Society has shifted from institutionalizing and excluding individuals with disabilities to accepting and accommodating their various needs (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2023).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):
- Created opportunities for transition planning
- Focused on measurable, postsecondary goals met by the student’s coursework
- Produced an individualized education program (IEP) to prepare students for adulthood (DeVos & Schultz, 2020, p.15)

Transition Services Exist to Assist Students with:
- Postsecondary education
- Vocational education
- Employment
- Adult services
- Independent living
- Community participation (IDEA, 2017)

Common Programs that Aid in Transition:
- Project SEARCH (Wehman et al., 2012)
- Step Transition in Education Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (STEPS) (White et al., 2017)
- National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability (NCWD) for youth
- Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) for college students with disabilities
- Bridges from School to Work (Social Security Administration, 2015)

Sixteen participants were recruited from Bridgeway Academy, a charter school located in Ohio. These participants underwent semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to address their lived experiences and perceptions of the transition process. The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology, as outlined by Smith et al. (2022), was employed to analyze the data.

Participants:
- Four adolescents with autism and developmental disabilities
- Three administrators
- Three teachers
- Three parents
- Three occupational therapists

Focused Participant Criteria:
- Males and females, aged 14–21 years on the applied or academic track involved in the “B.R.I.D.G.E. to Adulthood” program or those receiving outpatient services at Bridgeway Academy

Results

Overarching Theme 1. Fostering Independence
The implementation of orderly, client-centered transition plans
Reduction in the need for parental support by promoting independence in daily tasks at home
Incorporation of functional academics and repetition into school assignments
Reliance on a team of individuals

Overarching Theme 2. Areas of Improvement
- Barriers faced by students
  - Behaviors
  - Instrumental Activities of Daily Living Skills (safety, household, and financial management)
  - Executive functioning skills
  - Receiving constructive criticism
  - School barriers
  - Academic standards
  - Funding
  - Insurance
  - Time constraints
  - Community barriers
  - Transportation
  - Acceptance and trained staff at day programs
  - Paid job opportunities
  - Leisure activities

Overarching Theme 3. Resources and Supports
- Vocational and Life Skills Center
- School market
- Practical Exploration Assessment System (PAES)
- In-school jobs
- Community outings
- Internships
- Therapies
- Job skills program
- Transition to adulthood program
- Dual enrollment program

Themes and Subthemes:

**Theme 1: Fostering Independence**

**Subtheme 1a.** Transition Plan
- Fading Support
- Team
- It takes a team

**Subtheme 1b.** Academic Teaching

**Subtheme 1c.** In-school Job Skills

**Subtheme 2a.** Barriers Faced by Students

**Subtheme 2b.** School and Community Gaps

**Subtheme 2c.** Barriers to Leisure Involvement

**Theme 2: Areas of Improvement**

**Subtheme 1a.** Barriers Faced by Students

**Subtheme 2b.** School and Community Gaps

**Subtheme 2c.** Barriers to Leisure Involvement

**Theme 3: Resources and Supports**

**Subtheme 3a.** Vocational and Life Skills Center

**Subtheme 3b.** “B.R.I.D.G.E. to Adulthood”

Direct Quotes:

**Theme 1: Fostering Independence**

**Subtheme 1a.** Transition Plan
- “The transition plan should not be what I want but what the students want for themselves.”
- “Having parents with high expectations is a huge indicator of success.”
- “We need to leave our students alone more.”
- “We don’t need to teach my students Abraham Lincoln’s birthday if they do not know their own birthday.”
- “We have nailed collaboration.”

**Theme 2: Areas of Improvement**

**Subtheme 1a.** Barriers Faced by Students
- “I am having a hard time finding a day program that checks all the boxes.”
- “All the training in the world is not going to do anything if the job is not there.”
- “I am not involved in the community as much as I used to be.”

**Theme 3: Resources and Supports**

**Subtheme 3a.** Vocational and Life Skills Center

**Subtheme 3b.** “B.R.I.D.G.E. to Adulthood”

Discussion

Limited resources or the absence of a transition plan should not hinder teaching transition skills
Maintain ongoing communication with the transition team
Use a “backward planning model” by focusing on the end goals
Avoid over-promising as it decreases independence
Create shared responsibility for vocational experiences
Encourage practical activities for retention
Telehealth is a useful tool to increase carryover
Include an occupational therapist on the transition team
Focus on executive functioning skills, sensory input, and safety awareness
Provide vocational opportunities, whether paid or unpaid
A lack of leisure activities restricts social participation

Conclusion

Early independence and reduced reliance on support are linked to better outcomes
Functional academics and sensory accommodations are beneficial
Collaboration among parents, therapists, behavior analysts, and teachers is vital
Challenges include academic standards, funding constraints, and limited time
Encouraging life and vocational skills development and community engagement is crucial, despite challenges and fear of safety
Paid employment and expanded leisure opportunities would benefit students

References

Social Security Administration. (2015). Four resources for students with disabilities transitioning from school to work. https://www.ssa.gov/work/four-resources-for-students-with-disabilities-transitioning-from-school-to-work

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