

PAY Check: Post-Secondary Services to Support the Transition of Students to Community Life and Careers—A Follow-Up Study

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INTRODUCTION

The late teen years through early 20s is a critical time for individuals, especially those with developmental disabilities, to prepare for life after high school and full participation in the community, including future employment and the skills required for successful independent living. Recent legislation and public policy such as the Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act (WIOA) reinforce the previously established intentions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2015) that require public schools and state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to collaborate to ensure that youth with disabilities learn pre-employment transition skills.



The PAY Check (Post-secondary Apprenticeship for Youth) program serves students ages 18-21 years who are eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services and receive special education services or have a 504 plan at their school. PAY Check is a 3-5 semester program, which includes a high school diploma option, Post-secondary education, paid apprenticeship, as well as job placement. All components of PAY Check take place in integrated community settings, such as Delgado Community College (DCC) campus, public transportation, and paid apprenticeship sites; and provide opportunities for participants to acquire and engage in Pre-Employment Transition Skills (Pre-ETS) training outlined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA). The student's training curriculum includes self-advocacy, independent living and social skills instruction, job and work readiness training, as well as self-determination training throughout. Other skills included in the curriculum include job exploration, interviewing, transportation, navigation, time management, goal setting, problem solving, banking, money management, and stress management.

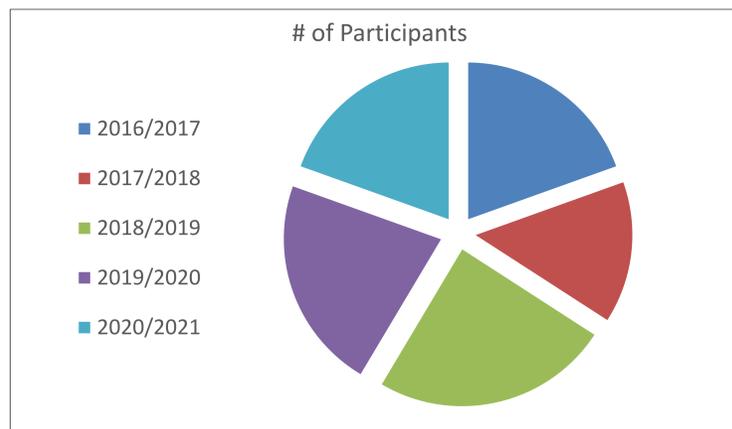
PAY Check students leave the program with a High School Diploma, Community Skills, Work Skills, Post-secondary college experiences, High School Core Requirements, and job placement. For more information visit our website at <https://www.hdc.lsuhs.edu/PayCheck/>

METHODS

As a quality assurance measure for the PAY Check program, a follow-up study is being conducted with PAY check participants one to four years post-completion to understand the life experiences of program participants following their participation in transition services. Risk and resiliency were used as a conceptual framework for understanding how people can have positive outcomes in spite of adversity.

Resilience is the ability of an individual to successfully adapt and develop social, academic, and vocational competence in the face of adversity and stress. Resiliency is seen as the successful completion of age appropriate developmental tasks despite the experience of adverse conditions. The influence of individual, family, community, and transition service provision were explored in light of interventions to move transition students toward resiliency.

Subjects: For this preliminary study, a sampling of program participants from each cohort were surveyed. There were 5 cohorts between 2016 through 2021 with a total of 41 out of 46 individuals who completed the PAY Check program. (see Figure for participants per cohort.)



Data Collection: Telephone surveys lasting 15 to 20 minutes were conducted by PAY Check staff. Nineteen individuals who completed PAY Check (47.5%) responded to the survey.

Instrument: A follow-up survey was constructed based on individual characteristics/skills, family/social supports, community supports, and future goals/life satisfaction.

RESULTS/DISCUSSION

- Employment: 74% are currently working in a variety of jobs including an Early Learning Center, Grocery stores, the Audubon Aquarium, Walmart, Fast Food Restaurants, as a Personal Care Attendant, a Bakery, and in a Warehouse.
- Only one individual has returned to school/community College but six respondents (31.5%) indicated that they have a goal of returning to school (law degree, 4 year degree, more college classes)

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS/SKILLS:

- Skill Gains: All of the respondents indicated they learned many skills in the program that they did not have when they entered PAY Check.
- Phone Usage: Ninety-five percent of the individuals indicated they had phones when they entered PAY Check and that they still have their own phones. Only one respondent (5%) indicated he does not have his own phone but uses his mother's.
- Transportation: Currently 53% of the individuals use their family for transportation. Thirty-five percent use public buses or streetcars and twelve percent use their own vehicle. Most of the individuals from the earlier years, 2016-2019 are still using public transportation. Two of the students reported they have their own vehicle. Most of the students in the later years, 2019-2021 are using Uber, friends, relatives or parents for transportation. This result may have been impacted by the Coronavirus and Delta variant as parents and family were reluctant to use public transportation during the pandemic and needed to find alternatives to public transportation.
- Financial Management: 89.5% indicated they paid cell phone bills, or Netflix or other streaming or gaming services. Only two respondents (10.5%) said they did not pay any of the household bills.
- Job Search Skills: 90% of the individuals said prior to the PAY Check program they did not know how to find or get a job but now knew how to do that. Seventy-four percent of the respondents are working.
- Disability Advocacy: 10 (50%) indicated they were more comfortable now talking about their disability and asking for help when needed than they were when they first entered PAY Check. Only two individuals (10.5%) continued to not be comfortable talking about their disability.



FAMILY/SOCIAL SUPPORTS

- Living Arrangements: 100% of the individuals were still living at home with their parents
- Support System: Participants indicated that parents, grandparents, mothers, and older siblings still provided support and guidance to them.
- Entertainment & Fun: Most of the individuals indicated that when they were along they tended to play games and when they were with friends they played games, watched movies, and that they just "hang-out".

COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

- Other service provider agencies: All respondents (100%) were receiving supports from Louisiana Rehabilitation Services during PAY Check but most indicated they are no longer receiving any supports or services. One individual's parents reported they were in the application process with the state IDD agency.

FUTURE GOALS/LIFE SATISFACTION

- Goal Attainment Challenges: Most individuals said they were able to set and reach their goals and did not mention any challenges. The majority of the individuals said they were very happy with their lives and said they were not missing out on anything.
- Every respondent was able to identify a goal they were currently working on:

