

# From the Parents' Perspective: The Think College Experience in Rural Vermont

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## Abstract

Through qualitative interviews, perspectives of parents of students who were in the first 2 years of the Think College Program at University of Vermont and Johnson State College were explored, thereby identifying expectations, academic and social aspects, and experiences of their children as college members. Previous experience of these students in inclusive educational environments influenced parent perceptions. Parents described efforts to support the students during college, from financing and transportation to academic coaching and accommodating lessons. They discussed hopes for employment, and evolving perceptions of their own roles in relation to the future lives of their adult sons or daughters.

## Keywords

rural postsecondary education, transition, parents of adults with disabilities, family roles

Postsecondary education (PSE) has been a component of transition planning for students with disabilities leaving high school since 1990, when it first appeared in P.L. 101-476, Amendments to P.L. 94-142. Since 1997, this planning process could be initiated as early as 14 years of age. In 2004, emphasis on preparing students for further education increased to focus on improving academic and functional achievement to help the child move from school to post-school activities, including PSE. In the experience of many parents of children with moderate to severe disabilities, however, little attention was paid to this aspect of students' transition (Martinez, Conroy, & Cerreto, 2012). Especially for those who had fought battles to have sons or daughters educated in inclusive settings, the idea of starting all over again in a new arena of education, with institutions new to inclusion, could be overwhelming (Martinez et al., 2012; A. Turnbull, personal communication, 2014).

In 2010, the Office of Special Education Programs funded the National Coordinating Center (now known as the Think College National Coordinating Center, n.d.) to support the growth and enhancement of postsecondary options for students with intellectual disability across the United States. The center provides support, coordination, training, and evaluation services for Transition and Postsecondary Education Programs for Students With Intellectual Disabilities (TPSIDs; Think College National Coordinating Center, n.d.). Think College supports evidence-based and student-centered research and practice by generating and sharing knowledge, guiding institutional change, informing public policy, and engaging with students, professionals, and families. In 2011, when this study of parents' perceptions of the Think College

Program in Vermont began, 130 PSE programs existed for students with intellectual disabilities across 31 states, with an additional 120 new programs self-identifying on the Think College website, for a total of 250 programs (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011). The Think College Program at the University of Vermont and Johnson State College enrolled a total of 12 students between 2011 and 2013, and it had four stated goals: academic, social, independent living, and employment (Ryan, 2014). Although 39% of TPSID programs offered residential options for students (Shanley, 2010/2011), these were not available at the time in Vermont. This became a challenge for families, particularly because of the distances many students had to travel to reach the program.

When this Think College Program began, parents had to consider how their children were going to get to and from school, both located in the northern part of the state. Where transportation for education had previously been given, now that high school was over it was no longer provided. As cited in Ferguson, Ferguson, and Jones (1988) "Schools are required to provide transportation; adult programs are not. That aspect alone can radically alter the demands upon a parent's time" (p. 182). Vermont families have typically tended to pride themselves on their independence, but for this aspect they needed help. Most parents worked, and

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some had acquired their own age-related disabilities that made it impossible to drive. Developmental service agencies shared the task of making transportation possible for this program. Patching together funding from Medicaid Waivers and from PASS plans (plans to achieve self-support) that allowed accumulation and more flexible use of Social Security funds, families and agencies worked out complicated plans and schedules. For some families, this was the first time that their children had used public transportation alone, and they worried, especially when their children arrived home after dark because of late classes. In some cases, this led to exhausting days for their children who had to ride public buses early and late. Where public transportation was not available, families or agencies had to hire drivers. This also limited their children's ability to take part in college extracurricular activities. Few students, in the first years of Think College, came from any farther south than Montpelier, in central Vermont.

