



**SAMUEL CENTRE
FOR SOCIAL
CONNECTEDNESS**

Inclusive Post-Secondary Education in Canada and the United States

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www.socialconnectedness.org
August 2018

ABSTRACT

This report examines inclusive post-secondary opportunities for young adults with intellectual disabilities in North America. The opportunity to attend an institute of higher learning is equally, if not more, significant for students with disabilities as it is for those without. College not only lends itself to higher wages and more fulfilling employment, but also provides invaluable social connections, life skills and self-determination. Students often leave college with a higher degree of self-confidence and are more prepared to be their own advocates.

Inclusive higher education initiatives were surveyed in Canada and the United States in an effort to better understand the current climate of inclusive post-secondary education. Respondents brought up three main barriers: financial challenges, lack of post-secondary options and insufficient awareness of existing initiatives.

Think College is a national organization in the United States that works to develop and improve research and practice as it relates to inclusive higher education. Think College offers a search tool for inclusive programs in the United States, which is an invaluable resource for anyone searching for initiatives in their area. Think College also coordinates the implementation of Transition and Post-Secondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID), an inclusive higher education initiative that was born out of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA).

Special Olympics has a presence on college and university campuses through their Special Olympics College Clubs and through a partnership with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III. Despite Special Olympics' presence on numerous campuses, many of these campuses do not employ inclusive initiatives. This is where Special Olympics could use its influence to facilitate inclusive post-secondary initiatives. In addition, Special Olympics should use its vast reach with youth to increase awareness about college as an option for young people with intellectual disabilities.

Additional recommendations highlighted in this paper include: continuing to establish new post-secondary programs, using data from pre-established initiatives to produce evidence-based standards and best practices, and supporting research in the field of inclusive higher education.

INTRODUCTION

The topic of inclusive post-secondary education has been gaining significant momentum in the United States and certain parts of Canada. Inclusive post-secondary initiatives exist when students with intellectual disabilities are provided the opportunity to enrol in courses on a college or university campus alongside their peers without disabilities. The realm of higher education has historically excluded students with disabilities, but inclusive initiatives across the globe are working to reverse this and promote acceptance in their communities. In general, students that are involved in inclusive post-secondary initiatives are non-matriculating, take classes for audit rather than credit and receive a certificate of completion in place of a degree or diploma. In most cases, students with disabilities will participate in campus clubs, activities and sports alongside their peers.

In fact, the literature suggests that acceptance of individuals with disabilities is facilitated when schools, social activities and sports teams are “inclusive,” that is, when individuals with and without disabilities participate together as equals.¹ Inclusive post-secondary initiatives work to end discrimination and isolation of people with intellectual disabilities in higher education and employment, and assist them as they realize and attain their life goals. Research into inclusive higher education is a growing field, especially in the Canadian context. This report seeks to add to the literature. The purpose of this research was to investigate two key questions:

- What is the current climate in North America toward inclusive post-secondary education?

¹ Cynthia May, “An Investigation of Attitude Change in Inclusive College Classes Including Young Adults with an Intellectual Disability,” *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities* 9, 4 (2017): Pages 240-246.

- Within North America, students with intellectual disabilities are integrated in to high school classrooms, however there is a disconnect when it comes to college and university. Why does this disconnect exist?

This research was undertaken by the Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness (SCSC) in partnership with Special Olympics International (SOI). As a result, I have taken into account the position of both organizations with regards to inclusive post-secondary education. In particular, I examined the relationship between Special Olympics and inclusive initiatives in North America, focusing on uncovering what impact, if any, Special Olympics movements have had on the establishment of inclusive post-secondary education. I will provide recommendations for how SCSC and SOI may best support inclusive post-secondary education moving forward.

METHODOLOGY

In order to have a full understanding of Special Olympics' presence on college campuses in the United States, I created a map of campuses across the country that have Special Olympics College Clubs, those that have inclusive programs, and those with both a College Club and inclusive program.² I reached out to every school with both a College Club and inclusive program, and once I had contacted all of them I then reached out to schools with only an inclusive program. Special Olympics does not have the same presence on college campuses in Canada as in the United States, so I reached out to all Canadian schools with inclusive post-secondary initiatives.

² Map of 'inclusive campuses' in the United States: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1H0xuQbnmRMz86mVH3p-xmB97IZlrbhK&usp=sharing>.

In total, 31 individuals representing inclusive post-secondary initiatives were interviewed, including three instances where two people participated simultaneously. Of these, five were in Canada, and the remaining were located across the United States. In addition, two individuals involved in non-profit organizations that work on inclusive post-secondary education at the state-level were interviewed, and one member of the Think College team. Four representatives of Special Olympics were interviewed. All but four interviews took place over the phone. General questions for interviews were based on those from Mosoff et al. (2009), while I wrote program-specific questions as well as questions pertaining to Special Olympics. In order to avoid losing data due to faulty recording devices, I took notes during all interviews.

TERMINOLOGY

One of the challenges in researching higher education in Canada and the United States is analyzing the different terminology used across country lines. For the sake of clarity, I will briefly describe the definitions that I will adhere to during this report, and provide a brief explanation of my decision when applicable.

- College and University: The terms “college” and “university” have different meanings in Canada and the United States. In Canada, colleges focus on career training and trades, while universities focus on academic and professional programs. Colleges award certificates and diplomas, whereas universities award degrees. In the United States, colleges are typically smaller, and only offer undergraduate degrees, while universities are larger and offer a range of academic programs at the undergraduate and graduate level. However, in American English, “college” and “university” are used interchangeably,

and most people use the term “college” to refer to post-secondary education in general.

This report will use the American version of “college” unless otherwise specified.

- Program: This report uses the following definition of “program”: a formal arrangement of services and supports that create access to post-secondary education for students with intellectual disabilities.³ The term “program” is used in policy in the United States to define the course of study and establish guidelines of what must be included for students to qualify for financial aid, which is the same as the term used to describe any college student’s course of study.⁴ I acknowledge that certain organizations in Canada do not use the term “program” to describe inclusive post-secondary education, and will use ‘initiative’ as a replacement. I will always use “initiative” when referring to both Canada and the United States.
- Intellectual Disability: This report will use the definition provided by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD): “Intellectual disability is a disability characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18.”⁵

CURRENT POLICY

In the United States, federal law has played a significant part in increasing access to post-secondary education for students with intellectual disabilities. The Higher Education Opportunity

³ Meg Grigal, Debra Hart, and Cate Weir, “Post-Secondary Education for People with Intellectual Disability: Current Issues and Critical Challenges,” *Inclusion* 1, 1 (2013): Pages 50-63. doi: 10.1352/2326-6988-1.1.050.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, “Definition of Intellectual Disability.” <http://aidd.org/intellectual-disability/definition>.

Act of 2008 (HEOA) (P.L. 110-315), a reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965, is the most recent piece of federal legislation that addresses this increased access directly. Though the HEOA addresses increased access to post-secondary education in general, thanks to various advocacy initiatives, there was a particular focus on students with disabilities.⁶ The HEOA marked the first time that “intellectual disability” was defined in higher education legislation. The HEOA opened access to more diverse funding options for students with intellectual disabilities with the creation of Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP) certification. Currently, 79 programs are CTP-approved and offer federal financial aid to their students.⁷ The HEOA also designated funds to support model demonstration programs, known as Transition and Post-Secondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSID). In 2010, the Office of Post-Secondary Education (OPE) awarded grants to 27 institutions of higher learning in 23 states for the implementation of TPSID project and created a National Coordinating Center for these projects, hosted by Think College.⁸ As of May 2018, 17 states have legislation or policy on inclusive higher education.⁹

WHY IS POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IMPORTANT?

The significance of this research is tied to the notion that post-secondary education is an important opportunity that ought to be equally available to all sections of society. In

⁶ Joseph W. Madaus, Jennifer S. Kowitt, and Adam R. Lalor, “The Higher Education Opportunity Act: Impact on Students with Disabilities,” *Rehabilitation Education* 26, 1 (2012): Pages 33-42. doi: 10.1891/216866512805000893.

⁷ Think College, “College Search,” Accessed August 18, 2018. <https://thinkcollege.net/college-search>.

⁸ Meg Grigal, “Post-Secondary Education for People with Intellectual Disability: Current Issues and Critical Challenges,” (2013).

⁹ Think College National Coordinating Center, “Higher education access for students with intellectual disability in the United States,” (2018).

demonstrating the value of higher education, and in particular the availability of post-secondary education to those with intellectual disabilities, this report focuses on two distinct dimensions of value provided by post-secondary education:

- The first dimension focuses on the instrumental value of post-secondary education by examining its relationship with employability and wages.
- The second dimension focuses on the intrinsic value of the experience of attending a post-secondary institution.

Evidence for the importance and value of post-secondary education can be clearly seen in the discrepancy in both employment rates and wages of those who are employed between those who have and have not received any form of post-secondary education. According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, 18.7 percent of persons with a disability were employed in 2017, compared to 65.7 percent of persons without a disability (both aged 16 and over).¹⁰ Also, in 2017 individuals with a disability possessed a substantially higher rate of unemployment when compared to their counterparts without a disability. The most recent statistics show the employment rate of Canadians aged 25 to 64 with disabilities was 49 percent, while Canadians in the same age group without disabilities had an employment rate of 79 percent.¹¹ Compared to adults without disabilities, adults with disabilities in Canada have lower education levels, higher unemployment rates and lower household incomes in addition to

¹⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics - 2017," Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. June 21, 2018. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm>.

