2011 Ivymount Post-School Follow-up Study:
A Brief Summary of the Report on Multiple Learning Needs and Autism Program Alumni

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**INTRODUCTION**

In order to better understand the post-school experiences of Ivymount alumni, the school undertook a follow-up study during the 2010-11 academic year. This document briefly summarizes study findings based on interviews with the parents of 43 Ivymount alumni who attended the Multiple Learning Needs Program and/or the Autism Program.\(^1\) Topics covered include employment experiences, adult education, transportation issues, living arrangements, social and community life, and transition to post-school life.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Participants**

Participants in the Ivymount Post-School Follow-up Study included parents of alumni who left Ivymount during the years 2004-2010, and who either completed the Post-High School Program or Autism Program at age 21 or transferred/leaves the Multiple Learning Needs Program or Autism Program between the ages of 18-21.

In terms of demographic information, alumni included in the study ranged from 18-27 years of age at the time of the interview; 31 were male and 12 were female; 23 were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and 20 were diagnosed with other types of disabilities; and total numbers of years attending Ivymount ranged from 4-19.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

During the Winter of 2011, 43 telephone interviews were conducted with parents of alumni. Data were analyzed using Excel and WEFT QDA (a software program designed for the organization and analysis of qualitative data). Statistical analyses were conducted for quantitative questions, and common themes were identified for open-ended questions.

**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES**

**Current Employment**

Ninety-three percent of Ivymount alumni are currently employed in either a volunteer or paid capacity.

**Type of Work**

Alumni are currently working in a wide range of employment situations, although they are somewhat more likely to have volunteer positions than paid positions. For example:

- 7% are competitively employed without support from a job coach;

\(^1\) For a more detailed description of findings, see the full-length report titled, “2011 Ivymount Post-School Follow-up Study: Full Report on Multiple Learning Needs and Autism Program Alumni” (Müller, 2011).
- 17% are competitively employed with support from a job coach;
- 3% are competitively employed as part of an enclave;
- 10% are employed in a center-based environment and work for a fixed piece rate;
- 58% are employed in a volunteer capacity with support from a job coach; and
- 5% are employed in other types of situations (e.g., commissioned work).

**Wages**

Only five alumni reported earning more than minimum wage ($7.25 per hour). Alumni working without the support of job coaches all earned minimum wage; alumni working with the support of job coaches and/or in enclave settings earned between minimum wage and $14 per hour; and alumni working in center-based environments were paid based on performance (less than minimum wage).

**Numbers of Hours Worked**

Most alumni work significantly less than full-time (or 40 hours per week):

![Figure 1 - How Many Hours Spent Working Each Week](chart)

**Job Descriptions**

Most jobs currently and/or recently held by alumni are entry-level and require limited skill sets. Job tasks and locations vary significantly, however, with some jobs involving physical tasks, some involving customer interaction, some involving desk and/or office work, and some involving assembly and/or the production of arts and crafts.

**Employment Support Programs**

Almost all Ivymount alumni participate in an employment support program of some kind, including two alumni who are currently unemployed. Programs in which alumni most commonly participate include:

- SEEC and/or Project SEARCH;
- Target Community and Educational Services;
- Community Support Services (CSS);
- George Mason LIFE Program;
- St. John’s Community Services;
- Community Services for Autistic Adults and Children (CSAAC);
Center for Handicapped Individuals; and
Innisfree Community (an integrated residential community).

Several alumni who transferred from Ivymount prior to the age of 21 are currently enrolled in either Marcia Smith School (a feeder school for CSS) or their local public schools, and receive employment support through their school programs.

**Funding**

Of the alumni who are currently employed and over the age of 21 (i.e., no longer eligible for employment support as part of their educational entitlement), 92% receive state funding to support their participation in employment support program of some kind.

**Satisfaction with Current Employment Situation**

Most alumni appear to be satisfied with their current employment situations:

![Figure 2 - Satisfaction with Current Employment Situation](image)

**Reasons for Satisfaction**

Interviewees mentioned several reasons for and/or indicators of job satisfaction, including:

- enthusiasm about current job placements;
- feelings of membership within the workplace community;
- well-matched jobs in terms of vocational skills and/or preferences;
- satisfaction with wages and/or lack of wages;
- pride in work; and
- decreases in behavioral issues at the workplace.

