

The following are a selection of abstract of student theses from the School of Special Education and Disability Studies, Flinders University, SA, Australia. Correspondence should be directed to the author c/o the Department of Disability Studies, Flinders University, PO Box 2110, Adelaide, 5001, SA, Australia, unless otherwise noted.

B.App.Sci (Hons) THESIS ABSTRACTS
THE POST SCHOOL PURSUITS OF YOUNG ADULTS
WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

by
Michael Burrows

This thesis presents a broad picture of the post school pursuits of young adults with autism spectrum disorder in the beginning of the year 2000. It addresses pursuits and services in the domains of employment, vocational training, further education, recreation and leisure. In addition, the study explores natural networks of support available to people in this group, and the post school planning and transitional services they have received.

A questionnaire was mailed to 79 people who were identified by staff of the Autism Association of South Australia (AASA) as meeting the following criteria:

(1) they were between the ages of 18 and 23, (2) they were considered clients of Adult Services of the AASA and (3) had been out of secondary school (including senior special schools, special classes and home schooling) for at least one year. A total of 28 people participated in the survey.

The majority of participants were regularly involved in structured and purposeful pursuits at the time of the survey. Sheltered and supported employment, tertiary education, day

option programs and other structured social, recreational and leisure activities were the post school pursuits in which participants were regularly involved. Participants had commonly received career guidance and post school transitional services from secondary school teachers and principals, staff of the AASA, Options Coordinators and other disability service or employment service professionals. Parents and guardians appeared to be the most important people in participants social networks to provide support in finding and participating in post school pursuits. It was also common for participants personal friends, co-workers and employers to provide assistance.

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ISSUES OF EDUCATION & TRAINING FOR STAFF CARING FOR OLDER
INDIVIDUALS WITH & WITHOUT INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

by
Belinda Shaw

This study researched issues of education and training for staff caring for individuals with and/or without intellectual disabilities over the age of fifty-five years. A questionnaire was mailed to staff working in an institution for mature adults with intellectual disabilities (N=43), staff in a nursing home for mature adults without an intellectual disability (N=10), and staff in a nursing home for mature adults with and without intellectual disabilities (N=15). A total of 43 (63.24%) completed questionnaires were returned. Results indicated that staff did not have widespread knowledge concerning the field in which they were becoming or likely to become more involved in their caring role. Respondents identified essential skill areas that reflected the primary focus of the respective organizations in which they were employed with little recognition of the

changes occurring, or likely to occur in the client population within their organizations. Recommendations for future education and training were made based on these responses and current research.

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FACILITATING COMMUNITY RE-ENTRY FOR PEOPLE WITH ABI

by
Caroline J Story

Abstract

Many people with acquired brain injury (ABI) experience extreme difficulty in returning to community life post trauma. Community re-entry is a significant goal for people with ABI. Psychosocial, behavioural and executive functioning impairments are reported to undermine efforts to re-establish supportive social networks post trauma. This study had two main aims. Firstly, to trial a research methodology aimed at providing researchers with distinct processes for achieving understanding about community re-entry. Secondly, to intervene, graph and map processes of social integration and community re-entry for three people with ABI. Qualitative research processes were used to observe and analyse subjects' participation in an intervention process. Quantitative processes were used to measure, graph and map processes of social integration. Analysis revealed several significant barriers to successful community re-entry, such as substance abuse, unmanaged executive function impairment, lack of social skills, lack of awareness and understanding about the effects of ABI, family support and limited opportunities for social interaction.

Examination of data also revealed positive factors which can contribute to achieving successful community re-entry. These include; self awareness, availability of a mentor, access to appropriate information, structured domestic regimes and opportunities to participate in recreation and prevocational activities. Finally, research limitations along with recommendations for future practice and research are presented.

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THE NEXT STEP - A PILOT STUDY OF INCLUSIVE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION FOR A SELECTED GROUP OF PEOPLE WITH AN INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

by
Cassandra J Gibson

Abstract

Disability should no longer be a barrier for continuing a person's education. With the advent of anti discrimination and equal opportunity laws, measures have been put in place to ensure that a person's disability does not affect his/her ability to access higher education. Today most Australian universities have a Disability Liaison Officer to provide assistance to students with a disability. Campuses across the country have been modified for those with a physical disability, modern computer technology is used to assist those with sensory disabilities, subjects and examinations are modified in some instances for students with learning disabilities, along with many other devices and resources constantly being considered to assist people with a disability. However, one group of people with a disability have not been considered- those with an intellectual disability. People with an intellectual disability are not encouraged to access universities under the current blueprint of university access. This study investigates the possibility

of people with an intellectual disability joining their peers at university in the quest of continuing their search for knowledge, developing social networks and becoming more involved in their local community.

The aim of this study was to examine the viability of a small group of people with an intellectual disability being able to access university as an alternative to traditional post school options. This study involves practical research in the form of a Pilot Study where four people with an intellectual disability were given the opportunity to audit a topic within the School of Special Education and Disability Studies at Flinders University (South Australia). The progress of the four auditing students was documented throughout the semester and an indication of the attitudes, opinions and reactions of their classmates was gained through their completion of two questionnaires. The researcher sought further opinion, via a third questionnaire from a group of professionals and parents.

The ethnographic research involved both qualitative and quantitative procedures. t tests and Spearman Rank Order correlations were used to analyse quantitative results. The analysis of the quantitative results indicated no statistically significant changes in attitudes towards the involvement of students with an intellectual disability amongst university students over the duration of the project. However the qualita-

tive results suggested positive outcomes for individuals, and trends that provided direction for further research in the field of post secondary education for people with an intellectual disability. The study concludes with suggestions for further research and practical recommendations with professional implications for a future university based post school option for people with an intellectual disability.

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MASTER OF DISABILITY STUDIES DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS
PARENTAL/CARER PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH AN
AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

by

Janet R. Lothian

A survey was conducted in late 1997 at the request of the President of the Autism Association of SA Inc. on behalf of the Parent Consultative Committee. The scope of the survey widened as a result of consultation with primary and secondary stakeholders.

The purpose of the survey was to investigate parental and carer perceptions of the availability and effectiveness of educational and support services for their child or young person with an autism spectrum disorder in South Australia.

Evaluative methodology was used to conduct the survey. A questionnaire was developed and distributed by mail to parents/carers of current clients of the Autism Association of SA Inc.: 166 questionnaires were returned (response rate of 33%). Codes were developed to categorize qualitative/open-ended responses: codes were attitude, coping level, diagnosis, learning environment, management, rights, support. Important themes to emerge were: parents/carers' desire for greater understanding, respect, flexibility and compassion from service providers/the general community; for increased knowledge of autism spectrum disorders for all stakeholders, and information about services available. Parents/carers wished to be more actively involved in partnership with schools/other professionals in receiving feedback and planning for their child's education/therapy/medical treatment, and for their depth of knowledge of their child to be respected. Adequate support and skill training (behaviour management

strategies) for parents and personnel working with the child, and participation in social skills groups rated strongly across almost all age groups. Early intervention, structured learning settings with curriculum delivery appropriate to the person's skill level, and the use of environmental supports such as visual communication tools also featured in comments.

Recommendations for future research included using a more structured format to gain information from parents, and exploration of face-to-face or telephone interviews (using an interpreter for parents/carers of non-english speaking background).

There have been recent developments, since the time of the survey, which have independently attempted to address some of the issues evident in the survey.

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AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION WITH LOCAL ABORIGINAL PEOPLE FROM ADELAIDE'S EASTERN/WESTERN REGION TOWARDS IMPROVING ABORIGINAL FAMILY HEALTH OUTCOMES

by
Vicki Brown

Health is a complex interaction of physical; emotional, spiritual, cultural and social factors that applies to an individual's well being. Premature ageing and high mortality rates are indicative of health, social and economic disadvantages that impinge on Indigenous people of Australia. The literature has compared this status to that of developing countries. It was the intention of this investigation to present data, and view this information in a social health context, thus seeking to improve opportunities for Aboriginal people living in an urban community.

The research process, a 'Journey of Two Worlds', is the gathering and interpretations of data from two different cultural perspectives. The world of research seeks to understand the views of its subjects; the philosophical perspective of an Aboriginal culture is often obscure from this process. Literature supports the notion that research is a participatory process and researchers with knowledge and understanding of the differing perspectives must include the fundamental features of Aboriginal thinking which are critical for the implementation and validation processes, as undertaken in this study.

This dissertation was written from an exploration perspective with 61 local people from the Aboriginal community who live in the western and eastern metropolitan regions of Adelaide. The aim of the study was to investigate ways to

improve health and well being outcomes so that agencies providing services are best able to respond and support Aboriginal families in these regions.

The findings are expected to give the health and community sectors a better understanding as well as indicate how services can begin to change and influence their policies and practices. The study's findings accompanied by evidence from the literature, point to mainstream services as struggling to meet the needs of Aboriginal people. Three models have been proposed to guide local agencies in addressing cultural sensitivity and access problems to ensure that a more effective services delivery is provided to Aboriginal families for improved health and well-being outcomes.

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