¹¹ Martin Turcotte, "Persons with Disabilities and Employment," *Insights on Canadian Society: Persons with Disabilities and Employment* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2014).

challenges accessing affordable housing, health care and transportation.¹² Thus, it is clear that equal employment opportunities are a significant issue for individuals with a disability.

The opportunity to attend some form of post-secondary education becomes imperative for people with disabilities when one considers that workers with even some post-secondary education have a lower unemployment rate than those with none. Furthermore, those who have some form of post-secondary education tend to earn wages that are demonstrably higher than those who have not (e.g., those with a bachelor's degree tend to receive wages almost twice as high as those with only a high school education). Even when individuals with disabilities gain employment, the lack of opportunity for them to receive some form of post-secondary education limits their ability to increase their earnings. A case study by Moore and Schelling (2015) found that employment rates improved for students with intellectual disability following graduation from post-secondary programs compared to individuals with intellectual disability who did not attend a post-secondary program.¹³ Indeed, the literature indicates that improved employment rates have been demonstrated for individuals with intellectual disability who attended a post-secondary education program.¹⁴ Thus, it is clear that post-secondary education possesses an instrumental role in both attaining employment and receiving competitive wages.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Eric J. Moore and Amy Schelling, "Post-Secondary inclusion for individuals with an intellectual disability and its effects on employment," *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities* 19, 2 (2015): Pages 130-148. doi: 10.1177/1744629514564448.

¹⁴ Cynthia Zafft, Debra Hart and Karen Zimbrich, "College Career Connection: A Study of Youth with Intellectual Disabilities and the Impact of Post-Secondary Education," *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities* 39, 1 (2004): Pages 45-53.

In addition to instrumental value, the value of post-secondary education can be clearly seen in those areas that contribute to the intrinsic value of one's life outside of employment. For instance, the very experience of post-secondary education, of living on one's own and taking increased responsibility, contributes to a sense of individuality that is an important step in the progression into young adulthood.

I asked participants what changes they observed in students before and after participation in inclusive post-secondary initiatives, and nearly every respondent mentioned enhanced self-confidence and self-advocacy. Many students have had their parents advocate for them their entire life, and after being involved in higher education, they are able to communicate their desires, needs, and concerns more effectively than before. Self-advocacy is an important aspect of adult life.

College offers students the opportunity to explore personal goals related to adult learning, employment and social connections, and it is unclear whether there exists any other institution that provides opportunities such as these in the same way. The sense of personal responsibility afforded to students at post-secondary institutions is significant in allowing students to take risks and make mistakes in a safe environment, where they can learn from such mistakes. Independence and self-determination are vital aspects of modern adult life, and post-secondary education is an effective way in which one can come to possess these attributes. By limiting the opportunity for individuals with disabilities to attend such institutions, we limit their ability to realize their own potential as human beings and stifle their ability to effectively pursue their own personal goals and values.

In order to create equality in both dimensions discussed above, we must attack the source of the problem by creating equal opportunities for an individual to receive a post-secondary education regardless of disability status.

ISSUES, EVIDENCE AND KEY FINDINGS

Definitions of Inclusion and Inclusion in Practice

Before discussing the nature and landscape of inclusive post-secondary education in North America, it is important to acknowledge that answers to the questions “*How should ‘inclusion’ be defined?*” and “*What does inclusion look like in practice?*” are not clear-cut and universal. One of the challenges of discussing the wider issue of inclusive post-secondary education is that it is often the case that the term ‘inclusion’ means substantially different things to different individuals.

One of the most pertinent takeaways from my interviews with inclusive post-secondary programs was that, rather than suggesting or asserting that one particular type or method of inclusion is preferable or more effective than others, students and parents together ought to be given the opportunity to learn about the various ways in which inclusive post-secondary education can be structured and practiced and make an informed decision as to which of these forms of inclusion they believe will be the most suited to their individual circumstances. Just as students without disabilities are able to assess what type of college experience they prefer, so too should students with disabilities.

By informing prospective students and their parents of the strengths afforded by each of these techniques, we not only allow them to find a program that caters to their specific needs and circumstances, but also provide a sense of ownership in their decision. Instead of having a particular type of program prescribed to them, they can exercise a sense of intentionality and responsibility for the path of their education. For example, certain programs offer a type of life skills class for their students to learn in depth about various aspects of adult life. This might appeal to some students, while others might prefer a fully inclusive experience without life skills classes, which tend to be segregated. Certain programs open their life skills classes to the entire student body in order to make them inclusive.

Another consequence of the process of defining notions of inclusivity is that certain programs that claim to be inclusive, may fail to demonstrate inclusivity in practice. This often takes the form of inclusivity to provide services for those with disabilities, however defined, but not programs that are designed specifically for the inclusion of those with intellectual disabilities. While these institutions provide a necessary service to those with “disabilities,” the reality is that disability is a broad term encompassing many dimensions, and that particular services and forms inclusion do not apply universally to all forms of disability. Rather, the most effective forms of inclusion will pertain to particular forms of disability – in other words, to effectively address inclusion, we must consider the unique aspects of such disabilities. Another distinction between disability “services” or “offices” and particularly “inclusive” post-secondary education programs, is that students with disabilities are often non-matriculating and take courses for audit. Nevertheless, these programs provide opportunities for students to enroll in courses for credit and, in some cases, allow students to go-on to matriculated programs at college after completion.

Though certain exceptions may be made for particular cases with extraordinary circumstances, for the purposes of this report, inclusion in the setting of post-secondary education programs are broadly defined as programs taking place on the campus of an institution of higher learning, in which students with intellectual disabilities are not completely segregated and are afforded opportunities to pursue some form of post-secondary education.

Inclusive post-secondary Education in the United States

As of 2017, there are 4,360 degree-granting post-secondary institutions in the United States.¹⁵ Currently, about 6 percent of these schools provide options for students with intellectual disabilities. Despite the recent growth in post-secondary options for students with intellectual disabilities, there is still much progress to be made. According to Think College, there are 268 higher education programs for students with intellectual disabilities in 49 of the 50 states.¹⁶ West Virginia is the only state that has yet to establish an inclusive program for students with intellectual disability. Though Wyoming ran an inclusive pilot program, Think College Wyoming, it no longer accepts students due to a lack of funding.¹⁷

Think College Wyoming is certainly not alone in encountering financial challenges. Multiple programs expressed facing barriers related to funding – whether not having sufficient funds currently or concerns relating to future funding after current grants expire. In fact,

¹⁵ National Center for Education Statistics, “Degree-granting post-secondary institutions, by control and level of institution: Selected years, 1949-50 through 2016-17,” *Digest of Education Statistics*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_317.10.asp?current=yes.

¹⁶ Think College National Coordinating Center, “Higher education access for students with intellectual disability in the United States,” *Think College Snapshot* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion, May 2018).

¹⁷ Sandy Root-Elledge (Executive Director Wyoming Institute for Disabilities), interviewed by Eden Beschen, Toronto, ON, July 2018.

programs that start out with grant or seed money often have difficulty diversifying their funding.¹⁸ Many respondents described the importance of creating a self-sustaining funding model, adding that this can be difficult to accomplish.

One key aspect of inclusive post-secondary programs is academic inclusion – students engaged in courses alongside their peers without a disability. In most cases, students with intellectual disabilities audit classes and are non-matriculating students. Many programs offer the option to take courses for credit, but in some cases this may change tuition fees. Programs vary in the classes offered – some programs allow students to take any course in the catalogue, some only allow students to take classes of a certain level (e.g., 100- and 200-level courses), while some allow students to take any course with the instructor’s permission. Programs may have students take required courses that were made specifically for their program, while others have students spend 100 percent of their time in courses with students without a disability.

As mentioned earlier, college is an important stepping stone to employment. This is reflected in the fact that the majority of programs have a focus on helping their students develop the skills necessary to pursue and attain meaningful employment. Programs allow students to choose classes and internships that align with their goals and vision for the future. Inclusive post-secondary initiatives often use person-centered planning to curate each student’s college experience based on their personal and professional goals.

¹⁸ Meg Grigal, “Post-Secondary Education for People with Intellectual Disability: Current Issues and Critical Challenges,” (2013).

Independent living is a crucial aspect of adult life that people typically experience initially during their time at college. With this in mind, inclusive post-secondary education programs frequently seek to equip students with the skills they need to achieve their goals related to independent living. Out of the 258 programs listed on Think College's *College Search* tool, 84 offer housing. Some programs offer on-campus housing, where students live in dorms alongside their peers without a disability. Other programs offer students off-campus housing, usually in apartments. In some cases, students live with other students in their program, while in others their roommates are students outside of their program. Out of the 25 programs I spoke with in the United States, 17 offered some form of housing. Offering housing is something that these programs hold in high regard; when asked what makes their program unique, 11 noted that they provide inclusive housing options.

Current Challenges to Inclusive Post-Secondary Education in the United States

When asked what they thought parents view as barriers to their children's post-secondary education, almost all respondents brought up financial barriers. Funding options are limited for students and their families, and post-secondary education in the United States is expensive. After the implementation of the HEOA, inclusive programs that are certified as a Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTP) are able to offer students access to forms of federal financial aid such as Pell Grants, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and work-study funds.¹⁹ However, students with intellectual disabilities cannot access student loans to pay for their education. Most programs are not sufficiently funded to afford large scholarships but there are nonprofit

¹⁹ Joseph W. Madaus, "The Higher Education Opportunity Act: Impact on Students with Disabilities," (2012).

organizations such as Ruby's Rainbow and the D.R.E.A.M. Partnership (both started by parents of students with intellectual disabilities) that work to provide scholarship options.

Attitudinal barriers were also frequently mentioned by participants, which is in line with the literature.²⁰ More specifically, many participants mentioned that students with intellectual disabilities frequently face low expectations of their success in academic and professional arenas. Low expectations can affect outcomes, as students with intellectual disabilities who face low expectations are less likely to attend college, vocational/technical schools or work for pay compared to other disability groups.²¹ In addition, parents are frequently told that their child with an intellectual disability will not be able to attend college. One study found that while parents wanted their children with intellectual disabilities to attend post-secondary education, few believed or expected that their children would attain that goal.²² If parents do not expect their children to attend college, it is unlikely that they will save money for post-secondary education in the same manner that they would for a child without a disability. The result is that previously existing financial barriers are extenuated. Thus, the presence of informed transition personnel in high school as well as raising awareness about the existence of inclusive post-

²⁰ Debra Hart, Meg Grigal, Caren Sax, Donna Martinez, and Madeleine Will, "Research to Practice: Post-Secondary Education Options for Students with Intellectual Disabilities," *Institute for Community Inclusion Research to Practice Series* 45 (2006).

²¹ Meg Grigal, Debra Hart, and Alberto Migliore, "Comparing the Transition Planning, Post-Secondary Education and Employment Outcomes of Students with Intellectual and Other Disabilities," *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals* 34, 1 (2011a): Pages 4-17. doi: 10.1177/0885728811399091.

²² Donna C. Martinez, James W. Conroy, and Mary C. Cerreto, "Parent Involvement in the Transition Process of Children With Intellectual Disabilities: The Influence of Inclusion of Parent Desires and Expectations for Post-Secondary Education," *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities* 9, 4 (2012): Pages 279-288.

secondary education are vital steps to ensure that families can hold high expectations for their children, regardless of disability.^{23,24}

Access to inclusive post-secondary programs is another barrier that many students and families face. Most states have only one or two inclusive programs for students with intellectual disabilities. Some respondents described situations where students and their families relocated so that they could attend an inclusive post-secondary program; however, relocation is a luxury that many cannot afford. Programs that offer housing can often support out-of-state students without necessitating the entire family to move. However, not all families are necessarily comfortable with their children moving to a different state. In a similar vein, students who commute often face barriers with transportation, especially in rural settings. Many respondents expressed that if more schools offered inclusive post-secondary education, problems of access could be alleviated.

Inclusive Post-Secondary Education in Canada

In Canada, inclusive post-secondary education initiatives for students with intellectual disabilities work to remedy one of the last remaining systemic obstacles in the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities as full members of society.²⁵ Unlike their neighbors to the South, Canada does not have a national department or ministry of education; each province and

²³ Megan M. Griffin, Elise D. McMillan, and Robert M. Hodapp, "Family Perspectives on Post-Secondary Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities," *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities* 45, 3 (2010): Pages 339-346.

²⁴ Donna Martinez, "Parent Involvement in the Transition Process of Children With Intellectual Disabilities: The Influence of Inclusion of Parent Desires and Expectations for Post-Secondary Education," (2012).

²⁵ Judith Mosoff, Joe Greenholtz, and Tamara Hurtado, *Assessment of Inclusive Post-Secondary Education for Young Adults with Developmental Disabilities*, Vancouver: Canadian Council on Learning, 2009.

territory is responsible for its own education. The result is that inclusive education is different in each province and territory, where policies on inclusive education vary widely in their definitions of inclusion, funding and implementation of inclusive educational practices.²⁶ The lack of a national department overseeing education also makes national data hard to source.

Also, unlike the United States, the right to inclusive education is not protected under federal law; Canada has no federal legislation protecting the right to inclusive education for children with disabilities, because education comes under provincial and territorial jurisdiction.²⁷ Despite this, two provinces have significant movements in inclusive post-secondary education: Alberta and British Columbia.

Alberta has been at the forefront of the movement with 20 inclusive post-secondary initiatives across the province, 14 of which are operated by Inclusion Alberta. According to Uditsky and Hughson, the following have positively contributed to inclusive post-secondary education in Alberta:

Clarity on the meaning of full inclusion, reasonably sustained funding that is not tied to special education or segregated adult programs but to supporting the inclusion of adults with ID (intellectual disabilities), and a provincial advocacy organization, the Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL), which is deeply committed to inclusion across the life span.²⁸

These sentiments were reflected in my conversations with individuals from Alberta. There is a diversity of institutions that offer inclusive post-secondary education in Alberta, including universities and colleges, faith-based and secular, private and public, rural and urban, with large

