

**HOW NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS MANAGE THE TRANSITION OF DISABLED  
STUDENTS LEAVING SECONDARY EDUCATION: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY**

**BY**

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## **Abstract**

The transition from secondary education to post-secondary life is a difficult one for students with intellectual disabilities. Schools are key to the preparation and management of this transition. There is little New Zealand (NZ) research on the transition of disabled students and lack of examples of effective practice. A multiple-case study was used to investigate the transition practices of three schools teaching disabled students with ORS (Ongoing Resourcing Scheme) funding. Qualitative data was collected through interviews and observations of staff members. Findings were that the schools began the process by no later than the students being 16-years-old and ensured the student and family were at the centre of the planning. Schools taught a combination of functional life skills and self-determination skills. Community inclusion was practiced through work experience and visits to potential future environments. Common post-school barriers in transition included reduced support and few opportunities. A forthcoming government review of ORS funding for disabled students aged 18-21, highlights the need for future research to investigate these post-school barriers.

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## **Glossary**

ASD	Autism spectrum disorder
EBD	Emotional and behavioural disorders
ERO	Education Review Office
ID	Intellectual disability
IEP	Individual education plan
ITP	Individual transition plan
LD	Learning disability
MoE	New Zealand Ministry of Education
MoH	New Zealand Ministry of Health
MSD	New Zealand Ministry of Social Development
NASC	Needs assessment and service coordination
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement
NTG	National Transition Guidelines
NLTS	National longitudinal transition study
NZC	New Zealand Curriculum
NZQA	New Zealand Qualification Authority
ORS	Ongoing Resourcing Scheme
PSE	Post-school education
TTP	Taxonomy of transition programming
WINZ	Work and Income New Zealand

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*Transition* is a period of change or a process of movement from one state to another. In life, we move through stages, for example starting school, beginning our first job; getting married; having a family, and so on. This is termed a “phase-related model of transition” (Dee, 2006, p. 5). This study focuses on the period when a student leaves school and transitions into adulthood. Leaving school prompts a mixture of feelings including anxiety and excitement. Most feel a degree of uncertainty about how life will pan out. The traditional pathway sees a student leave school, complete further education and then embark upon a career. Along the way, they will develop relationships, enter into independent living arrangements and become involved in other aspects of society.

Disabled students share many, if not all, the dreams for life after secondary school as their non-disabled peers (Morgan & Riesen, 2016). They want meaningful employment, further education, to live independently and to engage in relationships. However, the process is more complex (Carter, Brock, & Trainor, 2014). A disabled student’s transition involves various people including parents, teaching professionals and outside agencies playing roles, in shaping their future. This additional support for a disabled student can make transition a public process (Morgan & Riesen, 2016). The situation begs the question ‘how much control does a student have to make independent decisions?’ Dee (2006) refers to an “agency-related view of transition”, where factors in a person’s life dictate the degree of choice they have. Other influences are the availability of opportunities in further education and employment, access to funding and housing, and societal attitudes to disability.

Unfortunately, disabled students experience less success in post-school life. Insufficient opportunities and low expectations of participation in post-school



education (PSE) are common (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Rodriguez, Cumming, & Strnadová, 2017). Having minimal or no qualifications impacts on employability (Irving, 2013). Without meaningful work, living independently and community involvement are difficult (Merrells, Buchanan, & Waters, 2017). Disabled people can experience difficulties with social communication, physical impairments and learning necessitating extra support for inclusion (Morgan & Riesen, 2016). Poor post-school outcomes reduce their quality of life and agency to make changes to it.

In response to dismal outcomes, support systems and interventions are needed (Trainor, Lindstrom, Simon-Burroughs, Martin, & Sorrells, 2008). There is a recognition that during their secondary education, disabled students require support for transition (Morgan & Riesen, 2016). Schools provide transition planning and preparation and support agencies act as a bridge to post-school opportunities (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998). There have been attempts to raise disability awareness in society, especially among employers (Brostrand, 2006; Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005). While there has been an improvement with these supports, implementation is inconsistent and further developments need to be made to improve the future for disabled students.

My choice to pursue the current study was influenced by my career experiences. I had taught in a special education school for 5 years, been involved in the disability sector for 10 years and had recently been through the transition process with a student. The experience was difficult. I felt ill-equipped by my training to support the student and family. Professionally, I observed problems with the way the process worked regarding the sharing of information. I have worked in adult-services for people with intellectual disabilities (ID) and was disheartened by the poor outcomes experienced. To empower myself and contribute to my students' futures, I undertook this study. My intention is to start a conversation between schools, which can positively

influence the way professionals and policy makers support disabled students in transition.

## **Terminology**

### **Models of Disability**

Defining *disability* informs attitudes and actions as individuals and as a society. The term has broadly been defined under two categories: *medical* and *social*. The medical model views disability as an individual affliction that needs to be remediated (Woods & Thomas, 2003). Historically this has been the dominant model of disability which has given rise to specialised approaches in medicine, education and social welfare that segregate and focus on a person's deficits (Swain & French, 2000). By framing disability as affliction, it becomes an individual problem. A challenge to this view has been the social model of disability, in which disability is a creation of society and disables people by constructing barriers to inclusion (Hughes & Paterson, 1997). The latter view is that of the disability rights movement and influences current social policy (Fleischer, Zames, & Zames, 2012).

### **Disability Language**

Because of disability activism, the language of disability has undergone changes. In response to the medical model of disability there was a push to use *person-first* language (e.g. a person with a disability) in contrast to referring to someone as a 'disabled person' which was seen as dehumanising and highlighting their deficit first (Titchkosky, 2001). Using 'person with a disability' though has come under criticism from some disability groups. The deaf and autistic communities prefer *identity-first* language arguing that their disability is a part of them and cannot be separated (Dunn & Andrews, 2015; Johnstone, 2004; Kapp, Gillespie-Lynch, Sherman, & Hutman,

2013). This has led to contention over which terminology is correct. An alternative is to be *person-centred* and use what a person's preference is. This becomes problematic when referring to groups of people with conflicting preferences.

In the NZ public sector, identity-first language prevails, with some exceptions. The Ministry of Education (MoE) use person-first language referring to 'students with special needs.' (MoE, 2015). Identity-first language is promoted by disability culture advocates and disability scholars (Dunn & Andrews, 2015) and is used in the field of disability studies (Goodley, 2011; Longmore, 2003). To be consistent with the majority of NZ policy and trends in current research, this thesis will use identity-first language. In previous academic work I have used person-first, and it has given me reason to pause. What I hope comes through is that I value both the person and their disability, which is just one part of their identity.

The term disability covers many different impairments including those with physical, mental, emotional and social disabilities. This study relates to students who are funded by the MoE Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS). ORS funding does not target one disability, but funds the learning needs of eligible students. In 2016, students on this funding represent 1.1% of the general student population (n=8,753) (Education Counts, 2017). ORS funded students could have one or a combination of the following: intellectual disability (ID), learning disability (LD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), emotional behavioural disorder (EBD). This list is by no means exhaustive, but this study is focussed on funded students who have disabilities which interfere with their cognitive ability and social communication. This ORS funded students, require high-level adaption to their education to succeed.

## **Transition Policy and Practice in NZ**

### **Educational Settings**

Disabled students, since the change to the Education Act, Section 8 (1989), have had the same rights as non-disabled students to attend local schools. Previously education was mostly segregated and the only option was special education (Hornby, 2017). Now the systems exist in parallel, where in principle, a student and their family can choose between a continuum of educational placements. The following are the four main educational options and are listed from least to most restrictive:

1. Inclusion in a mainstream class
2. Special education unit/department in a mainstream school
3. Special education school
4. Residential special education school (Hornby, 2017).

There are 28 special schools and four residential special schools remaining in NZ.

### **Educational Funding**

ORS funding is tagged to the individual and provided to schools to meet the individual's educational needs (MoE, 2012). ORS is allocated on needs-based criteria and having a specific disability does not guarantee eligibility. The scheme is divided into two categories: *high* and *very high*. To qualify, students must have moderate to severe difficulties in either, or a combination of learning, hearing, vision, physical, language use and social communication. The funding is used for an array of support to educate the student. Often this in the form of personnel support such as teacher aides, therapists and psychologists. It can be used for environmental support, for example assistive technology and physical mobility equipment (MoE, 2012). ORS funding can

begin at 5 years-old and continue for students remaining in education until 21 years-old.

### **Transition Policy**

Transition policy focuses on school transitions and on post-school outcomes. NZ ratified the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2006) which emphasises the rights of disabled people to employment, education and inclusion in society. In recent years the NZ government has introduced many policy initiatives designed to address such rights and needs of disabled people. The *NZ Disability Strategy* highlighted the need to improve employment outcomes for disabled people (Ministry of Health, 2001). Later a cross-government project the *Disability Action Plan* (Office for Disability Issues, 2015) was developed to address disability issues. A priority is to “increase the number of disabled people who transition from school and tertiary education into employment.” (p. 12).

The *National Transition Guidelines* (NTG) (MoE, 2011) are ten best-practice principles to help guide schools to implement the process. Two reports, *The Wayne Francis Charitable Trust Transition Project* (Cleland, Gladstone, & Todd, 2008) and *Journey to Work: Creating Pathways for Young Disabled People in NZ* (Cleland & Smith, 2010) were key documents that advocated for and informed these guidelines. The NTGs emphasise that planning for transition is a central part of the process and each ORS funded student is required to have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) (MoE, 2013). As a student begins the transition process, the IEP may become an Individual Transition or Career Plan (ITP or ICP) and importantly this plan should be a key part of the preparation for post-school options. Unlike some countries, transition planning is not a statutory obligation for NZ schools (Gladstone, 2014).

## **Transition Support**

In the final year of school, ORS funded students are eligible for support from a Ministry of Social Development (MSD) subcontracted transition service (Hart, 2017), staffed by a transition coordinator, provider, broker, navigator or facilitator. This individual assists the student, and family/whānau and school to locate post-school opportunities including, employment, residential accommodation, tertiary education, community groups or adult services for disabled people. Organisations compete for the role and vary by region and they may provide disability related services, like supported employment, residential homes and vocational day-services.

