.

While many of the roles of families are comparable whether or not the student has intellectual disabilities, there are some differences. Commonly, families are the source of leadership in creating the collective vision for inclusion, building alliances and partnerships with post-secondary institutions to include their sons and daughters. Families may have to instigate the search for public funds and advocate for changes in policies and practices that result in the appropriate individual supports for each student. As inclusive post-secondary education expands, it may well be the families who help to sustain the vision and ensure supports and practices are fully inclusive. In other words, families will need to safeguard the spirit of inclusive post-secondary education.

There is the possibility of complacency among families once an inclusive post-secondary education initiative is underway, as they may come to believe the post-secondary institution is sufficiently committed to sustaining and offering quality inclusion. Further, families may come to believe that they should not have to be responsible for helping to create or sustain inclusive post-secondary opportunities. However, as long as inclusion is not socially and culturally normative and embraced by society, it is unlikely families will be able to rely entirely on post-secondary institutions to either generate or sustain inclusive post-secondary initiatives.

One way families have contributed to safeguarding inclusive post-secondary education over time is by participating on advisory committees that are established within post-secondary institutions. These are institutionally approved formal committees that meet regularly and provide parents and others (i.e., allies, post-secondary officials, faculty, students with and without intellectual disabilities, employers, government officials, etc.) with the means to provide ongoing input into the operation of an inclusive post-secondary initiative.

To facilitate the role of families in stimulating and safeguarding inclusive post-secondary options, it is helpful for families to have access to family advocacy organizations and other allies. Typically, when individual families are part of a family organization or collective, there is a greater likelihood of success as the family advocacy organization can offer a variety of useful supports. The advocacy organization can provide strategic advice and administrative support to the families' efforts (e.g., in negotiating or arranging financial and administrative processes with the post-secondary institution). Family advocacy organizations can provide continuity over time as parents move on to assume other advocacy roles once their sons and daughters complete their post-secondary education.

Allies can include government officials, faculty, post-secondary officials and community advocates who support inclusive post-secondary education. Allies are particularly critical to establishing inclusive post-secondary opportunities where they do not yet exist.

Parents may also find themselves walking a fine line during the time their son or daughter is enrolled in post-secondary education. There is often a fine line between being necessarily involved and supportive given the reality of a son or daughter's intellectual disability and being overly intrusive. Parents may sometimes find the post-secondary institution is unfamiliar with the degree of family involvement needed to ensure success for a student with intellectual disabilities. Some discussion and negotiation may be required to ensure there is mutual understanding and collaboration. However, it is also necessary for parents to understand that the opportunity for an inclusive post-secondary education must include the support of peers and faculty. This requires families to maintain an appropriate distance and accept the fact there should be experiences for their sons and daughters of which they will know little or nothing. Sometimes the best post-secondary memories are those that are never shared with parents.

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Jodie, a young woman who had charm and a zest for life, quickly made friends when first included in university. Her parents, like most parents, were supportive but apprehensive about her attending university - would she be safe, welcomed, accepted and supported.

Within her first year Jodie was invited by a group of women friends to go out on the town for a term-end celebration. When her parents learned that the young women were going bar hopping in a limousine, including the possibility of a stop at a "full monty" show, they were



reluctant to let Jodie participate. Jodie shared her disappointment with her friends who promptly contacted her parents and persuaded them to trust that as friends they would be there for Jodie. In their view there could be no celebration without Jodie.



They had a wonderful time together, with no details being shared, and their friendships grew over the years and post-university. When Jodie died at a very young age due to a heart condition associated with her disability, the friends she had first met at university 10 years earlier offered a eulogy at her funeral that was attended by hundreds. The three women spoke most eloquently and lovingly about

how much Jodie had brought to their lives and that of their growing families. She clearly touched many lives and changed the lives of her friends forever.

### *Faculty*

One of the exciting aspects of inclusive post-secondary education has been the responsiveness of faculty across post-secondary institutions. As we note elsewhere, they have very positively accepted students with intellectual disabilities in their courses and activities. Most faculty members and instructors have been keen to teach and often willingly adapt their materials and assignments to accommodate students with intellectual disabilities.

