



## Position Paper

### Transition for Adults with Learning Disabilities in Adult Education

Transition planning and services for adults with learning disabilities (LD) enrolled in adult basic education (ABE), literacy and GED programs must be of paramount importance. There must be adequate planning, services and support to assist students with LD to transition from ABE programs to postsecondary and work environments.

In the world of secondary to postsecondary education or the workplace, the purpose of a transition plan is to prepare students to move from the world of school to the world of adulthood. By comparison, students with LD who enter ABE, literacy and GED programs are already adults, actively engaged in the world of adulthood. Presumably, a transition plan for a student with LD will parallel a transition plan for a student who does not have LD. The difference is the essential expansion of tasks needed for positive exploration and implementation, which increases the intensity of services and supports.

Researchers suggest approximately one-third of students enrolled in ABE, literacy, and GED programs have disclosed or undisclosed LD. Once the GED or adult secondary diploma is accomplished, many of these students experience extreme difficulty completing postsecondary programs or securing and maintaining employment, and wage progression is all but non-existent.<sup>1</sup> The concerns regarding these difficulties are becoming more widespread. In an extremely competitive global economy there is a continuing realization that the demands of a twenty-first century workforce require a more educated, differently skilled employee who is a high-performer.<sup>2</sup> There must be adequate planning, services and support to assist students with LD to transition from ABE programs to postsecondary and work environments.

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<sup>1</sup> Price, L. A. & Shaw, S. F. (2000). An instructional model for adults with learning disabilities. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*, 22(3). Retrieved from Academic Search Premier May 11, 2006.

Seo, Y. J. (2005). Outcomes of students with learning disabilities at age 21 and 24. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 66(02). (ProQuest ID: 885689201)

<sup>2</sup> Gregg, N. (2007). Underserved and Unprepared: Postsecondary Learning Disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice (Blackwell Publishing Limited)*, 22(4), 219-228. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5826.2007.00250.x

National Center on Education and the Economy. (2007) Tough choices tough time: The report of the new commission on the skills of the American workforce. Washington DC. <http://www.skillscommission.org/report.htm>

US Department of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education (2007) Ready for college adult transition programs, adult basic and literacy education fact sheet. Retrieved June 2012 <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/sectech/factsheet/ready-for-college-adult.html>

For students who remain in high school, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 (revised 1997 and 2004) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 amended, provides scaffolding for transition planning and services for students who have LD. Sometime between ages fourteen and sixteen, both federal acts require the development of an individualized transition and employment plan for secondary students who have LD.

For students with LD who leave the secondary education system without a high school diploma or the development and completion of a transition plan, the benefits of such may not be readily accessible. The conversation about transition services from ABE, literacy and GED programs to postsecondary and work environments for all enrolled students has been ongoing for more than a decade.<sup>3</sup> Following the passage of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) played a significant role in implementing the Department of Education vision of postsecondary opportunities for all adult secondary and basic education students through the administration of the *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA)* [Workforce Investment Act, Title II, Pub. L. 105-220]. A major portion of the federal investment was devoted to addressing transition to postsecondary education. Throughout the next years, methodology and common goals turned into transition models and programs.<sup>4</sup>

For students with LD, *transition planning* must be characteristically defined as the development of a managed group of activities specific to the needs of the student that articulates the level and type of transition services needed to support successful movement from ABE, literacy and GED programs to a postsecondary or workplace opportunity. Such opportunity may include but not be limited to higher education, occupational and technical training, coordinated employment (including work-study, internships, work experience, try-out-employment, and on-the-job-training), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living and community involvement.<sup>5</sup> *Transition services* are the implementation of the managed group of activities, specific to the pre-developed transition plan. Transition planning does not imply automatic transition services and transition services do not imply a pre-developed student-centered anchor plan has been put into place.

Given general assumptions regarding transition planning and provision of services for students with LD in ABE, literacy and GED programs, there are often substantial gaps. A number of students with LD drop out of high school and later enroll in ABE,

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<sup>3</sup> US Department of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education (2007) Ready for college adult transition programs, adult basic and literacy education fact sheet. Retrieved June 2012 <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/sectech/factsheet/ready-for-college-adult.html>

<sup>4</sup> Alamprese, J. (2005). Helping adult learners make the transition to postsecondary education. *Adult Education Background Papers*: United States Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Retrieved April 24, 2006 from [www.c-pal.net](http://www.c-pal.net).