A common pathway for ORS funded disabled students is into adult services who administer community or vocational day-bases (Cleland & Smith, 2010; Gladstone, 2014). Typically, they provide social, educational and vocational activities. IDEA Services (under the umbrella of IHC – formerly The Society Intellectually Handicapped Children) is the largest organisation to provide support to people with intellectual disabilities, but each region will have other adult-service providers. To connect with a day-base, the approval of a Needs Assessment Service Coordination (NASC) organisation is required (Ministry of Health, 2011). Each region has NASC organisations (e.g. Access Ability and L.I.F.E Unlimited). NASC are contracted by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and fund support for other services to disabled students who are still in school (MoH, 2015).

## **Special Education Review**

The *Learning Support Update* (Office for MoE, 2016), recommended a review of ORS funding delivery to 18-21year-olds. In response to this, the media and disability groups have speculated that ORS funding for this age-group will decrease with a funding

freeze for Learning Support (formerly Special Education) and a new focus on early intervention services (NZEI, August 23, 2016; Tuckey, September 2, 2016). This proposal has parents concerned about the ramifications for their children's transition (Moir, 2016). It was suggested ORS funding could be used to enrol students in PSE or work-based training.

### **Thesis Outline**

Chapter two, follows the introduction and is a literature review which details research on effective and current transition practices for disabled students in secondary education. Conceptual models of effective transition are discussed and the framework underpinning the study introduced. The third chapter describes the methodology for the study and details the aim and research question, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical considerations. The fifth chapter presents the case studies of the three participating schools and the major themes are identified in the analysis. The sixth chapter provides a cross-case analysis and discusses the findings in relation to the literature. The thesis finishes with the conclusion chapter which summarises findings and implications for policy, practice and future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This review of literature explores both evidence-based and current transition practice for secondary-aged disabled students. The chapter uses a model of transition as a framework to review the literature. It concludes with an examination of current NZ research of the transition process.

Transition practice is frequently measured by outcomes for disabled students in employment, PSE and independent living. Conceptual models of the transition process are discussed, followed by evidence of effective practice and barriers to implementing this. Mostly, the research is based upon the international studies, but where available, a New Zealand (NZ) context is provided. The state of NZ transition research in relation to disabled students is discussed to provide a justification for this investigation.

### Models of Transition

When transition became a major focus of schools and researchers, it was considered to be an outcome-based process leading to employment (Halpern, 1993). Halpern's (1993) *Quality of Life* approach questioned this and emphasised the relationships of those involved and their effect on outcomes in many aspects of student's life. However, it is Kohler's *Transition Taxonomy for Planning* (TTP) that has become the most recognised and tested conceptual model of transition (Beamish, Meadows, & Davies, 2012); Kohler (1996); (Kohler & Field, 2003; Kohler, Gothberg, Fowler, & Coyle, 2016; Xu, Dempsey, & Foreman, 2016). The model, informed by evidence-based practices, is used to aid education services to plan and evaluate their transition processes. It comprises five elements: Student-focused planning; student development; programme structure; family engagement and interagency



collaboration. These elements will serve as the framework to discuss effective and current practice in this study.

## **Student-Focused Planning**

### **Age**

The recommended age for students beginning the transition process in most western countries is between 14-16years-old (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; MoE, 2011; Morgan & Riesen, 2016). Disabled students tend to have poor post-school outcomes and it is acknowledged they learn at a slower rate, making it crucial to begin transition early (Cummings, Maddux, & Casey, 2000; Halpern, 1994; Hitchings, Retish, & Horvath, 2005; Rodriguez et al., 2017). Two studies compared the employment outcomes of disabled students and found those who began the process at 14 years-old had more success than those who started 2 years later (Cimera, Burgess, & Bedesem, 2014; Cimera, Burgess, & Wiley, 2013). Results from a stocktake of transition practices in the Canterbury region found that parents and support agencies found transition planning occurred in the last 12-18 months of school and argued it needed to begin somewhere between 14-16years-old (Cleland et al., 2008). Research has tended to focus less on what age is best and more on the interventions which can be employed to improve post-school outcomes.

### **Student Involvement**

Transition planning can involve many people and the public nature of the process may mean that a student has little control over their own future (Dee, 2006). Student-focused planning, which arose from the Person-Centred Planning (PCP) approach, has become accepted as best-evidence practice (Cavendish, Connor, & Rediker, 2017; Meadan, Sheldon, Appel, & DeGrazia, 2010; Sanderson, Thompson, & Kilbane,

2006). As there is a long history of disabled people being discriminated against and this approach is seen to address the whole person, not just that part of the person that has specific needs (Mirfin-Veitch, 2003). In education, greater student involvement in planning has been linked to improve post-school outcomes (Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010; Test et al., 2009b). In the USA it is not only a right for students to attend their IEP, but they are “actively invited” to participate (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, & Valdes, 2012, p. 140) Cobb and Alwell (2009b) systematically reviewed planning interventions and found that student-involvement was positive and identified the need for more time to include students. They argued that “effective transition planning must include efforts to make students feel heard and valued at IEP meetings” (p.9).

While it is agreed student-focused planning is beneficial, this is not uniformly reflected in the implementation. In the USA, the *National Transition Longitudinal Study* (NTLS) and its successor NTLS-2, are large data collections drawn on to evaluate transition practices. Wagner et al. (2012) used data from NTLS-2 and another longitudinal study and found younger students and those with reduced social communication were less likely to be involved in their transition meetings. Of those students who did attend, only half had some input in the meetings. Similarly Martin et al. (2006) found the percentage of time students communicated in meetings was significantly lower than that for other participants. A qualitative study of small group of disabled students found that while the majority attended meetings, but they felt their perspective was not valued and had little involvement (Hetherington et al., 2010). Furthermore, a recent survey of 167 teachers indicated a lack of active student involvement, though the authors noted this was teachers’ perceptions and may not reflect actual practice (Rodriguez et al., 2017). In another study, Gladstone (2014) conducted a participatory study in Christchurch with two former students with Down’s

Syndrome. He suggested that despite person-centred planning being considered an integral part of the process, it was not an embedded practice. He concluded that “there is no generic transition planning process across schools or expectations of what effective planning looks like” (p.59).

American studies have often indicated the type of disability to be a determinant for student involvement. Students with ID, ASD and EBD were less likely to have a leadership role in meetings or goals for employment and PSE (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011; Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Wagner & Davis, 2006; Wagner et al., 2012; Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995). deFur (2003) argues that transition meetings should shift from a focus on compliance to that of quality where the approach is person-centred.

## **Tools**

To encourage student involvement in the transition process there are many planning tools and interventions available. While more empirical testing is required, growing evidence exists to indicate they are promising practices (Claes, Van Hove, Vandeveld, van Loon, & Schalock, 2010; Meadan et al., 2010). The *Self-Directed IEP* (Martin, Marshall, Maxson, & Jerman, 1996) is a tool comprising 11 lessons which has been shown to increase student participation in meetings (Allen, Smith, Test, Flowers, & Wood, 2001; Kelley, Bartholomew, & Test, 2011; Martin et al., 2006). *Whose Future is it Anyway?* (Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995) is another similar programme that is designed to build self-determination and self-awareness and one study found that using it alongside a computer-based reading programme helped increase student involvement (Lee et al., 2011).

*Planning Alternative Tomorrow's with Hope* (PATH) (Pearpoint, O'Brien, & Forest, 1993) is visual planning tool to aid participants to imagine future goals and

achievement steps. The visual aspect is a strength for engaging those with language difficulties (Held, Thoma, & Thomas, 2004; Kueneman & Freeze, 1997; Papi, 2010). The *McGill Action Planning System* (also referred to as Making Action Plans or MAPS) (Vandercook, York, & Forest, 1989) is a similar planning tool that has been shown to increase self-determination in IEP meetings (Shepherd, Giangreco, & Cook, 2013). Cobb and Alwell (2009b) were encouraged by the number of tools available, but stressed the need for more robust and larger studies to measure the effect on post-school outcomes.

### **Student Development**

Student development involves interventions to improve their abilities and skills to have a positive effect on their post-school outcomes.

### **Self-Determination**

Self-determination refers to the ability of a person to control the direction of their life (Morgan & Riesen, 2016) and for disabled students higher self-determination is strongly linked positive post-school outcomes (Nota, Ferrari, Soresi, & Wehmeyer, 2007; Test et al., 2009b; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). Shogren, Lee, and Panko (2016) used data from NTLS-2 to look at the effect of the aspects of self-determination on post-school outcomes. They found that strong self-empowerment and autonomy correlated with better outcomes in employment, education and independent living. Furthermore, Konrad, Fowler, Walker, Test, and Wood (2007) looked at the effect of self-determination interventions on academic skills. They noted the strongest effect was when the intervention was combined with self-management and goal setting development.

The development of self-determination in the classroom is valued, but there is inconsistency in instructional practices and in research findings. A comparative study of the promotion of self-determination in classrooms found special education teachers were more likely to provide instruction in self-determination than general education teachers (Carter, Lane, Pierson, & Stang, 2008). Chambers et al. (2007) found that students with ID had fewer opportunities for choice making in class. Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000) in a national survey of teachers found respondents valued importance of self-determination, though 31% did not have goals for their students in this area. They found that teachers who educated students with severe disabilities saw no value in teaching it. There is evidence that even when educators valued teaching self-determination they may be unaware of resources to support self-determination interventions. (Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, & Tamura, 2002b; Thoma, Rogan, & Baker, 2001).

### **Vocational Training**

Preparing students for future employment through vocational education and work experience are common practices in school transition programmes (Morgan & Riesen, 2016). A review of best evidence of transition interventions reported that these two practices had a moderate effect on obtaining employment (Test et al., 2009b). A case study of former students now in living-wage jobs, maintained that participating in work experience was a key influence on gaining employment (Lindstrom, Doren, & Miesch, 2011) whilst individuals who completed vocational technology training have been found to have a higher than the national average rate for employment (Luftig & Muthert, 2005). Carter, Austin, and Trainor (2012) identified that students who had a community-based job while still at school were more likely to still be in work 2 years after leaving. *Project SEARCH* is an example of one successful school-to-work

programme. Schall et al. (2015) contended students on this programme required less support and were more likely to stay in work for longer. Similarly another study found 90% of a group 50 students with ASD who participated in the project had paid employment post-graduation (Wehman et al., 2017).