The role of the facilitator in this process varies considerably from none to extensive depending on the interest or willingness of a professor or instructor to modify and adapt their materials and requirements. While faculty are not required to adapt their courses and means of instruction, as the students are present on an auditing basis, the vast majority do so out of their interest in wanting to teach well so that all students can be successful learners. Faculty members and instructors encourage student participation in class and provide verbal and written feedback on student work, as they would for all other students. This includes, as noted earlier, facilitating the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in any required group or cooperative learning activities.

“If people are interested in participating in a class that I am involved in, I see no reason to deny them that opportunity...”

Dr. Debra Cairns, Associate Professor, University of Alberta

“Have to adapt things consciously for this student but realized that I may need to do this for other students as well. Being involved made me think about what I teach and how. Gives me a new sense of how to look at material. Everybody wins. Nothing but a positive experience for everyone in the class.”

Dr. Keith Mauthe, Instructor, Lethbridge Community College

“I think it broadens them out not only in terms of the educational experience but also broadens them out as a human being.”

Art Nishimura, Associate Professor, University of Calgary

“When I teach a class over and over, it gives a new sense of how to look at the material.” University Professor

“Everybody wins. Nothing but a positive experience to everyone in the class.”

Barry Butt, Instructor, Grant MacEwan College

“There is a sense of being accepted on your own terms. For someone like Heather, it is important for her own self-esteem. She is just as normal as anyone else. This is one of the places that she can be reaffirmed in that way. Other classmates have kept an eye on her but not hovered. Little by little that develops a sense of independence.”

Art Nishimura, Associate Professor, University of Calgary

## Peers

Meeting new people and making connections with others who have different backgrounds and interests is common to all students during their post-secondary school years. For students with developmental disabilities, this opportunity is no less critical to participating in campus life. Students without disabilities are central to supporting the participation of students with disabilities in classrooms, field placements, study groups, tutorials and lab work. We all need introductions, ways in which to meet each other. Inviting fellow classmates to volunteer to help a student with note taking, making connections with a study group, getting advice about assignments and/or answering questions all help. Inevitably, there are students who respond. From these beginnings, other possibilities emerge.

“I have learned about pure enjoyment of life. He learns just like everybody else. He has got that positive aspect - everyone wants to be like that. Everyone strives for it and he is that guy. There has never been a negative comment about him. He is friends with everyone - everyone talks with him.” John Tadic, student, Grant MacEwan College

“I would say he brings energy to the party. Never seen him in a bad mood. Just waiting for the next chance to smile. Team is highly competitive, sometimes dread working your butt off but he lightens the mood in practice and games and brings an open atmosphere.” Tyler Coston, student, University of Alberta

## *Governance, administration and program operations*

There are multiple ways to fund and administer inclusive post-secondary education opportunities, but the principal source of funding is government. Funding also comes from different government sources depending on the policies and practices of respective governments. For example, in some jurisdictions funding comes from the same government departments that generally fund post-secondary education and in other locations it may come from the same departments that fund disability-related supports. Inclusive post-secondary initiatives may also rely on multiple sources of funding, at times including their own capacity to raise funds through grants or other fund development activities.

Different models of funding, from individualized to block or a mix thereof, are employed across and within jurisdictions. Quality and sustained inclusive post-secondary education can be provided irrespective of the funding approach or funding source.

The facilitators constitute approximately 80 per cent of the costs of providing inclusive post-secondary education. However, the ratio of facilitators to students is not fixed and varies with the needs of the students and local funding criteria. What appears to be most critical to long-term viability is ensuring families are actively involved in creating and sustaining these initiatives. Added to this is the need to facilitate constant explorations and reflections on the meaning of inclusion and its challenges.

Two strategies have been used to provide and fund inclusion facilitators. We have had successful experiences with inclusive post-secondary education initiatives that were directly operated by the post-secondary institution with families and their allies acting in an advisory capacity. In other circumstances, families have found it best to form incorporated non-profit societies to facilitate the inclusion of students on campus or secure the services of an existing non-profit society to assume that responsibility.

