

Research Summary: Service Providers' Views of Change Processes in Residential Immersive Life Skills Programs

Centre for Leadership in Participation and Inclusion

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SHARING OUR WORK

1. Peer-reviewed article now available (2015): Residential immersive life skills programs for youth with disabilities: Service providers' perceptions of change processes. *Disability and Rehabilitation*
2. Bloorview Research Institute Symposium (2013): *Development and utility of an observation checklist to capture service providers' use of intervention strategies in life skills programs.*

WHO ARE WE?

The Ontario Independence Program Research (OIPR) Team includes researchers and clinicians from three children's treatment centres in Ontario. We are leading a program of research looking at **Residential Immersive Life Skills (RILS) programs** for youth with disabilities. In RILS programs, youth spend multiple nights away from home in a college or university residence and have the opportunity to develop the skills they will need in their adult life.

WHAT WAS THE STUDY ABOUT?

The aim of the study was to learn from service providers about the opportunities that RILS programs offer, how the service providers help to build those opportunities and what kinds of things they encourage participants to do. The programs were **The Independence Program (TIP)** out of Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital (Toronto, Ontario), **Moving On** out of McMaster Children's Hospital (Hamilton, Ontario) and the **Independent Living Program (ILP)** out of ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment and Development (Mississauga, Ontario).

WHAT DID WE DO?

The study took place in 2012. We interviewed personal attendants, occupational therapists, social workers, physical therapists and others who had worked directly with youth at one of the three RILS programs in the previous four years.

We talked to service providers with three different levels of experience: beginner, intermediate and expert. During the interviews, service providers talked about ways that they worked to help RILS program participants change and grow through the program. The interviews lasted an hour to an hour and a half.

We aimed to recruit 24 service providers out of 63 who were eligible. Due to high enthusiasm for the project, we successfully recruited 37 service providers (59%)

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Service providers described three main ways that they helped RILS program participants to change and grow over the course of the programs:

1. The service providers felt that it was important that RILS programs created a **supportive environment** that was safe, engaging and encouraged youth to take control and try new things.
 - ❖ *“Staff are really skilled at building this sort of invisible safety net around the participants. So, you’d let them feel as independent as possible, but at the same time we’re not going to let anything too risky or really bad happen to them.”*
2. The service providers talked about key strategies that they used, including **stepping back** to let youth make their own decisions—and mistakes—and **engaging with youth** to win their trust.
 - ❖ *“I think it’s important for there to be errors made so that they know how to problem solve when they get themselves into those situations...just allowing them to learn on their own.”*
3. The service providers felt that the **intense challenge** of being away from home gave the participants the chance to develop skills, interact socially and take pride in their successes.
 - ❖ *“They’ve all been through a...pretty intense [time] together...just knowing that they accomplished so much in such a short period of time, along with all of their peers in that group...is something that I think they...hold really highly within themselves.”*

Service providers with **different levels of experience** had different perspectives on their work in the RILS programs. The **beginners** talked about specific things that they did during their work with the youth. The **intermediate** group discussed the importance of stepping back to let youth take control and of seeing youths’ strengths. The **experts** talked about their role as helping to create a safe environment that gave opportunities for new experiences that built on the youths’ existing strengths.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS STUDY, PLEASE CONTACT:

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NEXT STEPS

In 2013, we carried out a study with youth who attended The Independence Program (TIP). We talked to youth and their parents before TIP, after TIP, and 2-3 months later to find out what they learned during the program and what stuck with them. We observed workshops and activities that they took part in, and participants shared how they had felt as they did those activities. Look out for our next summary of what we learned!

THANK YOU!

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