The Up the Hill Project: Why is participating in university life a valued activity in the lives of people with an intellectual disability in Australia?

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http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_2PP89iym4&feature=youtu.be
Mission Statement

To provide an inclusive and supportive opportunity at Flinders University which enables people who have an intellectual disability to, access the University environment, develop social skills and social networks and to experience a range of educational opportunities and activities.
The Process

• Applicants with intellectual disability express desire to attend university (submit application form)
• Invited to informal interview - discuss: eligibility, options, and decide if university is for them
• If accepted, Coordinator invites the person to a meeting to begin to choose a topic of interest.
• Match with peer mentor
• Audit topics
• Presentation day
• Graduation ceremony 3 years
Students with intellectual disability

- intellectual disability;
- express desire to attend university;
- facilitate own transport to and from university campus; and
- demonstrate ability to attend lectures without disruption to learning environment.

Peer Mentors

- University practicum placement students
- Supported/ supervised by Coordinator
- Studying: Disability/ Health Science/ Behavioural Science/ Psychology/ Education
- Put theoretical perspectives into practice
Self-determination & Social Inclusion

- Mentors support students to identify goals and review goals each semester.
- Students work with peer mentors to identify the objectives required to meet their goals.
- Making friendships and being included requires self-determination skills.
- Mentors model social skills.
- Role-playing & practising these skills naturally.
- Presentations, social gatherings, class discussions.
- Opportunity to experience what the university environment provides
What does the research say?

• People with an intellectual disability (N=14 from two studies) who audited topics at Flinders University through UTHP reported feeling more independent, feeling better about themselves, enjoyed meeting different people, and learning about different topics (Gibson, 1997; Lobban, 2002)

• Range of social, emotional, and educational development & benefits

• Mentoring partnership (teaching students and students with ID) – early exposure, meaningful interactions, collaborative relationships – can positively influence attitudes toward inclusive practices (Jones & Goble, 2012)

• Higher education institutions shift in dynamics – meaningful interaction with students with ID – learning difference does not mean incompetence. Awareness & openness to universal design (Jones & Goble, 2012; O’Conner, et al. 2012)
History & Previous Research

• Pilot Project (Gibson, 1997)
  – 4 participants aged 21 – 28 years old
  – Audited 3rd year topic in disability studies
  – UTHP formally commenced in 1999

• Follow up research (Lobban, 2002)
  – 10 participants aged 19 – 46 years old
  – 5 current students; 5 past students

• 35 topics audited
• 20 disability topics; 15 topics from across the University
  (e.g. Politics, History, Drama, Women’s Studies, Sociology)
Who has been participating 1999 - 2013?

- N = 29 (includes 5 current)
- 15 Males; 14 Females
- Age Range (when commenced) 19 - 66 years
- Mean Age: 32 years
- 7 completed; 5 withdrawn; 3 did not start; 6 on leave; 5 currently participating; 3 unknown/ data not recorded
Does the UTHP accommodate people from all over Adelaide?
Topic Areas

- Disability  x 25
- Visual Arts  x 14
- History  x 9
- Sociology  x 6
- Politics; Women’s Studies  x 3
- Australian Studies; Drama; Archaeology; Criminal Justice  x 2
- Screen & Media; Globalisation; American Studies; Health & Physical Education; Computer Science; Creative Arts; Nutrition & Dietetics  x 1
Outcomes for people with an intellectual disability

- enhanced social skills and social networks, through the formation of relationships with peers
- development of self-confidence and self-esteem
- learning skills transferable to the workplace
- greater independence
Additional Outcomes

• Highlights the **individuality** of each person and their unique talents.

• Social interaction with academic staff and fellow students provide mutually enriching, educational and social opportunities for everyone within the University environment.

• Positive influence to peers within university classes – they will be the policy makers and employers of the future.

• As seen in the video, encourages lecturers to implement inclusive teaching strategies which benefit not only the person with intellectual disability but also the other students.
Providing opportunities for people with an intellectual disability to...

- Explore and increase their range of interests and knowledge;
- Exercise their rights to ongoing education;
- Exercise their choices for continued learning and development;
- Function in a positive, inclusive and supportive environment;
- Develop skills and abilities to transition into the broader community.
“...I'm stoked to have crossed the floor yesterday and graduated from Flinders. The three years I spent there was thoroughly fulfilling and an enriching experience. I learnt new things about topics I've researched over and over again before starting out at Flinders. I would also like to thank [mentors, lecturers, project director and coordinator] for supporting me during these past 3 years”

Student, April 2013
“...the many changes of personality as well as the wonderful developing process.... we have shared in the pleasures of participants and seen the changes made to their lives as a result of their experience. For all of them without exception it has been a world they had never imagined they could have ever belonged to, and has given them a certain enrichment that they will never forget. Many have taken that experience and new found self confidence with a direction forward into a new and different world. We have seen some learn new skills through being at University and continue to develop these in rewarding and notable journeys. We have watched with pleasure how participants have worked along side students and been absorbed into the social life of the university. We have seen them take risks and hold their own and in so doing learn valuable lessons”

Parent and past Board Member, January 2013
Where to from here?
- Up the Hill Project

- Explore the PATHWAY
- Follow up on where to after UTHP

- Job?
- Further study?
- Travel?
- ???
- Educated & informed life choices

• ‘Participants’ = Students
Future Plans & Research

- National/International network to research, promote and support inclusive post-secondary education for people with an intellectual disability.
- Exploring educational prospects as well as social inclusion – Our focus has been social inclusion, but UTHP students indicate that they also want to extend their learning and skills (e.g. to be able to do the assessments just like other students).
- Expansion at Flinders and other universities in South Australia and beyond.
- Following up on the outcomes for students over the last decade (where are they now).
- University student/peer attitudes towards inclusive education for people with an intellectual disability.
- Lecturers perspectives about having people with an intellectual disability in their class.
References


Thank You

Questions?

Comments?