**Reasons for Dissatisfaction**

Interviewees also mentioned a few reasons for job dissatisfaction:

- insufficiently challenging work; and
- lack of income.
ADULT EDUCATION

Enrollment in Adult Education

Of the 39 alumni who are no longer receiving services under their education entitlement, 38% are currently enrolled or have previously been enrolled in an adult education program of some kind.

Type of Adult Education

Alumni take advantage of the following types of adult education opportunities:

- Montgomery College courses and/or two-year certificate program for adults with disabilities;
- George Mason LIFE Program, a full-time, four-year college program for adults with disabilities;
- Project SEARCH (a one-year job training program for adults with disabilities);
- Baltimore’s 16-week residential job training program for adults with disabilities; and
- Frederick Community College’s eight-week job training program for adults with disabilities.

Funding

Of the alumni who are currently enrolled or have previously been enrolled in an adult education program or course of some kind, 44% received funding from the state or other sources to offset tuition costs.

Satisfaction with Adult Education Experiences

Of the alumni who are currently enrolled or have previously been enrolled in an adult education program or course of some kind, almost all were very satisfied with their experiences.

![Figure 5 - Satisfaction with Adult Education](image)

Interviewees were mentioned a few reasons for satisfaction with their adult education experiences, including:

- pride and pleasure in attending college; and
- opportunities for increased independence.
TRANSPORTATION

Although 68% of parents reported that transportation was not an issue, 32% reported that transportation poses a significant barrier for alumni and their families.

Most commonly, alumni reported using one or more of the following modes of transportation to get to and from job sites, adult day programs and/or other activities:

- transportation affiliated with programs (e.g., door-to-door vans);
- public transportation;
- Metro Access;
- parents;
- Medicaid waiver-based transportation; or
- school bus.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Types of Living Arrangements

Although most alumni currently live with one or both parents, several have other types of living arrangements:

Parents provided the following details about alumni living independently or in supported living arrangements:

- All have one or more housemates.
- Most live in apartments or condominiums.
- For those with supported living arrangements, all have either paid staff or parent volunteers providing onsite support, and support ranges from nights only to round-the-clock care.
**Funding for Residential Support**

Of the alumni who do not currently live with their parents or other family members, 75% receive funding for residential support. Parents noted that several alumni are eligible for funding for residential support because of behavioral and/or mental health challenges.

**Waitlist to Receive Funding for Residential Support**

Of the alumni living with parents or family members, 56% are on a waitlist to receive funding for residential support. Many parents expressed frustration with the length of wait time.

**Respite Care**

Thirty-five percent of alumni receive respite care. Of the 65% who do not, some parents reported that they have never applied for respite care and/or were unaware of this option; some reported that alumni are eligible for respite hours, but that there have been problems securing reliable respite providers; and some reported that alumni are now capable of staying at home by themselves for a few hours, or even overnight.

**Satisfaction with Current Living Arrangements**

As reported by their parents, most alumni are very satisfied with their current living arrangements:

![Figure 11 - Satisfaction with Current Living Arrangement](image)

**Reasons for Satisfaction**

Interviewees mentioned several reasons for and/or indicators of *satisfaction* with current living arrangements, including:

- contentment with current living arrangements;
- sense of “belonging” and/or positive relationships with housemates;
- home environments tailored to alumni’s individual needs and preferences;
- lack of desire to live independently; and
- pleasure/pride in private space.
Reasons for Dissatisfaction

Interviewees mentioned several reasons for and/or indicators of dissatisfaction with current living arrangements, including:

- preference for independent living (as opposed to living at home with parents);
- dislike of chores/responsibilities; and
- difficulty keeping alumni occupied.

Several parents also mentioned that they were dissatisfied with alumni's current living arrangements.

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY LIFE

Opportunities for Structured Social Interaction

Seventy-nine percent of alumni have regular opportunities for structured social interaction. Frequency of engagement in structured social activities ranges from multiple times each week to once per month or less, with most alumni participating in activities between two and four times each month.

Types of Activities

Opportunities for structured social interaction take a variety of forms. Most commonly, alumni participate in organized sports groups for individuals with disabilities. Also common are social clubs, either religious or secular, offering regular get-togethers and community outings for individuals with disabilities. Other types of activities include:

- buddy programs;
- religious services at churches and synagogues;
- music classes or choirs;
- drama/theater clubs;
- social and/or communication skills groups; and
- special interest groups (e.g., anime and book clubs).

