

# Research Summary: Opportunities, Strategies and Experiences in Residential Immersive Life Skills Programs

Centre for Leadership in Participation and Inclusion

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**Holland Bloorview**  
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## SHARING OUR WORK

1. Article submitted for publication (2014): Residential immersive life skills programs for youth with disabilities: A pilot study of program opportunities, intervention strategies, and youth experiences.
2. 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
3. Peer-reviewed article now available online (2014): A retrospective study of past graduates of a residential life skills program for youth with physical disabilities. *Child: Care, Health & Development*  
doi: 10.1111/cch.12196

## 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 describe the experience of attending **The Independence Program (TIP)** at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital (Toronto, Ontario). We wanted to know what kinds of activities and tasks youth with disabilities had the opportunity to take part in while at TIP. We were interested in discovering the strategies that service providers used to help youth to build core skills and knowledge during activity sessions. We also wanted to know how youth felt about taking part in the individual activity sessions, as well as participating in the program as a whole.

## WHAT DID WE DO?

We attended TIP on two days in the summer of 2013 and observed activity sessions for 1 to 3 hours at a time. We looked at the extent to which TIP provided **opportunities** for personal growth, social interaction, and choice making. Using a checklist, we observed youth and providers working together in four activity sessions and noted how often service providers used different **strategies** to assist or engage youth. For example, service providers might give verbal cues, help break down a task into smaller parts or step back and not interfere with youths' own problem solving.

Right after each activity session, we asked youth to complete a short survey. After they finished the survey, we talked to them for 5 to 10 minutes about their **experiences** with the activity and how they felt about taking part in the program overall.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

1. **Opportunities:** Youth had many opportunities to interact with adults, take part in social activities, and make choices. They had fewer opportunities for personal growth (e.g., creative expression or to choose between different activities to do at a particular time) but did have opportunities for identity development.
2. **Service Provider Strategies:** Providers most often assisted youth by engaging with them and listening. They also often used verbal cues and modeling, and helped youth develop their skills by holding back from providing assistance and helping youth to learn from teachable moments.
3. **Experiences:**
  - ❖ In the surveys, youth indicated that they felt that they belonged, that they had choice and control over what they were doing, that they were engaged in their activities and that they were really connecting with others.
  - ❖ Youth found that the high expectations of the service providers and their own expectations for the program led them to choose more challenging experiences. When they overcame the challenges, they felt confident in their abilities and proud.
  - ❖ During the program, youth were challenged by new social experiences. Some found that talking to and spending time with more people made them feel more comfortable socially.
  - ❖ Youth also had the opportunity to make more choices for themselves, which led to many new experiences. These new experiences helped them to understand themselves better, advocate for their needs and feel more independent.

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

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM (TIP) PLEASE CONTACT:

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## NEXT STEPS

In 2014, we received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to expand our work looking at RILS programs in Ontario. From 2015 to 2018 we will be recruiting youth with disabilities who are involved in three programs, **The Independence Program (TIP)** out of Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, **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). Look out for updates as the new study unfolds!

## THANK YOU!

We want to thank all the youth participants and service providers from The Independence Program for helping us learn more about RILS programs and what makes them unique.

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