Cobb and Alwell (2009b) concluded that work experience programmes work best when they involve socialisation with other non-disabled people and there are adult role models to learn from. They argued that students were at risk of losing jobs two to three months after school if there was not sufficient support to transition them. Rodriguez et al. (2017) agree, suggesting that teachers need to ensure students have adequate time in work placements to ensure a smooth transition. Vocational training and experiences has mixed implementation in schools, with some schools not providing preparation for employment. In one survey based study of 51 high schools only one third of schools offered employment preparation with much of this in-class rather than community-based (Guy, Sitlington, Larsen, & Frank, 2009).

### **Functional Life-Skills**

A functional curriculum is one that involves teaching skills disabled students need to be independent in their adult life (Browder, 2011) and developing social and independent living skills has been shown to have positive effects on post-school outcomes (Test et al., 2009b). Alwell and Cobb (2009) in review of 50 studies found that the use of life-skills interventions like financial literacy, leisure skills and self-protection, had a positive effect on transition outcomes. However, they cautioned that more research was required to be conclusive. Studies based on data from the NTLS-2 have found that the provision of functional-skills training to students with ID did not consistently result in successful post-school outcomes (Bouck, 2012; Bouck & Joshi, 2012). However, the authors did note that this simplistic comparison did not take into

account curriculum effectiveness...implementation [and] such as student characteristics, teacher's philosophies and contextual issues (e.g. resources)" (p.1182) Chiang, Ni, and Lee (2017) looked at students with ASD and ID and their improvement of life-skills overtime, concluding they would most likely require lifelong development.

While teaching functional-life skills is advocated to prepare students for later life, Bouck (2004) argues this should not be an alternative to an academic curriculum. Cobb and Alwell (2009b) agree saying students' learning should be a combination of both, but have strong focus on socialisation. A review of best practices found that functional life-skills were a precursor for success in other areas including academic achievement (Landmark et al., 2010). Rodriguez et al. (2017) study found teachers wanted disabled students to receive both an academic and functional skill-based curriculum. This could suggest that teachers see value in both disabled students earning qualifications and developing their life-skills as it improves their post-school outcomes.

### **Programme Structure**

The structure of a schools' programme can influence post-school outcomes. This includes the level of transition training staff receive, the educational setting and how they use evaluation to improve their process.

### **Staff Training**

Teachers have been shown to have a strong influence in the transition process. (Hornby & Witte, 2008; Kohler & Greene, 2004). Specific transition training has been shown to help teachers implement effective practices (May, Chitiyo, Goodin, Mausey, & Swan-Gravatt, 2017; Morningstar, Kim, & Clark, 2008), but unfortunately, transition

training is not standard practice in either pre-service or in-service teacher education (Blanchett, 2001; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013). Kochhar-Bryant (2003) argued that the primary method of transition training takes place on-the-job rather than through professional development. In the US, a multi-state survey of special education teachers found no relationship between the number years of teaching and the amount of training received. Teachers with training felt more competent to implement transition practices (Morningstar & Benitez, 2013).

Several studies have found that when teachers have received training, only some aspects of the transition process were covered (Blanchett, 2001; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013). The evidence suggests that teachers who complete transition training are strong on planning and implementation, but lack knowledge of involvement and collaboration with support agencies (Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009).

Specific transition training for teachers has been repeatedly deemed as necessary. Landmark and Zhang (2013) suggest that training in educational policies could help to increase compliance in the aspects of the process. Hornby and Witte (2008) advocate better in-service and pre-service training related to transition for teachers of school leavers in NZ. May et al. (2017) recommend that secondary schools and tertiary institutions work together to improve transition training in teacher education. A review of transition services in one American state had not only teachers, but other related professionals urgently calling for further professional development in transition delivery (Thornton, Thomas, Owens, Salley, & Blackbourn, 2017).

### **Setting**

The inclusion of disabled students in mainstream classes has been linked to improved post-school outcomes for them in independent living and employment (Test et al.,



2009b). Rea, McLaughlin, and Walther-Thomas (2002) compared students with an LD in mainstream versus a 'pull-out' separate classroom programme. They found students in the regular classes displayed better behaviour, had higher grades and higher attendance. Interviews with over 400 students with ID found that inclusion in mainstream was a significant predictor in PSE, though only 21% of them were included in regular classrooms (Baer, Daviso III, Flexer, McMahan Queen, & Meindl, 2011). Martinez, Conroy, and Cerreto (2012) surveyed parents and found inclusion of the student was influenced by parents' expectations of going on to PSE.

Educating disabled students in the mainstream community is another predictor of positive post-school outcomes, especially employment (Test et al., 2009b). Chambers et al. (2007) conducted a literature review of studies and found those in community-based settings had better self-determination. However, Sabbatino and Macrine (2007) described a community-based learning programme called *Start On-Success* and highlighted a number of positive outcomes including increased chances of employment, though they suggest a longitudinal study to test its long-term effects. A survey of special educators found that while many believed community-based extracurricular activities were of value, very few disabled students participated in them (Agran et al., 2017).

Transitioning from residential school placement back into the community can be problematic. Heslop and Abbott (2007) interviewed 15 parents of disabled students who attended residential schools and there was concern about how well services would connect during the transition to another location. The authors emphasised that 'out-of-area' students were more at risk of poor transition planning. Abbott and Heslop (2009) noted the change in location made interagency collaboration more challenging and often students faced the same difficulties which had led to their enrolment leave

in a residential school. Hornby and Witte (2008) looked at the outcomes of 29 students with EBD who attended an NZ residential school and found either returning to mainstream school or a post-school setting was frequently unsuccessful. The authors identified a major factor was a lack of support students received post-transition. This suggests there are issues with support for disabled students returning from the residential schools to the community.

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation tools and current post-school outcomes data help inform educators on which practices are working and for which groups. Disabled students experience significantly less success than their non-disabled peers in employment, PSE and independence (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009; Newman et al., 2011). Students with ID, ASD or EBD often fall behind those with physical disabilities. In the US, Grigal et al. (2011) found within 8 years of leaving schools students with ID had an employment rate of only 46% compared to 74% of people who had other disabilities. Cleland and Smith (2010) indicated that young disabled people are “are almost twice as likely as young non-disabled people to leave school without a qualification” (p.3). There is little other specific data on the post-school outcomes of disabled students in NZ, but disabled people tend to have higher unemployment rates, more likely to live in rental accommodation and less likely to have higher formal qualifications than non-disabled people (Statistics NZ, 2014).

Evaluation tools to assess a school's transition practices appear to be scarce. The *Transition Requirement Checklist* (Storms, O'Leary, & Williams, 2000) is a tool designed to assess whether US schools meet their legal obligations. The Transition Outcomes Project (TOP) uses this tool throughout schools in the US to improve transition compliance (Noonan, Morningstar, & Erickson, 2008; O'Leary, 2003). Finn

and Kohler (2009) completed a study of TOP employing this tool to evaluate the schools' practices, but acknowledged the limitation that it had not been tested for reliability or validity. The TTP (Kohler, 1996; Kohler et al., 2016), while not specifically an evaluation tool, is a tested model of effective transition which schools could use (Beamish et al., 2012; Cobb & Alwell, 2009a; Landmark et al., 2010; Mazzotti, Rowe, & Test, 2013; Test et al., 2009b; Xu et al., 2016). The National Technical Assistance Centre on Transition's (NTACT) *Evaluation Toolkit* (Kohler & Gothberg, 2016) is a resource the providers indicators for the legal obligations, evidence-based strategies and guidance on how schools can create their own evaluation process. Currently no studies have specifically evaluated at this toolkit. A possible reason for scarcity of evaluation tools is the variation in legal and recommended guidelines in each country. NZ has no specific legal requirements for transition and it does not appear to be a major focus of Education Review Office (ERO) reports.

### **Family Engagement**

Family/whānau involvement in transition is considered both an effective practice and a predictor of successful post-school outcomes (Sample, 1998; Smith, McDougall, & Edelen-Smith, 2006). Parents are the only constant support people in disabled students' lives, and responsibility will fall upon them if other supports fail or are not available. Dovey-Pearce et al. (2012) conducted focus groups and interviews with disabled students found that they rated influence of supportive parent as influential on their participation in the planning. Wagner, Newman, and Javitz (2014) used data from NTLS-2 to investigate family socio-economic status on post-school outcomes. They concluded that parental expectation was the most influential "type of parent involvement when it comes to academic achievement" (p.14). The authors suggest schools could help increase students' chances of PSE if they provide the families

information about their child's curriculum. Test et al., (2009a) in their literature review found teaching family and transition had a moderate level of evidence.

Despite family involvement being an effective practice, research has identified they are not consistently included. Doyle, Guckin, and Shevlin (2017) investigated parents' views of transition process in final 3 years of mainstream secondary school and they found parents identified problems in the communications with the school and varying levels of support. Cavendish et al. (2017) reported that parents frequently lacked input into IEP meetings and had disagreements over a deficit-view of their children. To improve parent and student involvement, the authors suggest the meeting process to be divided into phases of consultation. A study of a group parents in one US state found a key indicator of parental involvement was the quality of relationships they had with transition professionals (deFur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001). In NZ, Cleland et al. (2008) found parents had mixed reactions about school support, adding that an ideal framework would also include mentoring from other parents who had been experienced their child's transition. Shanks (2016) reported that in Wellington, parents often had great difficulty in discussing transition as they are confronted by life changing decisions. This suggests a need to not only guide students through the process, but allowing for time and support for parents as they adjust to these changes.

### **Interagency Collaboration**

As part of the process, transition professionals serve as bridge to post-school opportunities. Effective interagency collaboration has been shown to be a predictor of positive post-school outcomes in employment and education (Test et al., 2009b). Landmark et al. (2010) review of best-practices found students who were supported by agencies had more positive employment outcomes. Benz, Lindstrom, and Yovanoff (2000) investigated student perceptions and post-school outcomes of their educational

programmes and found coordinated services with individual support had positive effects. Agran, Cain, and Cavin (2002) noted that students who waited until after secondary school to connect with services faced greater transition obstacles.

Effective interagency collaboration is inconsistently occurring in transition (Noonan et al., 2008). The findings of a survey of special educators and rehabilitation counsellors found the latter group were not often invited to transition meetings (Agran et al., 2002). Oertle and Trach (2007) concurred citing that even when professionals did attend, there was lack of communication and information sharing and they highlight a need for more research into improving these interactions. A survey of transition teachers and vocational rehabilitation counsellors showed that they both value collaboration, but it not always feasible to do so (Taylor, Morgan, & Callow-Heusser, 2016). The authors suggested that poor collaboration was due to insufficient training, support and a lack of understanding of the others' role. In NZ, *Transition Providers* offer a service to support qualifying disabled students, their families and the school in their last year of secondary education. As yet, there is no research that seems to look at this unique system.

