

## Examples of Exemplary Postschool Programs

There is a significant lack of information about high-quality post school services for young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Australia, particularly services other than employment support. Using a qualitative evidence synthesis, we reviewed global examples of postschool programs for this population that have been evaluated and discussed in academic literature. This review led to the identification of seven exemplary evidence-informed post school programs and their shared characteristics. Of the seven programs identified, three are programs offered in Australia, two in the United States, and two are offered internationally.

### Post School Exemplary Programs:

- DO-IT Mentors Program, United States
- Project SEARCH, Australia
- Miracle Project, United States
- Latch-On Literacy Program, Australia
- Next Chapter Book Club, North America, Australia, Africa and Europe
- Tutti Arts, Australia
- ASDAN, United Kingdom

### The programs were evaluated according to:

- Use of mentors or job coaches
- Evidence of learning or skill progression amongst participants
- Opportunities for participant choice and empowerment
- Relationships and community connections
- Pursuit of independence for participants

Only one of the programs, DO-IT Mentors, focusses specifically on mentoring to enhance the post-school success of young people. However, mentorship is integrated as part of the support hierarchy in Program SEARCH.

Although all seven programs showed evidence of learning or skill progression among participants, it was difficult to find programs that used a comprehensive approach to measure participant outcomes and track learning progression systematically. Instead, each program tends to have its own distinct, often informal, method for assessing success and gradually advancing participants to higher levels.

Participant choice is a concept evident in nearly every identified program, with the exception of the Latch-On literacy program and the Next Chapter Book Club. The most prominent examples of participant choice and empowerment were found for the ASDAN program and the Australian creative and performing arts program, Tutti Arts. These programs offer participants the opportunity to choose, personalise, and take control of their enrolment in various programs and streams based on their personal interests and needs. Additionally, both programs allow participants to engage in activities according to their learning preferences (e.g., weekly class schedules, programs, and locations).

The integration of social skill development and practical community engagement into post school program curricula was a recurring theme in the literature and programs reviewed. All of the identified

programs focus on teaching or practising self-management or executive functioning skills as individuals work toward independence in various areas such as employment (Project SEARCH), artistry (Tutti Arts, The Miracle Project), literacy (Latch-On, Next Chapter Book Club), and education (DO-IT Mentors, ASDAN).

### **DO-IT Mentors Program**

The DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) Center is based at the University of Washington in Seattle. The DO-IT Mentors program aims to enhance the successful involvement of individuals with disabilities in rigorous academic programs. It does so by pairing college students with disabilities with mentors who guide them in their academic, careers, and personal growth through both one-on-one and group mentoring experiences. The program fosters the development of essential academic, personal, and social skills, promoting lifelong learning. It exemplifies best practices by offering frequent interactions and various modes of communication, including group, individual, in-person, and online mentoring. A study by Burgstahler and Cronheim (2001) confirmed the program's effectiveness in achieving these goals for its participants. DO-IT Mentors measure progress through employment outcomes and job retention productivity (Ham et al., 2014).

### **Project SEARCH**

Project SEARCH is a High School Transition Program in Brisbane that assists young people with developmental disabilities to find employment. Project SEARCH provides specialised training in employability skills and workplace internships for individuals with significant disabilities, focusing primarily on young adults transitioning from high school to adulthood. Through this, Project SEARCH not only equips participants with essential skills but also raises awareness among employers about the valuable potential within this workforce, addressing both the developmental needs of individuals with disabilities and the staffing needs of businesses.

Participants receive ongoing guidance by a job coach who provides consistent feedback and support during their internship rotations (Davis et al., 2021). The job coach's role is to ensure that participants' individual goals enhance their independence and productivity (Ham et al., 2014). Project SEARCH measures progress through employment outcomes and job retention, adjusting or phasing out mentorship as participants demonstrate sustained positive employment outcomes over time, as highlighted in the research by Ham and colleagues (2014). Skills in which participants became more independent after participating in Project SEARCH included completing assigned tasks (Ham et al., 2014; Wehman et al., 2012), transitioning between tasks (Ham et al., 2014), and following safety precautions (Wehman et al., 2012).