Here, as everywhere, parents of sons and daughters with disabilities faced their own developmental challenges as parents easing their children into adulthood (Erikson, 1982; Galinsky, 1987; Yehahey & Mestanova, 2015). Could they experience the "empty nest" and move on to independent lives of their own, secure in the fact that their children were safely "launched?" Parents' attitudes toward transition have been studied, first for the generation whose children grew up before the game-changing P.L. 94-142, and for the second generation, who had the opportunity for public education (Ferguson et al., 1988; Hanley-Maxwell, Whitney-Thomas, & Pogoloff, 1995). Now a third generation of children with disabilities, including those who live in remote settings, has more opportunities to attend college.

Advice abounds for parents whose children are considering PSE. Opinions ranged from facile statements advising letting go and trusting their children (C. Taylor, 2013) to acknowledging more complexity (Agosta, 2006). Pragmatic advice recommended "engaged interdependence" (Ferguson et al., 1988, p. 185) or to "stay connected," which was described as holding onto positives from the past and staying flexible (Hallowell & Keevil, 2012).

These various positions are echoed in the literature of transition. In a study by Ferguson et al. (1988), a parent declared, "You can't afford to back off at this point" (p. 182), and the authors summed up,

Normalization suggests the need for a weaning away of the individual from the daily protection and restrictions of parental control. Reality suggests the need for even greater parental advocacy and oversight when the individual faces the tremendous inadequacies of adult services. (p. 186)

Collins and Russell (1991) posited that the ambivalence and tension parents feel toward their children's increasing independence may reflect continuing role negotiation between parents and children. This role negotiation demonstrates

that parents and children change their roles as the skills of the child increase or the responsibilities of the parent decrease, but parents and children never really become independent of one another. Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) graphically described their own efforts:

For a couple of months each of us invested about 15 hours per week in setting up JT's self-determination life of quality . . . in addition to two more than full-time jobs, two other children, and an elderly parent in need of daily caretaking. It is ironic that in order to envision and strive for individual and family quality of life, one's own quality of life can be negatively impacted in the process! . . . Few people admit the serious impact on quality of life for some family members in the pursuit of self-determination and long-term gain in quality of life for individuals with significant cognitive disabilities. (p. 60)

Despite difficulty, transition to adult life is considered to be a key outcome for family coping and adjustment (Blacher, 2001), with involvement of the family, an important intervening variable in success (Neece, Kraemer, & Blacher, 2009). In a qualitative study of family perspectives on successful transition to adulthood, Henniger and Taylor (2014) surveyed 198 parents and found that about one fifth of respondents identified the goal of "continuing academic or intellectual pursuits" (p. 102). This goal ranked in the middle of the lists of goals, below those of productive occupation and moving out of the parental home, which may have had more urgency. According to Braddock et al. (2013), 71% of adults with disabilities lived with family caregivers in 2011. Academic pursuits also ranked below relationships with peers and skills for daily functioning in the study by Henniger and Taylor but higher than six other goals, including independence and physical health or safety.

Griffen, McMillan, and Hodapp (2010) surveyed 108 families, addressing family perspectives on PSE for students with intellectual disability. Employment was the most important adult goal, echoing Thorin and Irvin (1992) and Neece et al. (2009), who noted "given our findings, programs should prioritize preparation for employment as the most important outcome for their students" (p. 345). On the contrary, safety was the greatest concern for 90% of the families. This led Neece et al. to also recommend that post-secondary programs respond to parental concerns by taking appropriate measures to ensure student safety and communicate these efforts to families. For 36% of families surveyed, financial constraints were also identified as an issue.

Similarly, the Think College Stakeholders Research Project in Vermont sought the perspective of all stakeholders in the Vermont Think College program: students, mentors and friends, teachers, employers, shared living providers, and parents. This study focuses on the perspectives of parents of students in the first two cohorts of the Think College Program in Vermont. It explored their expectations and perceptions of academic, social, and employment experiences

**Table 1.** Students, Ages, Parents Interviewed, Previous Educational Setting, and Place of Residence.

Student	Age at start of program (years)	Parents interviewed	Previous educational setting	Place of residence
Lydia	18	Mother	Out-of-state residential	Group home, Essex
Valerie	24	Mother	Out-of-state residential	Group home, Essex
Tessa	19	Mother	Tech center and local school (inclusion)	Parents' home, rural northwest VT
Sage	29	Mother	Tech center and local school (inclusion)	Parents' home, central VT
Beth	22	Both parents	Local school (inclusion); studied floral arranging in Albany, NY	Parents' home, rural northwest VT
Carl	25	Both parents	Local school (inclusion)	Shared living, central VT
Zack	22	Both parents	Local school (inclusion)	Parents' home, rural northwest VT
Frank	24	Mother	Tech center and local school (inclusion)	Parents' home, rural northwest VT
Bernie	30	Not interviewed because of illness	Life skills classes in local school	Independent living but moving back to parents' home, rural northwest VT

Note. NY = New York; VT = Vermont.

of their sons and daughters as college students. In addition, parents' roles in the college education of their sons and daughters were investigated, as well as parents' expectations for the future for both themselves and their children.

## Method

### Participants

Both University of Vermont and Johnson State College programs provided contact information for their Think College students. Nine of the 12 students enrolled in the programs still had actively involved parents who were contacted first by letter, then by telephone, and email. The parents of one student could not be interviewed because of their pressing health issues.

Of the nine students who still had involvement with their parents, five lived at home, three lived with shared living providers (host homes), and one had his own apartment but was preparing to move back home to help care for his parents. Families reflected the demographics of Vermont. All were Caucasian and ranged from lower to upper middle class, with none particularly wealthy nor in poverty. Four of the parents had disabilities, reflecting increasing age and complicating efforts at transportation. The age of the students ranged from 18 to 30 years, with most in their mid-20s. Only two students lived within 10 miles of either of the two programs. The others lived either in the country or small towns in the northern and central parts of Vermont (see Table 1).

### Interviews

The first two authors, one a parent of an adult with a disability and the other an administrator of the Think College

Program in Vermont, designed questions for the parent interview. See Table 2 for a list of interview questions.

The researchers interviewed the parents of eight students, four interviews with mothers only and four with both parents together. In one interview, the student attended with her parents, although the researchers designed interviews with students to be separate. The semistructured interviews using "naturalistic inquiry" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) lasted approximately 1.5 hr each. Five took place in the parents' homes and two at restaurants the parents chose. One mother requested a telephone interview.

### Analysis

The first author transcribed, analyzed, and coded responses for themes (Charmaz, 2008, 2012, 2014; Holton, 2010; S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), then reviewed this with the second author. To increase confidence in the themes (triangulation), participants reviewed the findings (member checks) and expressed agreement. The researchers compared interview responses with responses to open-ended questions on evaluation reports for the project, which had been administered at the end of each of the first 2 years of operation with the intent of identifying areas for quality improvement (Cooledge & Mueller, 2012, 2013). Finally, the researchers compared the hopes, expectations, and fears of the parents with the hopes, dreams, and fears section of each student's personal MAP (Making Action Plans for Students), a person-centered planning tool (Forest, O'Brien, & Pierpoint, 1989) created by each student and his or her "team" (i.e., parents and agency service coordinator) at the time of admission to the program. Although this final source offered additional perspectives to those of the parents, it was also a source of parental input into the individual goals

**Table 2.** Parent Interview Questions Regarding Vermont Think College Program.

Question number	Question text
1	How has the time in the Think College Program been for your son/daughter?
2	What were your greatest fears when your son/daughter headed off to college?
3	What have been your greatest dreams?
4	How has the experience fit with your dreams so far?
5	Describe things that have seemed to come easy for him or her.
6	Describe things that have been harder for him or her.
7	Was there anything that ___ thought he or she could not do, but he or she actually did it?
8	What do you think made it possible for him or her to succeed doing that?
9	How do you think your son/daughter has changed during this program?
10	Thinking ahead 10 years, what do you see your son/daughter doing?
11	Where will he or she be living?
12	What kind of work will he or she be doing?
13	Describe your own expectations for your own future.
14	Have those expectations changed in the time of this program? How?

of each student. As many of the parents' hopes and expectations were related to jobs, information was provided on internships and employment for each student, summarized in Table 3.

## Results

Parents' responses fell into three categories: (a) perceptions of their son or daughter, (b) perceptions of the program (including expectations and perceptions of employment), and (c) perceptions of their own roles in the college life of their children and beyond. Perceptions of the program largely replicated findings in evaluations conducted by Cooledge and Mueller (2012, 2013) as part of the Vermont Think College assessment.

### Parents' Perception of Students

Three themes regarding positive growth of students emerged: (a) independence (e.g., "She takes the bus by herself, stays in hotels by herself overnight; she can make her way around the campus by herself; [she] attended some of her internship by herself"), (b) confidence and social growth (e.g., "He used to walk with his head down, and now he

holds his head up"), and (c) commitment to others (e.g., "She will always be an advocate for other people"). The first two themes were attributed to participation in the program; the third theme reflected a characteristic of the students enhanced by the opportunities the program provided.

A fourth theme reflected how parents and students perceived disability in themselves and others: "We have always believed Sage to be normal. Everyone is different." "That's one thing about Frank I admire. People are people. He doesn't discriminate. I think that's a perfect world."

The final theme, academic performance, included parents' concerns about their children's ability to deal with the stress of college-level expectations, as well as descriptions of hard work and commitment leading to success. Parents' comments included the following: "Reading is hard for her and stresses her out. She has a hard time processing information and sometimes she'll get stuck"; "She's a hard, hard worker, and did many writing outlines and worked with mentors."

### Parents' Perceptions of the Program

Several parents expressed enthusiastic satisfaction with the program, with one describing it as "transformative." Some cited program characteristics contributing to academic success, such as professors' gaining comfort in working with students and holding high expectations. They identified safety nets in the program, including mentors and a special educator who consulted with teachers.

Other parents, worried about student success, expressed concerns about appropriateness of materials. A parent with strong academic qualifications described "some academically thick stuff. The book that the professor required was unreadable—b\*\*\*s\*\*\* intellectual dumb thing; intellectual jargon." Others were concerned about the timing of classes, especially those that extended into the evening.

Program mentors' perceptions reflected the mentors' impact as strong social and academic supports. At the same time, parents expressed concerns about "too much of a good thing" leading to overreliance and inhibition of independence.

Parents' satisfaction with the inclusiveness of the program depended on previous high school experiences their children had with inclusion. Those parents whose students had not had effective inclusion in high school were pleased by the contrasting inclusive experience of the Think College Program. One parent reported, "My biggest fear was transitioning her back into an inclusive school. Inclusion didn't work well for her in high school, so I wasn't exactly convinced it was going to work." Parents whose students had strong inclusive experiences in high school did not feel that the program lived up to past inclusion. One father recalled, "Over 700 people came to his graduation party. He was so happy there. He never will have that again."

**Table 3.** Employment Goals and Outcomes for TC Students at UVM and JSC.

Student name	Job before TC (weekly hours and wage if known)	Job goal in MAP or plan	Internship	Job after TC (weekly hours and wage if known)
Lydia	Retirement home, food preparation, US\$9/hr for 8 hr	Preparation chef, other local college, no washing dishes	Baking assistant (UVM Marché <sup>a</sup> and local bakery), retirement home, US\$9/hr for 18 hr	Retirement home, food preparation, US\$10.50/hr for 18 hr; UVM Marché <sup>a</sup> , baking, food preparation, US\$10/hr for 6 hr
Valerie	Retirement home, housekeeping, US\$9/hr for 4 hr; CDCI (UVM), office work, US\$9/hr for 8 hr	Helping people with disabilities, especially with autism; advocacy	Green Mountain self-advocates, peer advocate; US\$9/hr for 12 hr	Local developmental service agency, administrative assistant and peer advocate for peer services team, US\$10/hr for 14 hr; retirement home, US\$9/hr for 4 hr; volunteer as peer mentor
Tessa	NA	Preschool teacher or assistant	Camp counselor, 12 hr; fitness club, day care assistant, 9 hr	Resort day care center, day care assistant, work trial, 9 hr; Grocery, front-end worker, US\$8.75/hr for 24 hr
Sage	Green Mountain self-advocates, self-advocacy, US\$12/hr for 6–10 hr	Script writer, film maker	Local TV station, editing, filming, assistant, 10 hr; ORCA media, filming, editing, video production, 10 hr	CDCI (UVM), filming, editing, video production, US\$12/hr for 12 hr; Green Mountain self-advocates, filming, editing, video production, US\$12/hr for 10 hr
Beth	Grocery (floral), kitchen assistance, elementary school, clothing store, organizing, preparing and stocking, assisting customers, US\$8.83/hr for 18–22 hr	Library, bookstore, hospital, or school kitchen, floral arrangement, long-term job security	Clothing store, same work as before, US\$8.83/hr for 4 hr; Local medical center, office assistant, 10 hr; Local developmental service agency, 12 hr	Clothing store, same work as before, US\$8.83/hr for 18–22 hr
Carl	Grocery, bagging, US\$8.46/hr for 10 hr	Baking, cooking	Grocery, bagging, US\$8.46/hr for 10 hr; Bagel store, baking assistant, 8–10 hr	Grocery, bagging, US\$8.46/hr for 8–10 hr
Zack	Interning with school athletic director; Convenience store, cleaning, and maintenance, US\$8.46/hr for 2–4 hr	Working at a news station or movie store, radio	archeology assistant	Walmart, floor work, carts, US\$8.46/hr for 8–12 hr
Frank	Volunteer work at library, Interning with school athletic director	Sports or radio broadcasting	JSC radio, local radio show (data entry)	Local radio show (data entry), volunteer, 5 hr; College steps program, peer advocate, US\$9/hr
Bernie	Liquor store, stocking shelves, US\$8.46/hr for 2 hr; Gardening store, maintenance, US\$8.46/hr for 3 hr	Architecture, one good steady job, organizing events, organizing or sorting	Local science center, facilities and historical research, 10 hr	Olive garden, food preparation, production, backup, US\$9/hr, with benefits, for 4–5 hr; Convenience store, maintenance and stocking, US\$8.73/hr for 4 hr (offered full time, but declined to protect benefits)

Note. TC = Think College; UVM = University of Vermont; JSC = Johnson State College; MAP = Making Action Plans for Students; CDCI = Center on Disability and Community Inclusion at the University of Vermont; ORCA = Onion River Community Access.

<sup>a</sup>Retail venue at the University of Vermont with multiple dining options.

Finally, three themes related to program limitations emerged: (a) knowledge about individual differences and needs, (b) student status and lack of residential options that, thus, required extensive travel, and (c) length of the program. Along with professors and mentors, parents struggled with the balance of support and independence and the need for individualization. In one instance, the program had two students with the same syndrome. Parents of one expressed concern that their son was not being supervised enough for safety, stating, "They don't really understand how dangerous it is." The school then generalized this to the other student, who needed less supervision and rankled under the excessive support. His father reported, "People don't understand the extent of Zack's independence. Get him to the site, and he'll do what he needs to do, but the fear of the unknown still has people demanding that he has a bodyguard with him."

The distances students needed to travel—and limited availability of public transportation—created major difficulties getting to and from campus and made it difficult for students to take advantage of extracurricular activities. This, in turn, affected parents, who expressed the following concerns: "My husband did transportation—152 miles a day, three days a week, plus some extra for extracurricular activities." "I'm disabled and I can't drive him back and forth. They said that the second year there would be on-campus housing, but there wasn't. We had to find more money to pay for transportation."

Finally, almost all the parents wished that the program could extend longer than 2 years. One mother mused, "What do I do with her now? I still have another 2 years before she's really qualified for other services."

### *Parents' Perceptions of Employment*

All parents interviewed considered the employment goal of Think College to be important. For some, job expectations were met (see Table 3). One mother stated, "I think she's a little more focused on her career. It's now more of a reality, and it has helped her in that respect." Other parents tried to temper the dreams of the student with expectations they considered more realistic (e.g., "She's had some dreams of being a film writer. We're trying to keep her as a self-advocate. She needs to find her place.").

In some cases, even though internships offered good training in general work skills, they did not result in a permanent job in the student's field of interest, as reported in frustration by one father:

Now that he's out of the program, he works 6 hours a week at Walmart. His archaeology teacher had promised to line him up with prospects for an archaeology job. If they are going to lead a student in a career path, they should make some steps to help him in that direction.

One student had an offer of full-time employment, but his parents, whose health was deteriorating, were concerned that if he lost his benefits (Social Security Disability Insurance), he might not be able to get them back if he lost his job and needed them. Faced with concerns for their own mortality, they decided he should limit his hours of work to protect his benefits, and he moved back home to help.

Another family did not want their daughter dependent on government benefits and looked instead for job security, stating,

It's very important that she has a career with good benefits and pay. We've talked about jobs that have security so she won't be cut back . . . I see her at UVM extension or having a government job.

### *Parents' Perceptions of Their Parental Role*

Parents indicated the need for ongoing involvement on many levels, most frequently in regard to instrumental support, transportation, finances, and academic assistance. Several responded negatively to the phrase "letting go." One shared,

I had a social worker that said I was too protective . . . I think the parents have to be very much involved. If they were not, it wouldn't work.

Another reiterated, I let go, but when things get messy, I have to step in and advocate.

Arranging or providing transportation became a significant role for parents in this rural state with limited public transport. Even where public transport was available, parents needed to become comfortable with their son or daughter using it. One parent described her concern, "Safety. I haven't taken public transportation, and I didn't know who would be on the bus. When it was dark, I worried about her getting off the bus."

With regard to participation costs, students' Medicaid Waivers were tapped wherever possible to finance expenses, but parents were still extensively involved in figuring out how to pay for the program:

It cost \$25,000 a year—mileage and time. Originally, (the agency) said, "We're going to get Zack into college at no cost to you." We found out it was going to cost \$20,000 a year out of his Waiver. So, for funding, we had a good chunk of his waiver; Voc Rehab had some funds; we got some non-degree grant money from VSAC (Vermont Student Assistance Corporation). He was on a PASS plan (Plan to Achieve Self-Support). It was 2 years of arguing with Social Security. There are only two people who handle PASS plans for this part of the country. They kept counting it toward his income. For 2 years, it was a financial horror show.

With regard to helping their students academically, those parents who were involved in providing help made

significant contributions in addition to the work of the teachers, mentors, and special educator assigned to the program:

She would read to me—I would help her restructure. “What’s the active verb?” Deeper meaning is harder—analysis is harder. If we had anticipated her going to college, we would have started analysis things earlier—eighth grade, sixth grade.

Another parent used her own training as a special educator:

There was a time when she had three finals and failed them all. She wasn’t given the accommodations she should have been given. Language impairment makes it hard when she has to process through all the choices in the multiple-choice questions. She can do open book or in her own wording. She can show what she knows rather than what she doesn’t know. Thanksgiving break (she) was given that whole vacation to do her final. I kept track of all the hours. She went through every question and showed where she found the evidence for the answers. It took more than 17 hours for the final over a week’s time!