²⁶ Helena Towle, "Disability and Inclusion in Canadian Education: Policy, Procedure, and Practice," *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives* (June 2015).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Bruce Uditsky and Elizabeth Hughson, "Inclusive Post-Secondary Education - An Evidence-Based Moral Imperative," *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities* 9, 4 (2012): Pages 298-302.

and small student populations. The first inclusive post-secondary initiatives began in the late 1980s with a “conscious desire to apply a particular theoretical approach to creating a good life for individuals with ID and a commitment to gathering evidence as to the effectiveness of this approach.”²⁹

British Columbia has taken a slightly different approach to inclusive post-secondary education, which is led by the British Columbia Initiative for Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (BC-IPSE), a non-profit society that works with colleges and universities. BC-IPSE is unique in its approach to inclusive post-secondary education in that it does not implement inclusive programs, but rather offers supports for students with intellectual disabilities who seek to pursue post-secondary education. BC-IPSE employs inclusion facilitators to support students – one full-time facilitator for every three students on a campus – and to work with instructors and the community with the goal of it being unremarkable for students with intellectual disabilities to be on campus.³⁰

How are Organizations Making a Difference? Highlighting the Work of Think College and Special Olympics

Think College

Think College has been an integral part of inclusive higher education in the United States.³¹ A project of the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston, Think College is “dedicated to developing, expanding and improving inclusive higher

²⁹ Uditsky and Hughson, “Inclusive Post-Secondary Education - An Evidence-Based Moral Imperative,” 2012.

³⁰ Arden Duncan Bonokoski (Provincial Coordinator and Director of Community Development BC Initiative for Inclusive Post-Secondary Education), interviewed by Eden Beschen, Toronto, ON, August 2018.

³¹ See www.ThinkCollege.net.

education options for people with intellectual disability.”³² Think College works to develop and improve research and practice as it relates to inclusive post-secondary education in the following ways:

- *Generating and sharing knowledge:* Conducting research related to higher education for students with intellectual disabilities, and using findings to create resources for expanding access and improving student outcomes. Think College has a resource library that includes both internal and external publications.
- *Guiding institutional change:* Through the development of standards, quality indicators and benchmarks, Think College helps guide colleges and universities to create quality inclusive higher education and to ensure that students with intellectual disabilities are included in all aspects of campus life.
- *Informing public policy:* Think College works with experts to stay engaged in monitoring legislative and educational trends, while also providing policy makers with information on evidence-based practices to assist in the development of informed policy.
- *Engaging with students, professionals and families:* Think College uses a variety of tools to facilitate collaboration between families, educators and students. Think College also provides training and technical assistance face-to-face and online.³³

³² Think College. “What is Think College?” Accessed August 17, 2018. <https://thinkcollege.net/about/what-is-think-college>.

³³ Think College. “Think College Fact Sheet.” Accessed August 17, 2018. https://thinkcollege.net/sites/default/files/files/resources/TC_factsheet_2018_web_F.pdf.

As previously mentioned, one of Think College's projects is the National Coordination Centre for TPSID grantees. There have been two cohorts of TPSID grantees – 27 institutions received funds for the 2010-2015 period, and a second cohort of 25 institutions for 2015-2020. Think College's National Coordination Center collects data from TPSIDs, provides technical assistance to TPSIDs and non-TPSIDs alike, and works to create a knowledge base surrounding effective inclusion in higher education.

One resource that Think College provides is a searchable database of college programs across the United States for students with intellectual disabilities. This tool is immensely helpful for families, students, researchers and anyone who is looking to find out more information about programs. The user can search for programs by location, keyword or program name, and can apply filters such as whether the program offers housing or financial aid.³⁴ Each program has its own page that provides self-reported information ranging from costs to the percentage of time students will spend with only other students in the program. The Think College *College Search* tool is easy to use, and the main vehicle for prospective students and their families to explore their options for college. Canada does not have a national organization such as Think College.

Special Olympics

In Canada, Special Olympics has a minimal presence on college or university campuses. In the United States, Special Olympics' presence on college campuses manifests in two main ways: Special Olympics College Clubs and National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III Partnership Unified Intramural Sports.

³⁴ Think College. "College Search." Accessed August 17, 2018. <https://thinkcollege.net/college-search>.

There are about 225 campuses across the United States that have a Special Olympics College Clubs on campus. Out of these, 50 campuses have both a College Club and an inclusive post-secondary program. College Clubs are student-run initiatives that act to connect college students and individuals with intellectual disabilities through sport to build social connections and “help lead the social justice movement of Special Olympics.”³⁵ In order to be considered a Special Olympics College Club, three fundamental elements must be present: Unified Sports, Youth Leadership and Full Campus Engagement.