Prince, D. & Jenkins, D. (2005). Building pathways to success for low-skill adult students: Lessons for community college policy and practice from a statewide longitudinal tracking study. *Community College Research Center*. Teachers College, Columbia University. <http://www.tc.edu/ccrc/>

US Department of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education (2007) Ready for college adult transition programs, adult basic and literacy education fact sheet. Retrieved June 2012 <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/sectech/factsheet/ready-for-college-adult.html>

<sup>5</sup> Murphy, M. & Golden, T. P. (2004). Articulating roles and responsibilities in the transition planning process: A practice aimed at figuring out how to work together. *Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute Collection*. Digital Commons@ILR, <http://digitalcommons.ilrcornell.edu/edicollect/110>

literacy and GED programs. These adult students with LD are frequently unexposed to much-needed transition planning and services. There is an assumption that adult students with LD can participate in and benefit from transition planning and the provision of related activities and services as easily as their peers who do not have LD. Researchers have validated that, while this appears plausible, it is not necessarily true. Many adult students with LD need additional supports.<sup>6</sup>

Given the estimated number of adult students with LD enrolled in ABE, literacy, and GED programs and understanding what is known about the transition success of students with LD, comprehensive and effective transition planning and service delivery must be in place.

The need for explicit transition plans and services for students with LD is crucial. Due to the invisible nature of LD, teachers and counselors may sincerely believe that the student has processed and connected disseminated information and understands how to use the received information. However, researchers suggest this is frequently not the case.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the need for clearly designed transition plans with explicitly stated goals, objectives and steps as well as the supports and mentoring to implement the plan and access services.

The Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) encourages its members to help adult education programs meet the challenge of providing effective transition plans and services for adult students with LD. Members may volunteer at local ABE, literacy, and GED programs and may provide information about learning disabilities, help with transition planning and service identification, volunteer with tutoring and mentoring, and assist with community engagement.

LDA's position is to strongly advocate the need for appropriate planning, services and support to assist students with LD to transition from ABE programs to postsecondary and work environments.

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<sup>6</sup> Gregg, N. (2007). Underserved and Unprepared: Postsecondary Learning Disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice (Blackwell Publishing Limited)*, 22(4), 219-228. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5826.2007.00250.x

<sup>7</sup> Fabian, E. (2007). Urban youth with disabilities: Factors affecting transition employment. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*. 50(3) 130-138.

Maudslay, L. (2003). Policy change in post-school learning for people with disabilities and learning difficulties and the implications for practice. *Support for Learning*. 18(1), 6-11.

Payne, N. (2010). Adults who have learning disabilities: Transition from GED to postsecondary activities. Ph.D. dissertation, Capella University, United States -- Minnesota. Retrieved June 23, 2012, from Dissertations and Theses: Full Text.(Publication No. AAT 3423844).

## Resources for Transition Planning

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**Center for Applied Special Technology** specifically focuses on access and methodology for all students to learn using a universal design for learning model. [www.cast.org/udl](http://www.cast.org/udl)

**Job Accommodations Network** provides free, confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues for people with disabilities as well as employers. <http://askjan.org/>

**K and W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity**, available in the Reference section of most libraries.

**Learning Disabilities Association of America** provides information and resources about learning disabilities, postsecondary access, workplace and community engagement. [www.lidaamerica.org](http://www.lidaamerica.org)

**LD Online** provides information about adult transition to postsecondary and work [www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org)

**National Clearinghouse on Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Disabilities** provides information about educational support services, procedures and opportunities at a variety of postsecondary entities. [www.heath.gwu.edu](http://www.heath.gwu.edu)

**National Center for Learning Disabilities** provides information regarding transition including checklists for various ages. [www.nclld.org](http://www.nclld.org)

**National Center on Secondary Education And Transition (NCSET)** focuses on secondary education and transition. <http://www.ncset.org>

**National College Transition Network** provides assistance and information for general transition plans and strategies. [www.collegeforadults.org/studentcenter/challenges.html](http://www.collegeforadults.org/studentcenter/challenges.html)

**Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills** describes the P21 Framework for curriculum and definitions of elements. [www.p21.org](http://www.p21.org)

**Peterson's Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities or AD/HD**, available in the Reference section of most libraries.

**Postsecondary Innovative Transition Technology (POST-ITT)** provides a technology-based tool to assist in transition planning. [www.cped.uconn.edu/transition.html](http://www.cped.uconn.edu/transition.html)

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