As parents looked ahead to the future, they developed more typical expectations for their child’s life as well as for their own, best expressed in their own words:

I never really had those kinds of dreams. It was always in the moment, fighting for the next thing. Now, I could say my hopes and dreams for her are no different than you wish for any of your kids. I think the Think College experience has helped with that.

Another parent said,

I don’t want to set a direction for her. She has her own dreams and directions for her life. We’ve both talked to her about our job as parents to guide our children to go in the direction they want to go in. If she can communicate to us about her dreams, with the experience we have, we can help her get there.

Another mother, interviewed with her husband, stated, “[We want the] same thing we’ve wanted all along— independence for our son—from our son.” Another parent summed up, “I was worried that she would always live with me. Now I feel like her future is separate from my future, which I wasn’t sure would ever happen. Now I think I will have a future of my own.”

## Discussion

The Think College Program in Vermont was new to everyone, and it started small, with students who did not live on campus. It fell to parents to get their students to and from schools and internships—a significant change from high school, where transportation had been provided. This will continue to be a challenge in achieving postsecondary inclusion in any area with limited public transportation.

With the use of PASS plans to create more flexibility with Social Security funds and Medicaid Waiver funds, parents were able to pay for transportation, but it led them into fairly complex levels of federal bureaucracy. Few benefits counselors knew the rules governing how students on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) could accumulate funds to pay for education expenses beyond the usual benefits limit of US\$2000 in savings. Depending on the state, the new federal Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act of 2013 may also allow for accumulation of savings.

Employment outcomes for the Think College Program were influenced by the economy but also reflected the reality of employer expectations. The balance between encouraging dreams and practicality, which might stifle those dreams, created a tightrope parents walked with their children. As they looked to the future, each family assessed the amount of involvement they would continue to offer to their son or daughter to succeed. Their dreams for their children’s futures were the same dreams as most families—marriage, family, a home, and meaningful work, tempered by the realization that PSE, while being “transformative” for their sons and daughters, had not yet transformed society—and they still had work to do.

## Recommendations

Parent training and information centers should learn about benefits’ rules and processes and provide information to parents who are planning for PSE for their sons and daughters. University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs) could offer training on these options for transition planning to educators, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and benefits counselors.

Residential options for students to live on or near campus could alleviate the difficulty of transportation. Two programs outside of Think College Vermont now provide residential options for Burlington area colleges (Howard Center SUCCEED and Mansfield Hall), as does Castleton University in the southern part of the state (Masterson & Spinney, 2015). Without postsecondary programs in other parts of the state, residential living options may be necessary to open up for the participation of students from distant rural communities.

Some students may continue to live with their families, contributing to the financial status of the family and helping to care for aging parents. Heller, Miller, and Factor (1997) suggested that when the adult with intellectual and developmental disabilities provides support to the caregiver, the level of caregiver burden is lowered. Although options for online learning may be possible, this would limit the valuable interaction of students with other students, faculty, and mentors who are a part of the college experience.

### Study Limitations and Future Research

There were several limitations to this study. First, the number of participants was small. To get the parents of eight students involved, two cohorts had to be interviewed across two institutes of higher education. Some students were in the first year, whereas others were completing the program. Only one interview was conducted, although member checks and triangulation took place with formative evaluation responses and the students' MAPs. A better design for future research would conduct an entry interview to determine parents' expectations and a closing interview after their children completed the program. Although the students were also part of the overall Stakeholders Research Project, there was no attempt to compare the responses from student interviews with those of the parents. This comparison could strengthen future research.

### Conclusion

For the most part, parents expressed overall satisfaction with the Think College Program in Vermont and moved toward positive perceptions of the lives of their children in the community and their own more independent roles as parents in the future. With attention to details, such as transportation, residential options, and clearer employment goals and expectations, outcomes for college students with disabilities will continue to improve.

### Authors' Note

The views expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) or the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

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