## **Transition in NZ**

Transition research in NZ is sparse, with few studies undertaken. Kimble (2007) completed a qualitative study with six disabled youth who had recently left school. She found they experienced difficulties with gaining employment and inconsistencies in the support they received. She recommended a need for research into how schools support them in transition. Gladstone (2014) found students experience limited opportunities in employment, social networking and PSE. He argued government policies restrict students transitioning to vocational day-bases and fail to emphasise transition planning compliance. He recommended that MoE track disabled students

post-school and ERO should review transition practices in each school. Irving (2013) looked at a case study of post-secondary transition scheme in the South Island for disabled students with high needs. It found parents had better awareness of opportunities when clear communication between all stakeholders was established. Hart (2017) conducted a 6-month ethnography of three disabled youth who had recently left special schools. She found an insufficient trialling of post-school options and a lack collaboration between professionals. To improve the process, she suggested ways to change the trialling of options and that ministries involved need to have better cross-department collaboration. Reports from other professional groups have added to these findings. Of note, Shanks (2016) prepared a transition project report for a NASC agency called Life Unlimited. He conducted 37 consultations with disabled youth and their families and found transition planning was occurring too late, families struggled to navigate the system, and there is a lack of coordination between services. He recommended a need for a single organisation to act as coordinator through the transition and suggests NASC is well-placed to this.

The scarcity of research in NZ transition, presents many opportunities to research. The National Transition Guidelines (NTG) (MoE, 2011) have many recommended effective practices for schools to follow and these seem to concur with research found in this literature, but they have not been reviewed in practice to understand their feasibility. The guidelines state the recommendation to “identify networking opportunities for schools to share and develop aspects of their transition process.” (MoE, 2011, p.4). However, the guidelines share no examples of these practices being implemented.

While few studies exist on NZ transition there is an indication that outcomes are poor for most disabled students. Interagency collaboration, school transition plans and

transitioning into post-school options have been highlighted as problematic areas in need of addressing. The NTGs outline effective transitions practices, yet no NZ examples exist for educators to follow. The government has signalled a review of ORS funding for 18-21year-olds is due, though scarce research is available for them to make an informed analysis. Therefore, there is an urgent need to review these guidelines, provide examples of feasible effective practice and start a discussion for schools to participate in. Accordingly, the following research question(s) became the focus of the study.

How do schools approach the transition of ORS funded disabled students from secondary school? Sub-questions were:

1. What effective practices are being used across different educational settings?
2. What barriers can be identified in each setting and are there any in common?
3. How do schools' perspectives on the transition process compare to the NTGs (MoE, 2011)?

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

This chapter outlines the methodology and the research procedures that were used to gather data and analyse data in this qualitative study. Attention is paid to data sources, participants, data collection and analysis and issues relating to trustworthiness, ethical considerations.

### **Aims of the Study**

The primary aim of this study was to:

Explore how schools approach transition of ORS funded disabled students from secondary school. Objectives were to:

1. identify effective practice in different educational settings.
2. identify barriers in each setting and those that are in common
3. compare schools' perspectives on the transition process to the NTGs (MoE, 2011)

### **Theoretical and Methodological Perspective**

Disability studies in education typically sit within an emancipatory paradigm (Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008). Emancipatory research is informed by the social model of disability, and differs from positivist and interpretive paradigms by forgoing objectivity to address the oppressive ideologies that marginalise minorities like disabled people (Barton, 2005). A key premise of emancipatory research is to consider the “subject from the perspective of disability rights” (Brueggemann, 2013, p. 294). Identifying positive examples of the transition process in NZ schools is contributing to disability rights and it is hoped that the findings support the empowerment of disabled students in the transition process.



Transition is a complex process with multiple participants, and a qualitative research design was appropriate to capture the perspective of school personnel in rich detail. Using this methodology connected with the emancipatory paradigm by rejecting a positivist view of research while it allowed for an acceptance of the multiple realities of the participants (Stone & Priestley, 1996).

## **Context**

### **Schools**

This multiple-case-study explored the transition policies and practices in three NZ schools providing education for disabled students. The schools were:

1. Hohepa Special School, a residential school,
2. Parkside Special School, a special school consisting of six satellite classes attached to mainstream schools and one inner-city transition unit
3. Waimea College with a special needs unit attached to a mainstream secondary school.

### **Procedural Steps**

The sequence of the data collection and analysis was as follows

1. Schools and participants recruited
2. Interviews, observations and document review were carried out
3. Reflective journal was kept during the whole process
4. Data was collated ready for analysis
5. Data was analysed and coded into themes

### **Participants**

The participants (n=17) were staff from the three schools that were involved in the transition process, eleven were interviewed and a further six observed. From Hohepa school the 5 participants interviewed and observed were the principal, two teacher-aides attached to the transition class and the transition teacher. Hohepa school, is part of a trust which also administers adult services providing a transition service for many of the students. From Parkside school, the 3 participants interviewed and observed were the educational psychologist, the deputy principal and the work experience teacher. One meeting observation involved two other teachers and three school therapists (occupational, physiotherapist and speech-language therapist). From Waimea College, the 3 participants interviewed and observed were the transition coordinator/acting head of department and two teacher-aides working with students going through transition. One other teacher-aide was observed in a lesson.

### **Students and Parent Participants**

The 23 students observed (four from Hohepa, nine from Parkside and 10 from Waimea) were aged between 16 and 21 years-old and had varied disabilities ranging from ID, ASD to Cerebral Palsy, Down's Syndrome and other learning disabilities. All students were receiving the ORS funding, either classed as *high needs* or *very high needs*. ORS funded students were selected as the transition process is more likely to be the most challenging because their needs would be higher than other disabled students who were not funded. While it is the ideal to include the disabled persons' voice, I chose to concentrate on the staff perspective as I was again limited by time and resource constraints. Neither students or parents were interviewed. Four parents of disabled students were observed during transition meetings. This included three mothers and one father.

### **Documentation**

Two schools provided a transition process policy document, the other provided a copy of the planning booklet used with the student. All gave IEP document templates. One family provided a copy of their child's completed IEP. The most recent ERO reports were used to provide school descriptions, but none contained any specific transition information.

### **Recruitment**

The schools were identified through the researchers' personal and professional networks as having unique settings and/or effective transition practices. I hold a position as a teacher in a special needs school, so to avoid any conflict of interest approached schools outside of the Wellington area. As mentioned one of the aims was to compare different settings, so three types of schools were selected: Special, residential and a unit attached to a mainstream school. In each school, the principal or head of department was initially contacted and then further discussion resulted in agreement to take part. The three schools approached consented. Participants were then identified by each school as being suitable/available for the study.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Interviews**

The primary source of data came from 11 interviews with staff. Each participant was interviewed separately for between 25 and 70 minutes. Interviews were semi-structured with a set of 10 open-ended questions as a guide to the discussion (see Appendix G). These questions were loosely based on the NTGs. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were checked by the researcher and then given to each participant to review. Some changes were made by the participants

based on these reviews. A supplementary question was asked of one participant via email.

### **Documentation Review**

A second data source was the documentation relevant to transition. The IEP plans and policy documents were reviewed for consistency with interviews and observational data.

### **Observations**

Observations of staff and students working in the school were a third data source. An observation protocol form was used to record information (see Appendix H). Each school provided the researcher with a guided tour of their facilities, highlighting aspects that are related to the transition process. At Hohepa School the tour included the residential houses and adult services community which many of the students transition to. At Waimea College, the tour was limited to the Special Education Department, though many students access other mainstream classrooms and buildings. At two schools, observations were made of students attending work experience. At the other school two observations were made of students during a cooking lesson and a preparation for employment lesson. Two of the schools arranged observations of transition planning meetings between staff, students and parents. Unfortunately, the third school was unable to do so. Three meetings were observed in total.

### **Reflective Journal**

During the data collection and data analysis phases initial research impressions, questions and thoughts were captured in a daily reflective journal.

## Data Analysis

The process of data coding and analysis began with reading through the data sources and then using the NVivo 11 software programme (version 11.3) for the next stages of coding and analysis. Various types of coding were used in the process and each case-study was coded separately before completing a cross-case analysis (Ridenour & Newman, 2008). Prior to starting fieldwork, the NTGs were analysed into discrete parts and compared for differences and similarities using *open coding* (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These codes served as a starting point for coding the interview transcripts - a method called *provisional coding* which is useful when building upon previous research (Saldaña, 2013). As a research interest was how the schools' transition processes compared to the NTGs so it was considered appropriate to generate provisional codes from the NTGs.

To avoid having a too narrow coding technique, in the second cycle the interview transcripts were open coded to uncover other distinct concepts or categories of the participant responses (Stake, 1995). Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) indicate it is common to expand or modify these original predetermined codes. A word frequency query was performed to create a word cloud to see if any other relevant codes were missed (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Following a third cycle of codifying an analytic memo was begun. Saldaña (2013) discusses how these memos can be useful in clarifying codes or discovering better ones. In the memo, the participants' responses for each code were paraphrased. The school documents, reflective journal and observations were read through used to add information to this memo. From this the codes were then simplified and put under categories based on similarities (Stake, 1995). The next stage was to interpret these codes and categories under *themes* (Creswell, 2007). Theming the data is process of organising and further simplifying

repeated ideas or patterns (Saldaña, 2013). This was done by reviewing the research questions and organising the categories in such a way to answer these. Once each case was completed a cross-case analysis was performed. Cross case-analysis is a research method used to compare commonalities and differences between processes or events (Ridenour & Newman, 2008). The data was compared to how each school's setting may have impacted upon the transition processes.

### **Trustworthiness**

Ensuring there is trustworthiness and validity to a study is critical to the research design (Punch, 2014). Trustworthiness can be described as the “extent can we place confidence in the outcomes of the study” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 145). Lincoln and Guba (1985) present a framework to test this methodological rigour which includes four key factors: credibility (confidence in the truth); transferability (generalisability to other contexts); dependability (consistency in measurement); and confirmability (reviewing the researcher bias).

### **Triangulation**

Using multiple data sources may establish credibility and confirmability (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This study used interviews from various staff in each school, document reviews, observations and a reflective journal to corroborate with each of these data sources.

### **Member checking**

A way to establish validity of the study is to check with the participants if their contribution was correctly interpreted (Moore, Lapan, & Quartaroli, 2012). Following the interviews, the participants were given an opportunity to review the transcripts.

They were also given a draft of the results to check the school has been accurately described and they were satisfied with the researcher interpretation.

### **Thick Description**

Having sufficient rich detail allows an opportunity for the reader to decide how transferrable the findings are to another situation (Creswell, 2007). Multiple interviews and observations afforded the collection of a large amount of data. This was used to describe each case in detail so that not only the three cases can be compared, but that the reader could decide if the findings apply to other school settings.

### **Purposeful Sampling**

Purposeful sampling can strengthen transferability of findings (Mertens, 2012). It allows the researcher to specifically select the participants or cases to study (Creswell, 2007). The schools were purposefully selected based as reputation for good practice in transition, and having sufficient students engaged in the transition process to generate useful and useable data. The findings from the three different case studies can be generalised at the reader's discretion to similar cases.

### **Audit Trail**

A reflective researcher's journal can strengthen dependability and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). These give a record of the research process and provide the chance to "walk people through your work" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 146). A reflective journal was kept detailing the initial impressions and procedures during data collection and data analysis.

### **Peer Debriefing**

Providing an “external check on the inquiry process” can enhance the credibility of a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). The completed codes and themes of one case study were shown the researcher’s supervisors before moving onto to complete further data analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical consent for the study was gained from Victoria University’s Human Ethics Committee. The participants all received an information sheet and consent form outlining the study (see Appendices A-F). All three schools consented to be named in the study, the participants consented to being referred to by job title or an alias to protect their identities. As some of the students had limited capacity to understand or give consent, adapted information sheets and consent forms were provided. Parental consent for their child to be part of the study was also sought and necessary when a student was unable to give consent. With some students, their ability to cope with new people and routine changes can be challenging. Each school thus prepared students for their participation in the study. Flexibility to change or discontinue observations was provided in the event a student was unable to cope with researcher’s presence.



## **Chapter 5: Findings**

Findings are presented as three case studies, first giving a description of the schools and participants involved and then a summary of the findings collected through the interviews, observations and document analysis. The data below was accurate as of 2016. The key objectives of the study were to:

1. To identify effective practice in different educational settings.
2. To identify barriers in each setting and those that are in common
3. Compare schools' perspectives on the transition process to the NTGs (MoE, 2011)

### **Hohepa School**

Hohepa School is a private special residential school for disabled students aged 7-21 years funded by a private trust. The school receives ORS funding to educate the students who are from the North Island and are referred to Hohepa because their educational and welfare needs cannot be sufficiently met locally.

The transition-aged students have their own classroom and kitchen unit and share other facilities with the rest of the school. There are several residential houses for the students. There is housing for the school's volunteers. The Hohepa Trust has adult services at Clive (20km away). The accommodation and employment facilities include a farm, orchard, cheesery, weavery, and woodworking and candle making workshops. There is additional adult accommodation elsewhere in Hawke's Bay.

Approximately 40 students attend Hohepa, including ten in the transition class. Students have a range of disabilities, many with high behavioural needs or with ASD. Most identify as Pākehā/NZ European with the remaining as Māori or other ethnic groups. There were no students with significant mobility issues such as wheelchair users. Most were male.

Hohepa has many staff including teachers, teacher aides, office/administration, therapists, a nurse and a specialist transition teacher in the transition unit. Volunteers work as additional teacher aides or support staff in the school. Volunteers mostly come from overseas and stay for approximately a year. Hohepa interacts with several transition providers – with one main one being preferred. These agencies have a MSD contract to supply transition support to ORS funded students in their final year of school. Disabled adults work come to the school site to manage the fruit and vegetable fields. Staff, students and disabled adults from the two sites interact through events like festivals and market days.

Hohepa was founded on, and its approach to teaching and learning is underpinned by the teaching and philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. This holistic approach is complemented by The *New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC), the *Fuel and Launch Curriculum* (an expanded and enhanced version of Level one of NZC) and the *Can-do Curriculum* (an in-house designed curriculum for teaching functional life-skills). There is an emphasis on developing life-skills. The transition unit follows the same curriculum, but with a greater focus on life-skills and with students going off site for work experience either into the community or at the adult site. The school provides various therapies including eurythmics (movement), art and music and activities such as weaving, gardening and woodwork.

Post-school, most students stay in the Hohepa system, either living and working at the Clive site, or in Hohepa run local community housing. Some Hohepa housing is provided in other parts of the country. For a few ex-students there are courses at a local tertiary provider. Those students who leave Hawke's Bay may access day-services and residential placements run by other adult service providers, or alternatively return to their families for care.

## **Transition Practices and Barriers**

### **Planning**

The transition process at Hohepa had recently been reviewed and was in a state of development. The school had previously focused on students' transition late in schooling, but once the need for more preparation for transition was recognised 16 years-old became the age to start the process.

Participants emphasised the value of student input into transition planning as important to the process. The contribution of each student varied according to their ability to participate. It was easier to include students with a strong communicative ability. For those with more difficulty, staff relied on close relationships to understand students' non-verbal communication. The Adult Services Manager emphasised the importance of having an expectation that students will communicate their aspirations.

*You just have to try different things and they will tell you. They will tell you through their behaviour, but you have to try. Don't box them in by, [saying they] can't.*

Family/whānau involvement in planning was valued, especially when it came to the location the student transitioned to. Within the Hohepa community, students could

transition locally in Hawke's Bay or somewhere else in the country. A third option was connecting with adult services run by other providers, in Hawke's Bay or in the student's home area. As options were limited it was important to inform and support the parents to make this decision early enough so that the correct agencies could be involved. While going to the Clive Community was not the only alternative, the transition teacher indicated he had had only a small involvement with other local adult service providers.

Whether parents attended planning meetings varied. The school location was a factor in whether families attended meetings. Those living further away were less likely to come, but the school used Skype/teleconferences and always sought feedback from parents prior to and after meetings. Residential house staff (called 'house-parents') were recognised as playing a key role in transition planning. The more verbal students often had discussions with their house parents about their aspirations. The residential staff were observed teaching life skills and preparing students for transition into the Hohepa adult houses.

In evaluating the planning process, all the participants discussed success in terms of a student's progress. Each response varied in their measure of this success, but all had a common theme of independence. The school does a functional life skills assessment for each student at 16 years of age. This data is used to create goals and measure progress, and is an indication of how ready a student is for transition. Teacher-aide #2 identified a successful transition to the Clive as one which involved acceptance by the community. He described the result of one student he transitioned.

*I felt that I could do less, I could sit back more, and I felt that he was going to be alright, and he has been alright. That's what I think a good transition is.*

The tracking of responsibilities and the future progress of the student is made easier when the student transitions into Hohepa Adult Services. Staff continued to interact with former students in the Clive community through festivals, events and when former students came to work on the school gardens. All these interactions helped in evaluating the transition process of a student.

### **Teaching**

The school provided specific teaching to prepare students for transition. There was a strong community culture which allowed for a supportive transition between the school and the adult site. The Steiner curriculum influenced the teaching style and types of activities used to educate the students. There was greater focus on teaching functional life-skills than standards-based education from 16 years-old onwards. Physical activities helped students manage their behaviour and learn functional life-skills. Activities like weaving and woodwork mirrored the opportunities students have if they transition to the Clive community. Many examples were given of activities that developed a student's life-skills, independence and connected to their post-school opportunities. The school regularly included activities that focused on developing communication and self-determination skills. The transition teacher used social stories and communication classes to address emotional responses and preparation for change. Choice making was frequently an aspect of lessons.

### **Community Inclusion**

The students access the community in a range of different ways from outings, to work experience and the Hohepa festivals. These experiences are aimed at preparing students for transition and nurturing a sense of inclusion in the local community. Trips to local facilities like the swimming pool and shopping centres were often conducted

by residential staff while the school concentrated on work experience and Hohepa community events. The festivals shared with Clive, mean from a young age, students were exposed to the adult community. One participant observed that Hohepa needed to make further connections in the community.

*Connections with the outside of the school; that is perhaps a bit wanting, but it doesn't mean to say that we're not doing anything. We have been made aware that we need to explore out of Hohepa, because it's very easy for us to think just within our Hohepa bubble.*

The principal remarked their model of having the adult community as a “mirror setting” of the school was not suited to all students, implying the need to explore other pathways. Teacher-aide #2 discussed this shift in student need and how Clive was coping with this.

*The type of student that we're getting now...is different to how it used to be. It used to be sort of Down Syndrome, and they'd come more willing and more able ...I think some people in Clive maybe aren't sure what to do with this sort of new breed of student.*

He stressed how these changes have made it even more important to develop those skills for working at Clive even earlier. The participants all asserted that there was a higher ratio of school staff to students at the school compared with adult services. The transition teacher was grateful for the high staff support while at school, but identified transition to less support could be problematic. Teacher-aide #2 felt that if students spent more time at school learning the skills required of them at Clive then they would cope with less support. The principal commented on the difference of funding students receive once they leave.

*If I look at the resources and the funding that is available for school leavers now, it's just so much less than what they can tap into whilst they get the MoE funding... and that's a big problem.*

Part of the students' preparation for transition was through work experience, consisting of in-house activities at Clive and work placements outside in the community. The principal outlined that work experience was an individual process, but working at Clive was something "everybody gets a bit of taste of". As students typically transition to live and work with Hohepa Adult Services, the work experience acts as part of the handover process. The opportunity helped the students prepare for the future.

*I think we have a wonderful facility, because ...our school-leavers can go where they can see their peers at work as well.*

When attending work experience at Clive, the students are supported by school staff. Work experience is a big change for the students and some individuals require more time to adapt. The staff member acts as their support person and helps with communicating information. Teacher-aide #2 speculated that the adult services staff go through the process of adjusting to meet the needs the transitioning student.

*It's a learning curve... they need to understand who the student is and what the student is about, in order to meet his needs.*

This handover process is made easier by two key factors: students become familiar with the adult site from a young age and there is a strong link between school and Hohepa adult services. Being part of the one organisation helped communication, as the Adult Service manager noted: "Because we are one community - we are one management, we meet, have transition meetings...and we look at the staffing." The

teachers maintain contact with Clive about a student's initial progress after they have transitioned.

In addition to work experience at Clive, students may participate in community-based jobs. Students have access to a range of roles from working in restaurants, rest-homes and car washing. The principal reasoned finding jobs was “a matter of working with aspirations” of the student while still widening their experiences. She indicated that “if you're a young person who [has] limited opportunities, your mind-set works with what you know.” As with work experience at Clive, the students go through a process of learning to manage themselves. Typically, community work experience was organised in partnership with a transition provider. The school uses several providers, one of whom was the preferred choice. The school had a good relationship with this provider who was open to find opportunities for all their students, not just the more capable and independent ones. The principal and transition teacher valued the work of this provider. While the provider and the transition teacher believed it would be beneficial if support could be in place earlier – the funding did not allow for this. There was very little discussion around students turning community work experience into paid employment apart from the roles offered in their adult community. Teacher-aide #2 felt that gaining employment outside of the adult community could be challenging.

*I think in the real-world employers are really looking for someone that can come and be independent; someone that they don't have to watch all the time. I'm not sure that we've had too many students that would fit into that box.*

PSE for the transitioning students is available through the local polytechnic, Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT). EIT have courses for disabled people to learn about being independent, however, only the occasional student attended. The principal



argued the eligibility criteria, level of independence required and reduced support were barriers for students. She contended there was a huge gap in PSE opportunities and felt that it was a loss of potential learning for her students. Her suggestion was to establish a training centre for 19-25 year-olds to provide continued learning.

Because of the lack of PSE opportunities, the adult community had begun two initiatives to provide further education. The learning centre was a place that adults can learn employment related skills. The other initiative was their *More Independent Learning Project*. Adults and some students from the school could access a housing programme tailored to develop their social and life skills. Prior to this initiative, students transitioned to live at Clive. The principal reasoned that the sheltered community did have learning opportunities, but also limitations. Hohepa have adapted former bed and breakfast homes into a spectrum of living arrangements with varying levels of staff support. The goal behind this is to help the adults live as independently as possible. Three current students were transitioning into such adult housing before finishing school. The intention was to increase the number of houses like this as funding permitted.

### **Staff training**

The school provides all staff with professional development. While there is no specific training for transition, much can be applied to assisting students in the process. The principal maintained that specific transition support was through staff meetings.

*For transition, it's more with the teachers group or the teachers in the transition team, so they understand the focus or the emphasis on transition; the independence, doing things for others ... understand the vision around the transition process and what is important for young people.*

## ORS Review

The potential threat of reduced ORS funding for 18-21 year-olds worried the participants and they felt it could have a negative influence on the transition process. Teacher Aide #1 suggested that this may mean transitioning students at an earlier age. Taking away that time she stressed could amount to “a lifetime for some children.” The Transition Teacher agreed highlighting the experience of two transitioning students.

*I think it would force the children - thinking of our students - the young fellow...who is quite bright, but emotionally he's massively - he's really vulnerable. To hurry him along I think would be a bit detrimental for him. [Another student] woke up to only what he wanted to do a year ago.*

The principal speculated this could just be cost-saving measure. She did however suggest that the funding could be used differently.

*I think funding needs to be available, but it could be a different process. Learning is different for 18 year olds in comparison to a seven or an eight-year-old. It's just a different focus*

A “negative impact” was how the Adult Services Manager described the potential change as. He believed that instead of funding being cut it should be extended until the students were 25 years. His reasoning was that people with intellectual disabilities require support for a longer period to become independent.

*If you put the money in early enough, the money is well spent, and intellectually disabled people learn slower. That's a fact; they just learn slower. They need more repetition. They need more continuity. They need smaller steps.... That's a wonderful process...That's setting people free.*

The funding he believes should be used to run programmes like the MIL initiative that teach the life skills needed to be independent

### **Parkside Special School**

Parkside School is a Special Needs school for students aged 5-21 years. There are approximately 130 students that attend across the 8 different school sites. It caters for a wide range of students from those with ASD, Down's syndrome to profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD). The school is in Pukekohe, a small town south of Auckland. The school covers the Franklin region through a range of facilities and outreach staff.

Parkside has one main "base" school and six other satellite units that are attached to mainstream primary or secondary schools. There is a newly established community-based transition class, called Te Whare Tapawha (TWT) located in the centre of town. The students are placed according to several factors including age, location, ability and needs.

For the students of transition age (16-21 years-old), the majority either attend TWT (23 students) or a unit attached to the local high school (18 students). A small number who stay at the base school (7 students), due to their needs and abilities. At the base school, there are several classes, outdoor spaces and a hydrotherapy pool. The unit on the grounds of a local high school, is run by Parkside school staff. TWT is ground floor open plan office space with a kitchen, computer suite and three other separate rooms. It is within in walking distance of the town amenities for shopping and community recreation.

Parkside employs many staff, including teachers, teacher aides, therapists and other specialists. They have outreach staff who work with other disabled students not

at Parkside, but in the local area. TWT has two teachers and two teacher aides, a work experience coordinator works across the unit and TWT. Specialists in music, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, education psychology and physiotherapy support the staff and students at all sites.

## **Transition Practices and Barriers**

### **Planning**

Students first enter the transition process when they turn 16 years to allow enough preparation time. A booklet called “My Choices, My Future” which provides the student an opportunity to express future aspirations. School staff, family/whānau may all contribute to the booklet. Because these aspirations may change over time, the booklet is updated every 18 months. This information becomes the basis for a student’s ITP. The school used two recognised planning tools, PATH and MAPS to base their planning process on. The educational psychologist outlined that when considering the future, PATH allowed students to look at their strengths. Contrastingly, MAPS made them consider possibly problem scenarios.

ITP meetings involved the student, their family, a transition teacher, school senior leader. School specialists when required would attend meetings. Transition providers and care workers were invited if necessary. Student participation was viewed as essential in ITP meetings. The deputy principal acknowledged the number of attendees can be daunting for a student, so staff ensure students are prepared prior to the meeting. For students with communication difficulties they adapt meetings using visuals and assistive technology to increase participation. The education psychologist stressed having the expectation students can contribute.

*I think the answer is to get participation at whatever level you can...and not just for them to be there, but to actually participate.*

In some meetings, the deputy principal noted parents have asked not to have their child present. This was usually because of a sensitive issue, for example when parents are not comfortable discussing changes to living arrangements before they have spoken with their child first. However, she noted there can be times when what the parent and student want differs. She highlighted that the parents typically have authority to make decisions about their child's future, which can create a power imbalance. In these circumstances, the school has offered the student an advocate from an outside agency. She stressed the importance keeping a balance between the needs of the student and those of the family.

*I think for us, the big thing is to be aware when there is, perhaps different ideas from a family and a student, and that's when we need to be working with the student, and talking about what they'd like to do.*

Information about the transition process is regularly shared with the parents. The school holds an annual information evening that introduces the parents to the transition providers. There is a transition expo held in Auckland, but due to the distance, families often tend to struggle to attend and school staff go on their behalf.

The school evaluates its transition process through feedback from families and transition providers. The student is monitored post-school for the first term after exiting school. The deputy principal outlined that if the student has transition to an adult day-service, she will visit the facility to check on their progress. As many of their past students may have transitioned to a day-service, often she will informally see their progress. She implied that because strong relationships they develop with the student

and families there is an ongoing commitment and interest in their post-school outcomes.

*You invest so much into their lives, and they really become a part of your family, that you want to do as much as you can, within the constraints of school to set them up for life outside of school.*

## **Teaching**

Parkside taught a combination of academic and vocational and functional life-skills. Alongside the NZC, they used the South Pacific Education Courses (SPEC) to teach these skills. The deputy principal endorsed the SPEC programme as it allowed them to combine academic and functional skills while still be flexible enough to adapt to individual student needs. SPEC had an advantage in that two of the courses lead to students achieving NCEA. However, she conceded only few students attained this level. The vocational and functional life-skills lessons included using money, employment preparation and occupation specific training. The education psychologist spoke about programmes he created for the students to learn “adaptive skills” to cope in society. Functional social communication, developing relationships, sexuality education and managing mental well-being were components of this preparation.

The change in environment had an impact on the student’s independence. From 18-21 years students left the high-school unit for TWT. The deputy principal labelled it as one of the “best things that has happened” for their transition programme. She speculated that the families see the move to TWT, has resulted in “amazing growth and independence...in their young folk.”

## **Work Experience and Employment**

The work experience programme begins at 16 years-old and students have 16 community placements available, varying in occupation. The students are matched to roles according to skills, aspirations and ITP goals. Students start with “in-house” jobs at the school and once proven they can work for a period of 30-40 minutes and understand instructions, they are deemed ready for more complex roles. In these community-based jobs the students have short introduction-to-work experiences. The work experience teacher reported that varying the jobs helped to extend the students’ abilities and increase their awareness of opportunities. At one work-site the students work alongside other disabled adults from a local adult day-service through one work site. He implied that this was an opportunity that students may be able to continue post-school. Student progress is regularly evaluated through conversations which are aimed at developing their self-determination skills.

*I have these conversations with students and together we decide on what their next step will be. It is one of the main aims to get students to make decisions for themselves (Work Experience Teacher).*

There were a few students of transition age who were not involved in work experience. They tended to be students with severe challenging behaviour or profound and multiple learning disabilities. These students were involved in alternative programmes at the main base school.

Participants emphasised the high level of work that was required to establish and maintain the relationships with employers. The need to ensure balance of benefit for both students and employers was repeatedly mentioned. Despite the school’s efforts, the number of students who go onto either full or part-time employment is very low. The work experience teacher was adamant there was still a benefit.

*So, it's really hard. I mean, if you look at statistics...there's very few of them that actually end up in employment - even part-time employment. If you can give them this little step up, or just a little bit of experience, they still get a foot in the door then.*

He felt employers sometimes had negative attitudes about students which interfered with gaining employment.

*I think people have just got a wrong perspective. They don't understand that there's also the students that actually can cope extremely well, that just need a little bit of support.*

The impact of health and safety legislation made employers hesitant to offer work experience, particularly in higher risk roles like automotive mechanics and building. Altus Enterprises was one local employer he mentioned that differed because their focus was on hiring disabled people.