In the first instance, the funding goes to the post-secondary institution and they directly employ and supervise the inclusive post-secondary education facilitators. Ideally, families are involved in the hiring of these staff. The risk with initiatives operated directly by the post-secondary institution lies in the fact fully inclusive post-secondary education may not be sufficiently inculcated in the organization. Thus, when staff or administration changes there is the risk that inclusive education may not be sustained or supported by new staff and administrators. In our view, with support and guidance, inclusive post-secondary education can be and has been readily sustained across administrators, staff and the often-changing directions and interests of post-secondary education institutions. Families remain the best safeguard in ensuring continuity.

The second option is where families and their allies form small non-profit organizations to direct and manage the inclusive post-secondary initiative. In this instance, the non-profit society receives the funding, as noted earlier from government sources, to hire the inclusive post-secondary education facilitators. As a legally incorporated non-profit society, the organization can receive government funding and can also pursue other funding sources. As noted previously, this funding can be individualized, block or a combination thereof. Some initiatives may charge students and families a nominal fee to cover incidental costs. Tuition fees are always paid to the post-secondary institution as would be true for any other student.

The non-profit organization strikes an agreement with the post-secondary education institution to have students included in the institution and for the society's staff to work on campus in facilitating the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities. Family operated societies incur risks as well. They, too, can lose clarity with respect to inclusion and how it should unfold on campus and may, as well, have difficulty finding new families to commit to providing time and leadership. A variation on the above is where an existing non-profit organization assumes the operational role until either the post-secondary education institution assumes responsibility or a specific non-profit organization is formed to assume the responsibility.

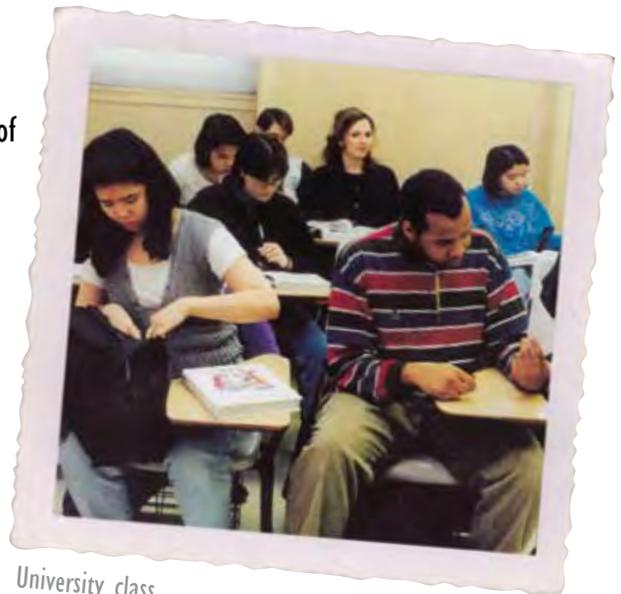
These are not the only models that may work but our experience is limited to these two major approaches. Similarly, with respect to funding, it may come from different government sources but what is critical is the assurance that these funds can only be used to facilitate inclusion. Different funding bodies typically attach different rules as to how their funding is to be utilized and if these rules detract from, limit or threaten full inclusion, then alternative sources of funding must be sought.

As previously noted, inclusive post-secondary education has been successfully supported by utilizing either block or individualized funding or a combination thereof. Individualized funding or its variants is when funding goes directly to the individual or family and these funds are then used to purchase supports. Block funding or its variants mean that funding goes directly to an agency or post-secondary institution to provide inclusive post-secondary education. Each funding option has its benefits and limitations but both can work. With respect to individualized funding, this requires families, in effect, to pool their funding to enable either an agency or the post-secondary institution to hire the staff they require. One advantage for families with individualized funding is that when their son or daughter completes their studies, these funds are still available to the family to secure post-graduation supports. However, new students must in turn have access to future individualized funding for the inclusive post-secondary initiative to continue. With block funding, the funds stay with the organization, but the completing student and their family may need to acquire new funding to provide ongoing supports after graduation.

## *Findings from 10 years of inclusive post-secondary education*

During 2004/2005, we conducted a one-year qualitative research study that accounted for the experiences of students, classmates, alumni, parents, faculty and instructors, facilitators, mentors and employers (Hughson et al., 2006). This study examined the outcomes and impacts of inclusive post-secondary education for adults with developmental disabilities over the last 10 years across six colleges and universities in Alberta. This year-long project provided a wealth of information, some of which we have tried to capture in this section.

Students and alumni who reflected on what they thought made participation in colleges and universities a success reported the following contributing factors: meeting new people; making friends (with and without disabilities); doing and trying new things (e.g., courses, extra-curricular activities, campus life); feeling a greater degree of confidence (e.g., from doing academic work, doing assignments, taking tests, getting feedback on assignments); a sense of greater independence; going on to having a career/job and earning a salary and developing a strong personal identity.



*University class*

Parents described the successes observed in their sons and daughters in many ways, including independence and confidence; improved skills in communication; finding and exploring personal identity; opportunity for authentic challenges; learning transferable skills and knowledge (academic and social) and surpassing parents' expectations of what was possible.

Parents also reported that their sons' and daughters' attendance at universities and colleges had an impact on the larger community by noting how: the students' presence set an example for what an inclusive society can look like; the community was improved by the participation of all; there was increased acceptance over time; inclusive post-secondary education provided hope and other students learned tolerance and invited inclusive participation.

Facilitators, faculty, instructors and mentors reported similar perceptions to those of parents and added other observations of success: faculty reported that having students with disabilities in their class gave them the opportunity to reflect on how they teach and evaluate all students; the initiatives provided an exemplary model for adult learning and the experience inspired hope for the future of inclusive communities.

Students had a number of perceptions as to what contributed to their successes. The meaningful experiences they identified included: being treated like an adult; having the opportunity to make choices and decisions in an inclusive environment; getting support from facilitators in doing course work; meeting people; getting to know faculty and working and learning with classroom peers.

Parents identified other perceptions: individual attention and support; specific qualities and abilities of the facilitator; unique and diverse opportunities available at college and university; opportunities for independence related to post-secondary contexts (e.g., leaving home, using community resources); parent involvement in supporting students and the fact that facilitators, faculty and non-disabled peers held high expectations. In totality, these factors all contributed to successes for their sons and daughters.

Facilitators, faculty and mentors added some additional contributing factors to successes. This included: the openness of faculty; students desire to be attending a post-secondary institution; the involvement and leadership of parents; the value of having a facilitator with strong leadership qualities; commitment to the initiative and related values; having facilitators who were visionaries, creative problem solvers and convincing, skillful communicators. They also reported that the practice of ensuring the mentorship of new facilitators and the importance of creating the role of “critical friends” and engaging in continual reflection on practice were necessary features to increasing student achievements.

“I never even finished grade 12, so to see my son go to college - it’s very exciting, we’re very proud.” Dale Chapman, parent.

The students reported some experiences that tested them. They found that meeting people, making and keeping friends, doing academic work (usually described as a positive challenge) and the difficulty of finding work or finding work in their area of interest, presented challenges for all. It should be noted that these perspectives would not seem on the surface to be very different from the comments of any student attending university or college.

Parents identified challenges as well. They included the limited spaces available for more students to access post-secondary education, sustaining friendships and relationships (on-going challenge during and after inclusive post-secondary experience), finding facilitators (for post-secondary and workplaces) that are a “right fit” and the reality that occasionally facilitators sometimes leave and change jobs.

Facilitators, faculty and mentors identified similar challenges and added several including finding and mentoring new facilitators; encouraging continued leadership of parents; the existence of traditional segregated transitional-vocational programs in the same colleges; uncertainty of future funding and bureaucratic requirements of funders; maintaining creativity and innovation in finding pathways to inclusion; and maintaining an inclusive vision and parental influence when inclusive post-secondary education initiatives are not started by parents.