### **Miracle Project**

The Miracle Project, established in the United States, is a film and expressive arts program that caters for neurodivergent people with and without disabilities. It offers performing arts classes to build participants' skills and confidence before giving them opportunities to perform in front of live audiences. Internal research on this inclusive theatre program has shown that participation leads to improved self-esteem, empathy, and comfort within the autistic community (Kim et al., 2015).

The Miracle Project focuses on fostering social skills and community connections. The program's curriculum includes improvisation, movement, dance, storytelling, and song to teach and practise social and communication skills, often culminating in performances where participants share their stories with their families and the broader community. This program offers people with disabilities a fun, social opportunity to learn group participation, build self-confidence, form friendships, and

explore drama and theatre arts. A study on The Miracle Project confirmed its positive impact on participants' self-esteem, comfort with others, empathy, and trust (Kim et al., 2015).

### **Latch-On Literacy Program**

Established in 1998 and operating out of the University of Queensland, Latch-On™ is an evidence-based program designed to positively impact participants by providing opportunities for ongoing literacy development in a postsecondary school environment. Utilising computer technology, Latch-On™ not only improves literacy skills but also builds self-confidence and independence while offering pathways to work placements. The program combines traditional literacy and numeracy teaching with extensive technology instruction, along with health and fitness education. Delivered in small groups, this part-time, two-year program serves students aged 18 and older, with an option for a one-year extension. This program appears to be the most responsive to participant outcomes. It uses computer-based technology to provide personalised feedback and progressive literacy instruction to adults with intellectual disabilities.

### **Next Chapter Book Club**

The Next Chapter Book Club (NCBC) aims to create meaningful opportunities for lifelong learning, social connections, and genuine community inclusion for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities through community-based book clubs that welcome readers of all skill levels. Operating in North America, Australia, Africa and Europe, NCBC hosts weekly or biweekly meetings where participants gather to discuss and read a book. These meetings, held in libraries or coffee shops, offer a relaxed and social atmosphere designed to foster social interactions and a love for literacy. Participants are not required to read the book themselves, as it can be read aloud to them. In 2016, NCBC was awarded the Innovations in Reading Prize. A study of the program found that socialisation was fostered through activities such as parties, social conversations, games, and crafts during club meetings (Connor & Plocharczyk, 2019).

### **Tutti Arts**

Tutti Arts envisions a future where individuals with learning disabilities and neurodiverse conditions are fully recognised and valued in the arts and culture sector. The organisation's mission is to showcase the exceptional artistic talents of these individuals. Founded by Pat Rix in Adelaide in 1997, Tutti has grown and thrived over the years. Today, more than 200 learning disabled and neurodiverse artists participate in various art forms each week at Tutti's studios. The Tutti Arts Program, still operating out of South Australia, offers professional development for artists with learning difficulties and intellectual disability. The flexibility of the Tutti Arts program was highlighted by participants and their families during interviews, emphasising the freedom of choice it provides to young adults with disabilities (Darragh et al., 2016). The program demonstrates a strong commitment to the social well-being of its participants. According to Darragh et al. (2016), participants experienced positive impacts on their social well-being and were recognised for their valued social roles within their communities.

### **ASDAN**

ASDAN is an organisation that provides education and qualifications for young people with diverse needs in the United Kingdom and internationally. ASDAN offers a unique curriculum and assessment framework with nationally recognised programs and qualifications. These programs are designed to be learner-focused and activity-driven, empowering students to take charge of their own development in essential personal and social skills. ASDAN not only acknowledges formal education within schools and colleges but also values the accomplishments learners achieve in

their communities, homes, and workplaces. ASDAN, aims to promote learners' personal and social development to enhance their contributions to their communities (James & Simmons, 2007).



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