Research Study #1

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Supporting Employment Through Partent Mentorship: The Employment Pathways Project

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Finding a job after high school can be challenging for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Many families describe this time as a major transition, with fewer services and supports available. As a result, parents often take on a larger role in helping their family member explore job options, connect to services, and navigate the employment process.

The Employment Pathways Project was designed to support families during this transition. This study tested a parent-to-parent mentorship model in which parents of job seekers were paired with experienced parent mentors and provided with training and resources. Families were randomly assigned to either receive mentorship or continue using services available in their community. This brief highlights key findings from this study and what they suggest about how this approach supported families.

Key Findings: Findings from this study suggest that parent mentorship may be a promising approach for improving employment outcomes for adults with IDD and supporting their families.

- **More participants in the mentorship group found jobs.**
  About 69% of adults with IDD whose parents received mentorship became employed, compared to 41% in the comparison group.
- **Parents felt more prepared to support employment.**
  Parents in the mentorship group reported greater increases in their ability to help their family member navigate the employment process.
- **Parents reported less stress.**
  Parents who received mentorship reported lower stress related to supporting their family member's job search.
- **All families benefited from access to training and resources.**
  Parents in both groups received information and tools to support employment and reported feeling more prepared. Mentorship may provide additional benefits.
- **Mentorship relationships were meaningful and helpful.**
  Parents and mentors reported strong connections and found the mentorship experience valuable.

Key Takeaways: Several important patterns emerged as families moved through the program:

Support from other parents matters.

- Families valued learning from someone with lived experience who understood their challenges and could offer practical advice.
- "The mentorship component was extremely helpful… the connections have helped a great deal." -- Parent participant

Families gained confidence over time.

- Many parents reported feeling more confident navigating services, communicating withemployers, and supporting their family member at work.
- "There were way more resources than I knew about… the course gave us tools to guideour job search." -- Parent participant

Mentorship helps families navigate next steps.

- Parents valued having someone explain what to expect and how to move forward.
- "[My mentor] explained what to expect and what would happen next… I really appreciated that perspective." -- Parent participant

The employment journey is not always linear.

- Families moved forward at different paces, and progress was often shaped by life events, service access, and individual needs.

Barriers are still present.

- Challenges related to transportation, services, and employer engagement continued toaffect employment outcomes.

Even small successes matter.

- Many jobs were part-time or entry-level, but families described meaningful improvements in confidence, independence, and daily life.

These findings highlight the importance of supporting families as they navigate the employment process and point to parent mentorship as one way to strengthen that support.

Learn More About Research Study #1: https://idd.vcurrtc.org/research/rs1.cfm

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