The responsibility of finding employment or continuing work experience once a student leaves school is a problematic area. The work experience teacher said, "I think it's a real hard question actually, and kind of difficult to answer, because it's not just one specific organisation or group, is it?" He suggested the solution was a closer liaison between the school, family, transition providers and adult day-services to ensure the responsibility is managed more effectively.

## **PSE**

As a result of work experience some students decided to pursue further training in an occupation they enjoyed. Examples of students beginning training in food preparation and childcare were given. MIT and Auckland University of Technology (AUT) were the main providers of PSE for their students. The deputy principal commented in the past



students had enrolled in courses, but noted that none of the current students meet entry requirements to such courses. Transportation to courses posed another problem for students wanting to attend tertiary courses which are delivered outside of Pukekohe. Taxi costs were still too high, despite some funding subsidies being available. Using public transport was a challenge for many students who lacked the independence to do so.

### **Leisure Activities**

Students participated in sports through Special Olympics (an organisation providing sporting programmes for people with ID), which provided them opportunities to socialise with other disabled people from outside of their own school. The work experience teacher implied it has provided stability for transition students as it is a familiar activity they could continue post-school. A local adult-services youth group provided a similar sense of continuity. Connecting with this group post-school gave ex-students another avenue to continue social inclusion.

### **Interagency Collaboration**

There was a choice of five transitions providers that students and families could connect with in their final year of school. The providers mainly helped to find an adult day-service placement and sometimes assisted with finding employment and/or accommodation. The providers were part of organisations that provided adult day-services programmes and residential accommodation. While a model like this, has the potential for providers to endorse their own day-services and accommodation, the deputy principal did not see this problem occurring as well. She stated her role was promote the providers equally to the student and family.

A memorandum of understanding set up between all stakeholders that establishes the level of support the school can provide in the process. When a student transitioned into an adult-service placement, the provider required teacher-aide time to accompany the student. The school would typically commit to four teacher aide supported visits, depending on the agreement with the provider. The deputy principal noted some friction around this request.

*There's been a couple of times when a transition coordinator said, oh we need a teacher aide with this young person for 10 visits this term, but we can't always provide that much support.*

Releasing a teacher aide to go on more than four visits stretched the school resources as it took a valuable staff member away from the class. If the programme was not Pukekohe, they "have to pay the transport as well as the time to get there" (Deputy principal).

School therapists were sometimes involved in educating new support staff on aspects of a student's care (e.g. physical and communication needs). Service providers are invited to the school to do training on how to best support a transitioning student. However, the participation from these agencies varied. The deputy principal suggested why this might be: "I don't know if some of the providers see the value in that. I mean, that's a big judgemental thing, but I wonder if they don't necessarily see the importance." She added it could also be due to limited funding a service provider receives to release their staff. She indicated that interagency collaboration was area they needed to develop further at the school.

The reduction of support post-school was an area the participants expressed concern about. One issue was that when students transition into adult day-services

they could miss out on supports like regular therapeutic interventions which they received at school.

*I think in terms of what they move onto, it concerns me that the students have a whole team wrapped around them at school and then suddenly school's no longer there, they're in a new place, and all they've got are the workers in the organisation that are running the program, or the business.*

The deputy principal implied that an increase in funding to adult-services was a priority.

### **Staff Training**

All Parkside staff received a general induction upon commencing employment. For teachers working in transition there was more specific training around the ITP process and using the planning documentation. Teacher-aide training was based on how best to support students. Most of their knowledge about post-school opportunities came from communication with the transition providers – either through meetings or attending expos. No other outside transition-specific training was mentioned.

### **ORS Review**

The reduction in ORS funding for 18 to 21 years olds made the participants anxious. The deputy principal indicated “for a lot of families it’s not until the last couple of years that they’re in a place where they’re actually ready to think and plan.” She agreed that it was not always necessary for students to stay until they are 21 years-old, but felt some students needed that option to have a successful transition.

## **Waimea College Special Education Department**

Waimea College in Nelson is a mainstream Year 9-13 high school with approximately 1400 students. Their Special Education Department supports disabled students, most of whom are ORS funded.

The Special Education Department unit is situated on the main college site. It has four different spaces including a teaching kitchen. The students are grouped in four classes with some crossover. The transition class has its own “common room” which doubles as a learning area. Students access mainstream classes and whole school activities at differing levels. The department has one school van and staff claim mileage for using their cars to transport students to and from school activities.

The students begin at the regular high school age (13/14 years), but can stay until their 21st year. All students were ORS funded, but in the past the unit has included non-ORS funded students. Students had a range of disabilities including ASD, Down’s Syndrome and some with physical disabilities like Cerebral Palsy who required wheelchairs. There were 10 students in the transition class. They usually join this group in their last three to five years of college, depending on their needs.

The department has four teachers, eight teacher aides and part-time specialists in music, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language. There is a dedicated transition teacher. Each teacher aide is assigned to one of the four classes each having an additional role such as responsibility for visual resources and timetables or transition. Mainstream college staff work with the disabled students. The disabled students may be part of their mainstream class or the teacher comes to work with them at the unit.

The department works with several outside agencies. This includes four transition providers who assist in finding work experience, day placements, employment and supported living. The department has an extensive number of community groups and employers who provide work experience, employment and recreational services and connections with the local polytechnic.

Students had a few different avenues for post-school, some of which they begin to access while still at the college. Many adult day-service programmes and sports/leisure activities were available. Some accessed part-time employment or voluntary work, while others began their own micro-enterprises. Options for PSE were at a local polytechnic. Students either accessed adult-service run residential placements, went flatting through accessing supporting living services or continued to live with their family.

## **Transition Practices and Barriers**

### **Planning**

According to the department's Transition Booklet, transition began "no later than 14-16 years" (p.2). While the booklet details the milestone ages of the process, the transition teacher clarified that these were just a guide. Usually transition began in the last three to five years of school depending upon the needs of the student. In the first year of transition the IEP became an Individual Transition Plan (ITP), a life skills assessment was completed and the parents were informed and consulted about the process. A one-page profile document about the student is created, which is added to over their time at school and used by outside support agencies such as the local NASC. The ITP meetings occurred annually.

When planning the transition, the department considered six different areas: (1) Work Experience (employment); (2) Post-Secondary Education (3) Community participation (in formal day service providers such as Pinnacle House); (4) Recreation and Leisure (5) Residential considerations and (6) Specific needs around becoming independent. The steps needed to be taken in each area were identified as was the order they would occur. It detailed the required staff and outside agencies to involve.

The school adopted a motto used by the disability rights movement of “nothing about us, without us”. The philosophy helped to ensure the students were involved in any of the planning. The transition teacher discussed how they worked on building student involvement.

*It's about the degree of participation. That's where having kids come into our department, and straight away having them at the IEP so they can build up to it, because for a start, just being able to be present for an hour is massive. So, we don't even start with an hour - so long as they can come in at the beginning so they know that we're going to be talking about them, and they've got a sense of that. After eight years of doing that, you pick up by osmosis.*

Prior preparation was an aspect the transition argued was crucial to the process, as they get older there was an expectation they will lead the meetings. In the cases where student had communication difficulties, visuals and devices were used to increase their ability to participate.

The plans made in the meetings were documented in one of two ways – the school standard ITP or through using the PATH planning tool. The transition teacher preferred the PATH plan as the visual component engaged everyone and she felt goals were more likely to be achieved. The downside she noted was that PATH

planning is time intensive. The school recognised this issue and therefore offered the choice of either PATH or a regular ITP.

A unique aspect of the ITP meetings, was the student chose the location. One occurred in a local café and another was held at a McDonald's. The students chose who they would like to attend the meeting. Typically, this involved parents, sometimes additional family members and specialist staff. The transition providers did not usually attend as they have a separate meeting. The school tried to encourage the families to have a direct relationship with the providers. The transition teacher noted that after leaving school, some students did not achieve their goals for post-school. She reasoned that one factor was families no longer had the school to act as an advocate for them.

There was a priority on developing relationships with the parents. Teacher Aide #1 discussed how some parents feared their children leaving home.

*They think no-one else can look after them like they do. I get there is a fear with being put into a respite house; you are relying on people to be as good as you are to them.*

This teacher-aide outlined how they try to teach the parents to become active "supervisors" in these transitions. The transition teacher acknowledged parents can find transition and post-school support a "bureaucratic nightmare". In the school's transition booklet one of the core principles is that "families are offered information and support that opens the door to a wider range of inclusive community based options" (p.2). She implied that the school provided guidance on how to best access the system. The school ran workshops at the beginning of each year and families were given brochures on transition when the students started in year 9. Most families began

engaging in the transition process earlier, but concerns were held if no actions had been taken by age 16/17 years old.

To ensure the transition was effective, the school had an evaluation process. During the ITP meetings, the progress of a student was tracked in relation to their goals. The school experimented with a few different life-skills assessment tools, but settled on *The Vinelands Adaptive Behaviour Scale*. Although the results were provided to parents and some agencies, the school questioned the value of the information to them.

When a student left school, parents were given an “indication form” to feedback about the transition. The schools held informal meetings with the students and families. All three participants expressed an interest in the students’ lives outside of school. The transition teacher noted that this is a result of the strong relationship staff formed with them. “It’s because you work with those families quite intensely, and it’s not just about the student; it’s also about the families.” Teacher aide #1 discussed her continued involvement with one student.

*I’m passionate about these guys out in the community afterwards. I’m there if she needs it for a start-off, which is reassuring for her mother and father, that she’s got somebody still supporting.*

## **Teaching**

The transition teacher made it clear that it was vital to have a guiding philosophy to underpin how schools prepare their students. She contended her approach was about ensuring the student came first. “I can’t see how personally you can do it very well without person-centeredness being part of that, but that’s perhaps a judgement on my part.” She suggested though it could be perceived differently through another culture.



“The tricky thing about is that culturally that looks very different for Māori and Pasifika because - and my argument is it can still be person-centred, because the whānau would be the wider person.” Both teacher aides identified that their approach was to promote the independence of the student.

A large component of Waimea’s transition programme was teaching functional life-skills. Once students began the process they attended specific transition classes. Classes covered a variety of skills including budgeting, using transport, employment preparation and daily living skills. There was a basic plan, but the skills taught were determined by the needs of the students. Lessons were taught both at school and in the community. A trip to the supermarket was observed, as was a class held at a local café about clothing needed for employment. Community members were invited to give workshops (e.g. Work and Income (WINZ) and first-aid training). The transition teacher saw these community connections as important for developing relationships with non-disabled people. A concern was that students frequently ended up only having friendships with other disabled people.