Unified Sports have college students and Special Olympics athletes participate in sport on the same team. Unified Sports operate under the assumption that training and playing together is “a quick path to friendship and understanding.”³⁶ In this context, Unified Partners are college students without intellectual disabilities playing with Special Olympics athletes. In most cases, Unified Sports functions as an intramural or club sport, but at advanced levels tournaments with other local Special Olympics College Clubs may occur.³⁷ The Youth Leadership aspect of Special Olympics College Clubs is evident in the fact that students plan events and meet regularly. Special Olympics encourages College Clubs to invite Special Olympics athletes to become members. Full Campus Engagement can take many forms, such as raising awareness, pledge signing drives and rallies. Activities that can engage the whole student body at the college or university fall under “Full Campus Engagement.”

³⁵ Special Olympics. “Special Olympics College.” Accessed August 16, 2018. <https://www.specialolympics.org/our-work/unified-schools/college>.

³⁶ Special Olympics. “Special Olympics College Club Starter Guide.” Accessed August 16, 2018. <https://dotorg.brightspotcdn.com/50/9b/81efdc824cc2a1ad0032e7fe4c13/special-olympics-college-club-starter-guide.pdf>.

³⁷ Ibid.

In 2011, the Division III Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) and Special Olympics developed a partnership in order to, “enhance the lives of Division III student-athletes and Special Olympics athletes through a mutual learning experience; provide a platform for recognition of Special Olympics athletes and Division III student-athletes within their communities; and raise awareness of Special Olympics, its programs and services.”³⁸ Division III student-athletes across the United States are encouraged to participate in existing Special Olympics events, create their own events or support Special Olympics organization in other ways (e.g. volunteer, fundraise). There are 451 NCAA Division III schools, and eight percent have an inclusive post-secondary program on campus.

The programs surveyed for this research indicated varying degrees of Special Olympics involvement. Out of the 25 programs I spoke with in the United States, 14 had a College Club on campus. Some reported that their program had no formal relationship with Special Olympics, but individual students may participate in local events that they were involved with prior to attending college. Other programs indicated that their students do indeed participate in Unified Sports on campus.

Note that several respondents commented that the philosophy of Special Olympics may not align itself with certain interpretations of inclusion. These interpretations generally hold that inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities manifests when these students receive the same treatment that students without disabilities receive. Therefore, the idea that students with disabilities would have to identify as such, may lead to differential treatment as opposed to full

³⁸ NCAA. “Special Olympics Partnership.” Accessed August 16, 2018. <http://www.ncaa.org/about/special-olympics-partnership>.

inclusion. Some also view Special Olympics as more segregated than inclusive, because traditionally Special Olympics is only for people with an intellectual disability. However, even when respondents described these feelings, they also stated that they would never discourage their students from getting involved with Special Olympics, but rather they may not specifically encourage it, or they may encourage students to join sporting activities offered on campus.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Advocates should continue to push for informed policy regarding inclusive post-secondary education in both the United States and Canada. This is particularly important in Canada as there is very little existing legislation concerning inclusion in higher education.

Standards of practice should continue to be developed and enhanced in order to hold inclusive initiatives accountable. The word “inclusion” is frequently used to describe an assortment of policies and initiatives, making it difficult to ensure that all parties are clear on what inclusion should look like in practice.³⁹ New inclusive programs should be aligned and integrated into the operations and infrastructure of existing institutes of higher education in order to achieve a greater chance of sustainability.⁴⁰

When asked what recommendations they had for Special Olympics on how to best support inclusive higher education, respondents frequently mentioned raising awareness that these programs exist. One of the barriers to inclusive post-secondary education is a lack of

³⁹ Uditsky and Hughson, “Inclusive Post-Secondary Education - An Evidence-Based Moral Imperative,” 2012.

⁴⁰ Meg Grigal, “Post-Secondary Education for People with Intellectual Disability: Current Issues and Critical Challenges,” (2013).

knowledge about inclusive programs, as families, students and teachers are not aware that college is an option. Recent studies involving parents of young adults with an intellectual disability indicated that although parents may desire higher education for their children, transition professionals exhibit a significant lack of knowledge about existing and available post-secondary education options.^{41,4243} With such an extensive presence in high schools across the United States, Special Olympics should work harder to ensure that this information is disseminated to all young people and their families.

Studies suggest that when peers without a disability had a greater level of comfort with students with intellectual disabilities they found more benefits associated with their inclusion on campus and viewed students with intellectual disabilities as having higher abilities.⁴⁴ By expanding Unified Sports with young people, especially in Canada, Special Olympics can continue to assist in breaking down attitudinal barriers and changing the conversation about people with intellectual disability.

Canada would benefit greatly from the establishment of an organization similar to Think College. Such an organization could facilitate the establishment of inclusive post-secondary education at Canadian institutions, connect individuals with organizations and conduct research specific to the Canadian context. Though there are organizations that work at the provincial level, such as Inclusion Alberta and BC-IPSE, an organization at the national level could positively impact

⁴¹ Megan Griffin, "Family Perspectives on Post-Secondary Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities," (2010).

