

# Research Summary: Service Providers' Views of Key Benefits and Features of Residential Immersive Life Skills Programs

Centre for Leadership in Participation and Inclusion

Gillian King, Amy McPherson, Shauna Kingsnorth,  
Debra Stewart, Tanya Glencross-Eimantas, Jan Willem Gorter, Kimberlea Jones-Galley,  
Andrea Morrison and Ana Maria Isihi



**Holland Bloorview**  
Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

**ERINOAKkids**  
Centre for Treatment and Development



## SHARING OUR WORK

1. Peer-reviewed article now available online (2014): Residential immersive life skills programs for youth with disabilities: service providers' perceptions of experiential benefits and key program features. *Disability and Rehabilitation*  
doi:10.3109/09638288.2014.949353

## WHO ARE WE?

The Ontario Independence Program Research (OIPR) Team includes researchers and clinicians from three children's treatment centres in Ontario. We are conducting 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 key benefits and aspects of the RILS programs. We also learned about the opportunities the programs offer, how 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.

During the interviews, service providers talked about the ways that they helped RILS program participants change and grow through the program. The interviews lasted an hour to an hour and a half. We used interview transcripts to identify common themes.

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 things that they took away from working in a RILS program:

1. They felt that RILS programs were **life changing** for youth. In their eyes, youth learned new skills and gained self-confidence and self-understanding because they had to face **real-world challenges**, especially being away from home, riding transit, directing their own care and sharing the experience of the program with other youth with disabilities.
  - ❖ *“A lot of them are just used to Mom or Dad...doing the routine, and then they come in and they have a whole new experience. I guess the whole world opens up to them at that point”*
2. The changes that youth experienced were thought to happen because the programs gave youth the chance to **develop skills and confidence, and learn from mistakes**.
  - ❖ *“I think it was because of the program [that she gained confidence], because she was forced into those situations of...‘You know what, I can make mistakes and I can learn from them, but I can do it’”*
3. The service providers themselves learned a lot from participating in RILS programs. They talked about having a better understanding of the **challenges that youth face** on a daily basis. They also realised **youths’ strengths and abilities** despite these challenges, and the importance of working with parents to encourage **life skills early on**.
  - ❖ *“I realised, you know, that these participants have so much capability and strength...and we are just there to mentor and guide them and...sometimes they may not really need our support as much as we think they do”*

### TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS STUDY, PLEASE CONTACT:

Dr. Gillian King  
gking@hollandbloorview.ca  
1-800-363-2440 ext 3233

### FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE RILS PROGRAMS, PLEASE CONTACT:

Natalie Timbrell (TIP)  
ntimbrell@hollandbloorview.ca  
Andrea Morrison (Moving On)  
morrisona@hhsc.ca  
Barbara Kehl (ILP)  
bkehl@erinoakkids.ca

## 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!

We would like to thank all the service providers from The Independence Program, Moving On, and the Independent Living Program for helping us learn more about RILS programs. We would also like to thank Gage Transition to Independent Living and the Research Assistants who supported this work: Alyssa Willoughby, Lisa Blenkhorn, and Madhu Pinto.

## THIS PROJECT WAS FUNDED BY:

The Centre for Leadership in Participation and Inclusion with the support of the Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation