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TRANSITIONS



As you know persons with learning disabilities have had a great deal of difficulty with success in the very recent past. This is still true for adults with learning disabilities without completion of post-secondary education as outlined in the LDAC report ('Putting a Canadian Face on Learning Disabilities' www.pacfold.ca March 2007)

The Transitions Longitudinal Study cohort is proving to be more successful than any group of adults with learning disabilities has ever been. Almost all of you have completed a post-secondary program, with some of you completing two or even three programs! You are making progress with your careers and in life. Certainly there are difficulties, set-backs and bumps on the road, but it simply cannot be said enough—you are proving to be successful in a way that is making history for a population of people with learning disabilities.

It is for this reason that we are launching this new and exciting Newsletter. We want to celebrate your success, share in your set-backs and hear about all the wonderful and usual

things you are encountering in life as we progress from year seven and towards the end of the 10 year study.

So please send in your success stories, (and not so success stories) so that we may share them with the Transitions family because if nothing else, our group of pioneering people are never dull. And don't forget to go online and read the 6th annual report to the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities for all the details about your Transitions progress!

Your Transitions Team

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Facts

- 1 Transitions people are great at multi-tasking, with 89% of study participants who are still in school combining study and work.
- 2 80% of graduating participants felt prepared to seek employment.
- 3 44% of participants report that student debt prevents them from enjoying the lifestyle they want.
- 4 35% of participants do volunteer work in addition to doing everything else in their busy lives.
- 5 63% of participants engage in regular physical activity.

Quotes

From *Transitions* Participants:

"I have found a job in an area I didn't think I could do. Numbers and I never got along very well. It is really satisfying to know I can do it!"

"I enjoy school now since I found out that I have a learning disability and wish to pursue advanced schooling related to my field of study."

"I want to obtain higher levels of pay in my field, but think the specialization is more important because it will directly impact my success in what I do."

"Seeking employment is different from getting a decent job that actually pays the bills and gives one some value to their day."



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2009

After six years of the *Transitions* Longitudinal Study, our participants continue to graduate, work, and make progress with their careers and relationships. As has been said, this level of success would have been considered impossible for a group of adults with learning disabilities as recently as 20 years ago.

Even more recently, in 2007, the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada published a comprehensive report, which presented an alarming profile of Canadians with learning disabilities. In the report, youth and adults with learning disabilities were shown to have high rates of depression, distress, anxiety disorders, and poor physical health. In addition, they were shown to have low educational and employment attainment compared to the general population.

It is the *Transitions* team's contention that this huge difference between the LDAC profile and our *Transitions* cohort is directly related to post-secondary educational attainment. We think it very likely that our *Transitions* Trends--refined from year to year, survey to survey--will allow us to establish this contention as a central study finding at the end of ten years.

This year there have been a number of *Transitions* highlights. Most note-worthy, we have been able to dramatically reverse the normal course of survey attrition, endemic to longitudinal studies, going from 93 participants last year to 123 participants for the 6th Annual Report.

This new figure is even higher than the 119 participants we had two years earlier. As a testament to our *Transitions* participants, it is worth mentioning that without exception, once we were able to locate people after long hours of trying, they were glad to rejoin the *Transitions* family.

Our participants are busy, with 42 having graduated from two different postsecondary programs. Our female participants are no longer experiencing higher rates of unemployment than their male *Transitions* peers. *Transitions* people continue to impress with high rates of volunteerism and a rate of engagement in physical activity that is twice the general population average.

Perhaps most impressive are trends related to employment with an all time high of 93% participants reporting having good relationships with their coworkers, 80% of participants reporting being prepared to seek work, and 74% indicating satisfaction with their jobs.

That 44% of participants report being held back in their lives by debt is a trend of concern. And although 78% report being able to manage their learning disability well, this figure is lower than the 90% in 2008, and therefore a trend worthy of monitoring as we move forward.

Though more difficult to establish as a study finding, we further think that the fundamental reason behind our cohort's success is because the LOTF supports that they received as pilot students placed

Assistive Technology

Assistive Technology & Accommodations

Of the 22 participants currently registered at their Special Needs Office, 18 (81%) are using accommodations, while only 3 (14%) have chosen not to. This is slightly higher than the number of participants using accommodations in 2007, 69%.

Of the 30 participants currently studying, the number of participants using assistive technology is 16 (53%) and 14 (46%) reporting that they do not. This is similar to the 2008 figures, and we still believe that this figure seems low.

The following devices were the most used:

- Kurzweil
- Inspiration
- Palm Pilot
- Dragon Naturally Speaking
- Read/Write
- Digital Voice Recorder
- Graphic Organizer



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY continued...

a great deal of emphasis on developing **resiliency**. From its conception, the primary *Transitions* research question has been to ask what really works, not just for the time of one's post-secondary education, but what really allows one to transform one's life and not fall into the pattern outlined in the LDAC report.

"I have the knowledge and the skills plus the experiences to do the job I would like"
~An enthusiastic *Transitions* Participant~



THE 6th ANNUAL MTCU REPORT ON *TRANSITIONS* TRENDS:

I ☺ **Participants place a high value on post-secondary education.**

In 2009, 29 (24%) *Transitions* participants were still enrolled in post-secondary programs. Most impressive, 11 of our participants graduated from three different programs, and 42 have graduated from two different programs.

II ☺ **Transitions participants have a higher than average retention rate than the general population in post-secondary education.**

In the general population, 15% of post-secondary students leave their program without graduating. In 2009, only 11 (9%) of our *Transitions* cohort left their program without graduating.

III ☺ **Transitions PSE Leavers cite inability to pass required courses as the most common reason for not graduating.**

In 2009, there were eight participants who reported not being able to pass their required courses.

IV ☺ **Transitions participants combine post-secondary education and work reasonable well.**

In 2009, 25 of 29 (89%) participants who are currently studying are also working.

V ☺ **A high percentage of *Transitions* participants are living with their parents or other family members.**

The percentage of *Transitions* participants living at home is 27%, down from 30% last year, as compared to 20% of similar age in the general population.

Did you know?

⇒ Transitions follows the progress of 123 persons with learning disabilities who have graduated from post-secondary and are moving into the workforce and further studies (2010).

⇒ The Transitions longitudinal study is an outcome of the pilot projects funded by the former Learning Opportunities Task Force (LOTF), an arm's length agency of the Ontario Government.

⇒ LOTF was established in the 1997 Ontario budget, to improve the transition of students with specific learning disabilities from secondary school to post secondary education; & enhance services and supports that students with learning disabilities receive in the post-secondary education sector.

⇒ The Task Force was chaired by former Minister of Education, Dr. Bette Stephenson, who introduced the 1980 amendment to the Education Act, commonly known as Bill 82.



The 2009 PROFILE OF TRANSITIONS TRENDS continued...

VI : Financial concerns are impacting on *Transitions* participants' life decisions.

In 2009, 44% of participants report that their student debt prevents them from enjoying the lifestyle they want, compared to 38% in 2008.

VII : The majority of *Transitions* participants, upon graduation, feel prepared to seek employment.

In 2008, 69% of participants felt prepared to seek employment, and this year that figure has gone up to 80%.

VIII : *Transitions* participants have lower salaries and are underemployed compared to the general population.

By a small margin in 2009, we must continue this trend since 13%-15% of participants earn less than \$20,000 annually.

IX : Compared to other Ontario residents aged 22-29 with learning disabilities, *Transitions* participants have a high rate of employment and good salaries.

The LDAC report on learning disabilities notes that 41.2 % of persons with learning disabilities of similar age are unemployed and 26.3% only earn between \$1-999 annually. In 2009, 80% of *Transitions* participants are employed and of these 72% earn salaries of \$20,000 or more.

X : PSE Leavers employed full-time are generally earning salaries that are comparable to graduates in the general population.

In 2009, of the 11 participant Leavers, 8 are employed, and only one woman earning \$18,000 considers herself to be under-employed.

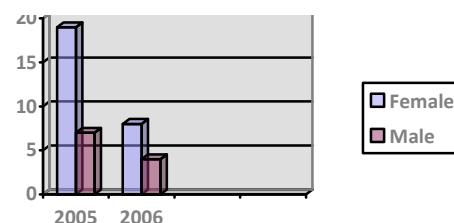
XI : Field of study likely influences low salaries of *Transitions* participants.

Our *Transitions* cohort has often chosen post-secondary programs in the Arts and Social Sciences, whose average annual earnings are lower than in professional programs. For example, in Ontario the average salary six months after graduation for someone with a B.A in 2006 was \$32,010. Compared to a university architecture or engineering student in 2006, at \$52,057.

XII : Female *Transitions* graduates are more likely to experience high rates of unemployment than male participants. (Ending Trend)

In 2005, 19% of female and 7% of male graduates were unemployed, but in 2006 this figure dropped 8% and 4%. Since that time there has been very little change to these low figures, and thus Trend # 12 is ending.

Unemployment rate gender differences



Transitions Portal

www.transitionsportal.ca

The *Transitions* Portal, came into existence in the spring of 2005; after the First Annual *Transitions* Longitudinal Research Study to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

A PDF version of all *Transitions* Annual Reports can presently be downloaded from the *Transitions* Portal.

The Portal is meant to be a virtual meeting place where participants can get together and meet each other to share their experiences about what it is like for them to be in school, or getting through it, as well as discussing how their learning disabilities affect their work.

The Portal provides a forum for participants to gather and discuss important issues, encouragement and concerns with each other despite the diversity in their geographic locations ranging from British Columbia to Nova Scotia.



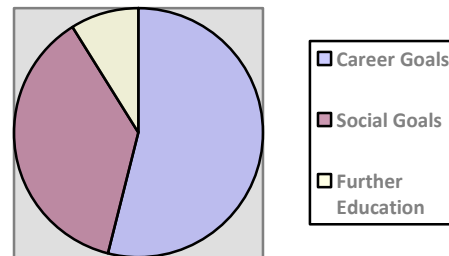
PROFILE OF TRANSITIONS TRENDS continued...

XIII: *Transitions* participants have a slightly higher unemployment rate than the general population.

In 2009, the rate of unemployment among *Transitions* participants is 12.8%, up from 8% last year. This rate of change may be explained by the recession, and is higher than the Canadian rate of 8.6%.

XIV: *Transitions* participants place great emphasis on educational and career goals, while social goals remain relatively low.

In our life goals section, we asked participants, *what kind of goals other than career goals do you wish to achieve in the near future?* 56% responded *buy property*, 69% *travel*, 66% *be debt free*; while social goals such as *get married* 51%, *start a family* 46% and *have a steady relationship* 34% continue to be relatively low goals. *Pursuing further education* remains steady, years after graduation, at 34%.



XV: A high number of *Transitions* participants engage in volunteer work.

Consistent with past years, in 2009, 45 of 123 participants (35%) do volunteer work in addition to everything else in their busy lives.

XVI: A high number of *Transitions* participants engage in physical activity.

In the general population 30% of people regularly participate in physical activity. In 2008 our *Transitions* rate was a comparatively high rate of 59%, and in 2009 it was a very impressive 63%.

XVII: *Transitions* participants appear to be resilient in social relationships.

In 2008, 63% of participants reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their friendships, and 53% reported the same regarding their relationships. In 2009, the satisfaction with friendships figure has risen to 65% and satisfaction with relationships to 54%.

XVIII: *Transitions* participants disclose their learning disabilities at work only when necessary for the job.

In 2009, 48% of participants who were currently employed responded that they had disclosed a learning disability at work, down only slightly from 50% in 2008. In order to receive services as pilot students, 100% had to self-identify to the disability office, and since only two participants had indicated receiving a negative reaction, we can conclude that people identify only as needed for the job.

Transitions Database



The *Transitions* Study Database consists of a very detailed Excel spreadsheet, on which the Research Assistants record everything from telephone numbers to addresses to small notes about what participants are planning on doing in their immediate future. This enables them to get an idea of some of the changes that could happen when the next round of surveying begins.

This database is the primary resource that the Research Assistants work with in terms of contacting participants, updating their contact information, as well as keeping track of how the surveying process is going.

It is then the responsibility of the Research Assistant to contact and engage their own group of participants and to encourage them to complete the survey. This allows participants to recognize and become familiar with the name of their Research Assistant.

PROFILE OF TRANSITIONS TRENDS continued...

XIX : **Significantly more women working full-time disclose their learning disability at work than men working full-time.**

In 2009, 11 men have disclosed to their employer that they have a learning disability compared to 23 women.

XX : **Few participants who are currently employed use accommodations and/or assistive technology at work.**

Of the 99 participants who were employed in 2009, only 20 used accommodations at work. This figure has not substantially changed since the beginning of *Transitions*.