⁴² Meg Grigal, "Post-Secondary Education for People with Intellectual Disability: Current Issues and Critical Challenges," (2013).

⁴³ Donna Martinez, "Parent Involvement in the Transition Process of Children With Intellectual Disabilities: The Influence of Inclusion of Parent Desires and Expectations for Post-Secondary Education," (2012).

⁴⁴ Meg Grigal, "Post-secondary Education for People with Intellectual Disability: Current Issues and Critical Challenges," (2013).

coordination, establish inclusive post-secondary education initiatives and even work toward the creation of TPSID-like grants for Canadian institutions. In conducting this research, it became clear that a Canadian College Search tool, like that of Think College, would be very helpful for researchers, students, families and inclusive initiatives alike. A major challenge I faced was locating inclusive post-secondary initiatives outside of Alberta and British Columbia. This challenge inspired me to explore the possibility of creating a database for inclusive higher education in Canada.

It is clear that inclusive programs are highly influenced by their environment; as described in one study, “the degree of inclusion embraced by any post-secondary initiative is often a function of the values and knowledge of the architects of these efforts.”⁴⁵ Programs such as InclusiveU at Syracuse University and Next Steps at Vanderbilt University, which are both housed at institutions that are leaders in Disability Studies, will be more successful than programs that are constantly fighting with the university or college for accommodations and acceptance. Thus, it is important to continue to demonstrate to institutions of higher learning the many benefits of inclusive post-secondary education. Special Olympics is in a unique position for facilitating inclusive post-secondary programs. As a highly regarded organization, Special Olympics has significant influence. In addition, whether through College Clubs or the partnership with NCAA Division III schools, Special Olympics has a presence on hundreds of campuses that do not offer options for students with intellectual disabilities. For example, only eight percent of the 451 NCAA Division III schools offer options for students with intellectual disabilities, and while 50

⁴⁵ Uditsky and Hughson, “Inclusive Post-Secondary Education - An Evidence-Based Moral Imperative,” 2012.

colleges and universities with a Special Olympics College Club on campus also offer inclusive programming, 175 do not.

Inclusive post-secondary education is still in its nascent phase. As a result, both the Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness and Special Olympics should continue to support research into inclusive higher education. There is a need for more data surrounding inclusive higher education. Examining these initiatives in order to continue to develop standards and best practices is of utmost importance. When evaluating the success of post-secondary education for students with intellectual disabilities, it may also be useful to develop an effective measurement of self-determination and/or self-confidence to be used alongside indicators such as employment and independent living.⁴⁶ This could be helpful because changes in self-determination/self-confidence were the most frequently observed by the respondents. Both the Samuel Center for Social Connectedness and Special Olympics can contribute to raising awareness about the existence of inclusive post-secondary initiatives, why they are important, and how institutions of higher education can implement inclusive education.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive post-secondary initiatives in the United States and Canada offer a diversity of experiences for students with intellectual disabilities. The situation will improve as more colleges and universities offer to support students with disabilities on campus and more students can

⁴⁶ Cate Weir (Program Director, Think College National Coordinating Center) interviewed by Eden Beschen, Toronto, ON, July 2018.

access higher education. Unfortunately, there is still a long way to go in Canada, as only two provinces have taken initiative to support inclusive post-secondary education.

After conversations with participants, there appear to be three main reasons as to why there is a disconnect between high school and college for students with disabilities:

1. The first is that there are substantially fewer inclusive higher education options than inclusive high school options. Many U.S. states only have one inclusive higher educational program, and most Canadian provinces and territories have none.
2. The second reason is a lack of knowledge about inclusive options. Students, families and teachers alike may not know about inclusive higher education, and thus will not consider it as an option.
3. The third reason for a disconnect is financial barriers. Students with disabilities have limited options for funding their college education, and are typically self-funded, and these programs can be very expensive.

Due to the temporal and spatial limits of this research, it is difficult to offer specific recommendations for Canadian inclusive post-secondary education. As stated, there is limited national coordination in regards to higher education in Canada. Future research on the feasibility of implementing inclusive higher education initiatives in each of the provinces and territories would contribute greatly to the limited literature on Canadian inclusive post-secondary education.

One of the limitations of this report is the number of inclusive post-secondary initiatives that were surveyed and interviewed. Due to the time restrictions of this research, only a fraction of the existing inclusive higher education initiatives in the United States were represented. Also, outreach took place during the summer, when many professionals in higher education are not on campus.

Future studies should seek to include the perspectives of parents and students who have gone through inclusive post-secondary education. These perspectives are incredibly important, and could not be included in this report due to time limitations. Including the voices of students with intellectual disability is particularly important in regards to conversations about what inclusion should look like in higher education. At the end of the day, their experiences are the ones that truly matter.

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