Programs Sponsoring Activities

Programs offering opportunities for structured social interaction most commonly mentioned by interviewees include:

- Special Olympics;
- Potomac Community Resources (PCR) – including Studio 3F;
- Best Buddies;
- Kids Enjoy Exercise Now (KEEN);
- Challenger Baseball through Georgetown Preparatory Academy;
- Community Support Services (CSS) sports teams;
- Saturday bowling club for Ivymount alumni and their families;
- Art Stream;
- Towson University’s Wellness F.I.T. Program (pairing kinesthesiology majors with adults with autism spectrum disorders); and
- Weston Adult Club (WAC) for adults with disabilities (organized through Fairfax Recreation Department).
Opportunities for Unstructured Social Interaction

Seventy-three percent of alumni have regular opportunities for unstructured social interaction with peers. These interactions take a variety of forms, including dinners and outings with friends, sleepovers, movies, and other informal get-togethers. All alumni have regular opportunities for unstructured social interaction with family members, often with extended family and/or adult siblings. Several parents also noted that alumni have opportunities for unstructured social interaction with respite care providers and/or other paid staff.

Major Themes

The following major themes emerged in terms of alumni’s opportunities for unstructured social interactions with peers:

- critical role of Ivymount relationships in providing regular opportunities for unstructured social interaction with peers;
- importance of alternate modes of interaction, specifically telephone calls and email messages; and
- need for parental facilitation of alumni’s unstructured social interactions.

Satisfaction with Social and Community Life

Parents reported that the majority of alumni are either “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with their social and community life.

![Figure 14 - Satisfaction with Current Social Life](image)

Reasons for Satisfaction

Interviewees mentioned several reasons for and/or indicators of satisfaction with social and community life, including:

- enjoys opportunities for social interaction;
- has one or more “friends”; and
- is content with minimal social interaction.

Reasons for Dissatisfaction

Interviewees mentioned several reasons for and/or indicators of dissatisfaction with social and community life, including:
lack of sufficient opportunities for social interaction;
- challenges to socializing relating to alumni’s personality;
- difficulty for parents of gauging alumni’s satisfaction with social and community life;
- desire for more and/or deeper friendships;
- parents’ difficulty coordinating opportunities for social interaction; and
- desire for romantic relationships.

## TRANSITION TO POST-SCHOOL LIFE

### Overall Quality of Post-School Life

The majority of parents reported that the overall quality of post-school life for alumni was either “excellent” or “good”:

**Figure 15 - Overall Quality of Post-School Life**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Very Good</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Positive Aspects**

In terms of positive aspects of alumni’s post-school life, reasons and/or indicators included:

- presence of all the amenities of a comfortable life;
- good quality of life in spite of disabilities; and
- alumni appear to be happy.

**Negative Aspects**

In terms of negative aspects of alumni’s post-school life, reasons and/or indicators included:

- mental health problems and/or other medical issues;
- social isolation;
- unoccupied time; and
- limitations relating to autism spectrum disorders.
Changes in Support Needs Over Past Five Years

The majority of parents reported that alumni required either “much less support” or “somewhat less support” than they did five years ago:

![Figure 16 - Overall Support Needs Now as Opposed to 5 Years Ago](image)

**Less Support**

When asked to elaborate on their responses, families of alumni requiring less support stressed that alumni continued to make progress over time, and had become more independent and self-reliant.

**More Support**

For those families reporting that alumni needed the same or more support over time, many described ongoing challenges relating to mental health or other medical conditions.

**Most Significant Post-School Challenges**

Challenges most commonly mentioned include:

- threat of unemployment and/or underemployment;
- achieving desired levels of independence/autonomy;
- too much unoccupied time;
- social isolation;
- concerns regarding future living arrangements;
- mental health and behavioral issues;
- medical issues; and
- lack of motivation.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Findings from this study indicate that most Ivymount alumni live busy, satisfying lives, yet continue to experience significant challenges. Most are employed, yet the majority work as volunteers or
receive minimum wages for their work. A significant number have received some sort of adult education. Most continue to live at home, and are content doing so, but for those who seek residential placements, waitlists are long. Most participate regularly in both structured and unstructured opportunities for social interaction, yet do not always have adequate opportunities and/or social skills for developing and sustaining meaningful relationships. While overall satisfaction with post-school life tends to be high, concerns relating to employment, future living arrangements, and disability-related health and behavioral issues remain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ivymount School wishes to thank all the alumni families who participated in interviews for sharing their time, insights, and experiences. Their contributions will be used to help Ivymount staff better prepare current and future students for post-school life.

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