XXI : ***Transitions* participants have good relationships with their coworkers.**

In 2008, 88% of participants described their relationship with their co-workers as comfortable. In 2009, that percentage has risen to an impressive 93%.

XXII : **An overwhelming percentage of *Transitions* participants experienced job satisfaction.**

Transitions participants have always rated high in this category, and in 2009, 74% (the highest percentage so far) indicated that they are satisfied with their job.

XXIII : **Overall, *Transitions* participants feel they have learned how to manage their learning disability.**

Though 78% of participants have indicated that they have learned to manage their disability, it is less than the 2008 *Transitions* high of 92%. This trend will be monitored to determine why there was a percentage drop in this category and what it might mean.

XXIV : **A higher percentage of *Transitions* participants report being employed in a field related to their education than the general population. (New Trend)**

The Provincial Overview of Survey Results of College Students says that 54% of people surveyed in a full-time job are working in a field related to their education. In 2009, 77% of our *Transitions* cohort reports being in a related field, which is up by 2% from last year.



Graduation Statistics

Primary

Forty-two participants graduated, then returned to school, and have recently graduated with another degree/diploma/certificate and will be referred to as having graduated with a "secondary" degree/diploma/certificate.

Eleven participants have graduated from three programs, and will be referred to as having graduated with a "tertiary" degree/diploma/certificate.

Of the fifty-two primary graduates, fourteen graduated with degrees, thirty-four with diplomas and four with certificates.

Secondary

Of the forty-two "secondary" graduates, the highest number, 15, graduated with two degrees.

Seven participants have earned a degree and a diploma. Three participants have earned a degree and a certificate. Eight participants have earned two diplomas, six have earned a diploma and a certificate, and finally three participants have earned two certificates.



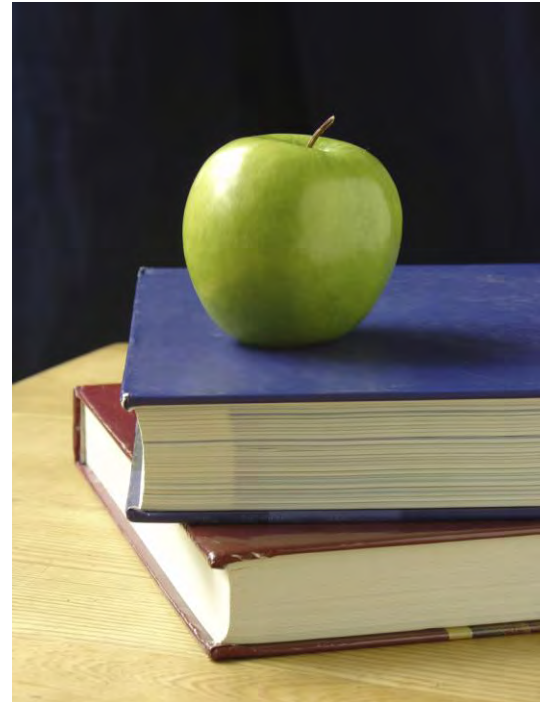
A NOTE ON RESILIENCY

→ Observations on Transitions Progress after Year Six.

It may be that resiliency attainment is as important as educational attainment for persons with learning disabilities, and/or that the former is only possible with the latter. In focus groups of pilot students leading up to the commencement of *Transitions*, students consistently talked about the difficulties of living and dealing with learning disabilities at all levels of school.

People talked about feeling inadequate, stupid, being afraid of failure. Though we would not wish these experiences on young people, perhaps there is a silver lining related to enduring difficult experiences. Perhaps an element of resiliency develops from dealing with not just the learning disability, but with adversity. Our *Transitions Trends* may be indicating that the condition that made life difficult--dealing with a learning disability, otherwise known as *adversity*--is the very thing that has allowed them to adapt, survive and thrive in a competitive adult world.

If we define resiliency as the ability to succeed in the face of adversity, it seems that the experience of having a learning disability, is paying off after all.



The contents of this Transitions Newsletter have been extracted as excerpts from:

Transitions Longitudinal Study. (2010, June). Annual Report to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (6th Annual Report). McCloskey, L., Figura, F., Narraway, K., Vukovic, B.