In summary, this research confirms and reveals a number of critical considerations. Universities and colleges are more welcoming and accommodating of students with developmental disabilities than many of the high schools they attended. It has not been necessary to wait until inclusive education has been perfected and commonplace within high schools for inclusive post-secondary education to be successful. The actual costs of providing an inclusive post-secondary education are often less than the costs of providing other human service system supports as the students are making full use of the many existing campus supports and services as well as the natural support of instructors and other students in their classes. The high expectations of these academic institutions often calls out the best resulting in students achieving levels of performance not often anticipated, both academically and socially. As one would expect for any student, these successes and accomplishments lead to improved self-image. College and university students with developmental disabilities have chosen a wide array of courses across an expanding number of departments and faculties. Students have chosen to participate and been welcomed into a broad expanse of extra-curricular activities from sports to cultural to political.

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Our recent review of the outcomes for all of the students with developmental disabilities who have graduated from inclusive post-secondary education in Alberta since the 1990's, found that over 70 per cent were employed either part-time (often in more than one part-time position) or full-time in a wide range of job opportunities (Hughson et al., 2006). These employment outcomes are vastly superior to what is often found through more typical approaches to enabling employment (e.g., supported employment, job development, etc.). Older students said that the decision to go to university or college was initially motivated by parents but today many young adults are saying...

"I want to go to college/university/technical institute...to continue learning, further my education, find a career, pursue interests, increase employment opportunities, make more money, because my friends are going, my brothers/sisters went/are going, please my parents, avoid working right away, make friends, have experiences (without my parents knowing)."

The interpretation of the research results has generated a number of observations that may have value for parents and allies who wish to pursue inclusive post-secondary opportunities in their communities:

- ◆ It is necessary to keep initiatives small, individualized and personalized.
- ◆ There has been little or no resistance from elite academic institutions even while they maintain eligibility based on academic merit.
- ◆ So far there has been marginal impact on inclusive general education for grades K-12 in Alberta.
- ◆ The oppression of dreams and possibilities from special education and special educators continues; many often act as gatekeepers and do not recommend or support students to further their education inclusively.

- ◆ It is necessary to safeguard students from being “objects of the gaze” (i.e., recruited as research subjects, practicum sites, etc.).
- ◆ Resistance to establishing inclusive post-secondary options can rest with established student disability support services within post-secondary institutions.
- ◆ Greatest challenge lies in learning to enable relationships for students with severe and multiple disabilities.
- ◆ Need to support outcome research projects that explore long-term impacts of inclusive post-secondary options for adults with developmental disabilities and publish findings accessible to advocates and allies in the community.
- ◆ Regular and intentional retreats and conferences with students, peers, parents, instructors/professors and facilitators that reflect on practices are essential to safeguarding the spirit of inclusive post-secondary education.
- ◆ Students do go on to pursue life-long learning opportunities after graduation.
- ◆ Post-secondary inclusion has enjoyed limited staff turnover, which is in stark contrast to high turnover rates in adult disability-related services in Alberta.
- ◆ Students who attend colleges and universities speak of the pride that comes from being challenged and succeeding; they often contrast that experience with their oppressive school experiences where they did not have homework, could not sit through exams or write assignments, were not taught to read or write.
- ◆ Learning about the possibilities of higher education has a big impact on parents of young children - it inspires them to hold on to high expectations, as too often, even while their children are still very young, their hopes and dreams have been limited by the common attitudes of society.
- ◆ Most graduates and their families indicated their options and life choices are significantly improved by having attended college or university.
- ◆ Individualized and personalized inclusion (natural supports and facilitation) is key to student and graduate success and needs to be maintained. This model provides evidence of the value of responsive individualized supports and high expectations all offered in an inclusive context.
- ◆ Parents have an essential role in the leadership of inclusive initiatives and their expansion.
- ◆ Supporting students in developing and maintaining friendships continues to be a key area that challenges everyone.
- ◆ Need to expand the accommodation for students with more intensive support needs. Maintaining and expanding the diversity of who benefits from post-secondary education requires intentional commitment on the part of initiative leaders.
- ◆ Importance of mentoring new staff and keeping the vision alive calls for intentional communication and collaboration between new and existing initiatives.
- ◆ The expansion of adult inclusive lives and education continues to demand committed and creative visionaries.

## Conclusion

For almost 20 years post-secondary institutions in Alberta and elsewhere have been welcoming and fully including students with intellectual disabilities in an increasing array of courses and activities. Families, peers and faculty have all commented that inclusion was as much or more a benefit to them as to the students with developmental disabilities. Just as the lives of students with intellectual disabilities were forever changed so were many of the lives they touched.

“I like to tell other parents it has the potential to change your child’s life as well as your own life.” Virginia Hunt, parent.

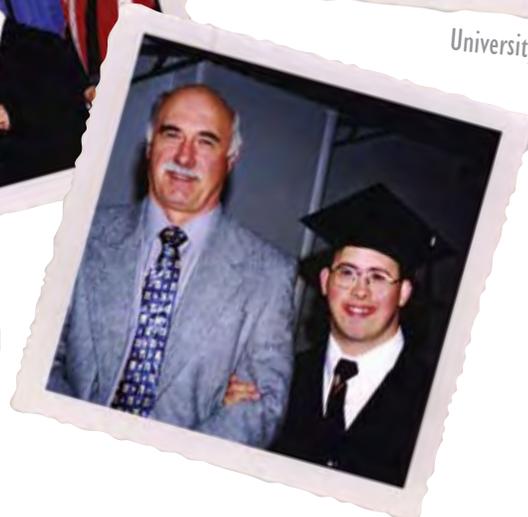
We believe the many lessons learned over time in developing, implementing and sustaining these inclusive post-secondary initiatives could be applied to other contexts. These positive experiences have held true across universities, colleges and technical institutes – large and small, urban and rural, academic and technical, secular and faith-based, and public and private – suggesting some degree of universality. There was a time when no one imagined inclusive post-secondary education, which leaves us to wonder where and how else inclusion might be realized.



University Convocation



University Convocation with  
Chancellor, President and Dad



## *Authors' Biographies*

### *Bruce Uditsky, M.Ed.*

Bruce is the CEO of the Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL). He has been invited to speak and consult on a wide variety of social justice and inclusion issues in Canada, the United States, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand and Europe. With Bruce's leadership, AACL is recognized internationally as one of the most successful and powerful grassroots family advocacy organizations. He was a co-developer of a family leadership series, regional family advocacy networks and a partnership with government and others to address the needs of children with disabilities in the child welfare system and parents with developmental disabilities. Bruce has been recognized for many successful advocacy campaigns that have influenced social policy and legislation. He has contributed to the development of a number of innovative community initiatives, including a region-wide inclusive early childhood system, Rotary employment partnerships and inclusive post-secondary education opportunities. Bruce is also an Adjunct Professor, Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies, University of Calgary. He is the parent of two adult sons, one of whom has intellectual disabilities and is living an inclusive life.

### *E. Anne Hughson, Ph.D.*

Anne is an Associate Professor, Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Calgary and a Chartered Psychologist. She has worked extensively with families and individuals with development disabilities, in particular addressing issues of abuse and sexual assault. Anne is a recipient of the Faculty of Education Excellence in Teaching Award and the author and co-author of a number of texts, chapters and articles on a wide range of disability-related subjects. She has lectured and consulted in many countries. As a researcher in disability studies and program evaluation, her work is grounded in the lived experiences of people with developmental disabilities and their families. Anne was instrumental in developing an Inclusive Education Summer Institute where she teaches and in developing inclusive post-secondary education options. She was a co-developer of an internationally recognized family leadership series and community inclusion projects in child welfare, inclusive education, regional family advocacy networks and individualized funding. Anne is a guardian for a friend ensuring he continues to have the personal advocacy and love he requires to have a good life in community.

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