As the unit is part of the mainstream college students had varying degrees of involvement in the wider college. Some students attended mainstream classes alongside their nondisabled peers with a teacher aide to support them. All students got subject-specific teaching from a mainstream teacher like art or science. These classes were either held in the mainstream classrooms if space was available or in the unit. All students took part in whole-school events like the sports day and arts festival. Teacher-aide #2 described a sports day where they initially spread all their students into different mainstream teams. Unfortunately became an issue of how to support them. Now their students have their own team, which makes it easier to support. An

integration programme invited a group of mainstream Year 9 students to come down to the unit. Teacher aide #2 explained their impact.

*Well the mainstream class will come here and she'll ask some of our kids if they want to come and sit and chat. It gives these guys a chance to see that we're not the boogieman. When they see our kids out now, they say, hi. They're more integrating...it's been a really nice shift.*

This participant indicated that in some cases putting students in the mainstream did not work well because of environmental issues. "The students didn't cope being in mainstream...I think Year 9 and 10 mainstream kids are interesting, and it was just all a bit sensory overload...it was just a bit too busy." She reflected on one example when one student from the unit was led astray by a mainstream student. However, some students had succeeded and a few went on to complete NCEA qualifications. As these students got closer to leaving they were faced with a choice between continuing with studies or opting to be part of the transition classes. The transition teacher gave an example of one student.

*There comes a point at which they need to choose, because if you miss too much of a subject then you can't pass it. So, [a student] this year...he's doing two subjects, so that is eight hours a week. Now, it clashes with when work experience can have him, or those sorts of things. So, he's purely doing his mainstream subjects for interest...so it doesn't matter if he misses a class because it's a work day.*

### **Work Experience**

Very early on in a student's transition, the school introduced them to community participation. This involved work experience, further education, visits to formal day-

service providers, recreation and leisure activities. Work experience, depending upon the student, can begin in the first year of transition (usually 16 years-old) within the school. In the second year, students explored work experiences offsite. The transition booklet specified that these placements “are carefully managed and supported by the Department Transition Coordinator and Work Experience staff” (p.3). In the following years the amount of time spent off-site increased and for some their last year they had minimal time at the unit. These work experience opportunities came through both the student’s natural networks and established relationships with the community. Teacher aide #1 referred to one student who had a paid time part-time job at the local WINZ office. “She stocks all their photocopiers...cleans their kitchen area of their morning tea/lunch area...stocks all their brochures... she’s just doing so well there.” In her opinion was that the local community was very receptive to providing work experiences for their students. With the agreement of an employer, the school reduced the amount of support a student receives while on work experience to encourage the employers be more actively involved.

Another avenue the department pursued was assisting students to set up their own micro enterprises. The transition teacher mentioned two students, one of whom had left and ran a t-shirt printing business from home. She described the progress of another student.

*He’s at the market every fortnight. He got enough to buy himself a canopy and a table. He’s taken photographs of what they look like when they’re planted in the ground and they’re big bushes, to go beside each of the little seedlings. He also operates a service...you can choose boxes or bags to put the plants in, and then he takes them to the car for you, and then if you’re an older person he’ll offer to come and dig the holes.*

Ex-students seeking paid employment post-school may be entitled to receive support through an MSD initiative called the Mainstream Employment Programme. The transition teacher raised questions about this programme, as it was limited to those “who are able to work independently five hours plus a week”. She argued that many of her students would not be able to meet the requirement. She estimated that this requirement could cut out 60% of young people with a disability. She contended that those who miss out could still have the ability contribute if the criteria were not so high. Without support, ex-students she stressed, experience several difficulties compared with those without disabilities.

*You think about your typical young person going in to promote themselves for work, and how hard it is when they mostly have communication - it's not too bad - mostly they can spin a story - mostly they'll dress appropriately - mostly they'll be able to get there and back on their own - they don't need to wait for Mum or Dad to come home from work to go and do the rounds. A young person with a disability has none of that self-promotion kind of skill.*

The transition teacher added that competition for jobs was a major factor, even with the ability to self-promote there would “still loads more people in the queue ahead of them.” While the school did actively assist students with self-promotion skills and provide them with work experience the conversion to paid employment was very low. Teacher aide #1 estimating just 30% will get some form of paid role. The transition teacher felt the health and safety regulations and budget constraints worried employers. Teacher aide #1 discussed how the employers feared no longer having school support. This has led some ex-students to taking on roles as volunteers. The transition teacher suggested that this can be meaningful and positive for developing

their self-esteem, though support agencies may label this as “slave labour”. Conversely, she saw the other side when discussing a student who is volunteering.

*The other side of that is it is really frustrating not to be paid, because she’s making a huge contribution, and a number of our students are exactly the same. I can name three this year who will be leaving, in that situation where they won’t be paid for what they’re doing, but they’re going to keep it as it’s what they’re going to do when they leave school.*

### **Leisure Activities**

In a student’s second year of transition, they began having ‘taster sessions’ with local community groups. Teacher aide #1 interviewed each student to see what their experience was and what they might like to try, then a six-week placement was organised. She discussed the benefits for one student who visited rest homes. “I’m about to take a young lad very soon - he goes to a rest home every Monday morning, and just sits and talks with the residents. So much of that is invaluable in our community.” Other taster opportunities were activities run by disability-specific organisations such as Riding for the Disabled and Special Olympics. Other mainstream groups, like Sports Tasman, local clubs and gyms also offered opportunities. Through the school’s outdoor programme students could choose to go to organisations like Whenua-iti and Outward Bound.

Those students with very high needs ORS funding, they typically ended up post-school attending an adult day-service post-school, so their taster sessions were visits to these facilities. The transition teacher questioned the philosophy behind adult day-services. In her view by their nature they were not inclusive and differentiated them from the rest of society. “I mean, the word day services - I don’t go to my day

service. I'm sure you don't go to your day service." Teacher aide #2 didn't explicitly criticise the idea of day services, but did feel their issues with them. She highlighted that there were insufficient programmes and resources available. Many of the existing programmes offered less meaningful activities, were difficult to get into or involved additional costs to attend.

### **Housing**

For some students moving out of home while still at school was a possibility, either into a flatting situation or a residential-care facility. The choice came down to the family and student, but the transition teacher noted the school liked to be involved in the process if at all possible. The view was that the students could not live at home forever and the staff would like to be there to help with this move.

### **PSE**

Opportunities for PSE were provided by the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT). At the time of the initial interview NMIT offered two possible pathways for students. One was a Certificate in Vocational Skills, while the other was range of 'living courses' that developed life skills. Students had the option to attend NMIT while still at school with the support of a teacher aide. While NMIT was open to all students, in practice there were only opportunities for students who could fully participate in the courses.

A desired outcome for transition, is that by the final year of transition the students ideally spending five days a week offsite. The transition teacher explained how she saw the role of the unit for those students who are their last year. "When things fall over, if they fall over, they can come back here and we re-group and all of that stuff, but we monitor them." Some students were able to leave school before their

ORS funding concluded at 21 years. The students more likely to leave earlier had other options than an adult day-service facility. She emphasised how their transition process endeavoured to steer students away if opportunities existed to do so.

During the first and second interviews with the transition teacher there was a change in course availability at the local polytechnic NMIT. Previously they offered living courses, but a cut in funding meant they could only offer one course that was suitable for some of the students at the unit. The transition teacher stressed that this affects not only her students, but older people in the community too. She discussed the result of this decision.

*People in the community who are older people...who were doing these living courses were absolutely traumatised, because they were doing like three to four days a week, and now they've got nothing - absolutely nothing. So, what they were then doing was to jump back into vocational services where we were transitioning our students to some of the vocational service programmes. So, because the older ones have gone back in they've kicked our kids back into school.*

This change has now meant there was less pathways into PSE for the students.

### **Staff Training and Networking**

The school offered training to all staff though content on transition was limited to in-house professional development. The transition teacher was not aware of any transition-specific training, but would have loved to deliver it. She had completed PATH training about 10 years previously and mentioned they PCP training. Both courses were about planning and not necessarily transition-specific.

The transition teacher tried to connect with other schools on transition. In 2016, she began a transition forum group with the purpose of collaboration with schools and support organisations. However, she found that it was predominantly transition providers who expressed an interest in being involved. She was unsure as to why, but suggested perhaps schools did not have the money to fund staff to attend or make transition a priority at their school.

### **Interagency Collaboration**

The department worked with many agencies including NASC and four different transition providers. The school ran a transition market day, and held annual transition evenings where parents and transition providers could meet. Some parents chose not to use a transition provider as they felt the school had sufficient ability to complete the process. One transition provider was singled out as effective to work with on the basis this provider sometimes attended classes and worked together with the school on a project to create a PCP document that could be shared with other agencies.

The transition teacher spoke at length about issues she has identified with transition providers. She argued that the timing of their contract was problematic. The providers begin support with the student in the final year of their schooling, which gives very little time to create a relationship. She explained the problems with this.

*Do they know what journey they've been on in their life? Do they know how far they've come and what challenges they've had to overcome? They are trying to sell and market the young person who they don't know very well.*

A further issue was when staff changed and the new person had to form this relationship in a short space of time, as well as also learning how to effectively connect with the community. She discussed an experience of this.



*[They] didn't know any of the jargon - weren't able to do their jobs. So, I ended up facilitating, doing the whole thing. That's not his fault. There isn't any blame here, but the point is that that's \$4000 worth of MSD's money that's a waste.*

The contract of the transition providers, was perceived as inflexible. The providers were not able to support students with public transport to visit transition opportunities like work experience or day-services. Professional development is an area that the providers neglected. She described the effect that this can have.

*So, they have a limited understanding of new ways of thinking. New ways of thinking are developing your natural networks and looking at sustainable options for these young people - not something that relies on a special service or a special funding.*

As some parents chose not to use a provider, the transition teacher inquired with MSD if the \$4000 per student, normally paid to the providers, could be utilised by the school. Unfortunately, the answer was "no".

In 2012, the transition teacher surveyed 20 families to track student progress after leaving school. Going five years back, she found the only one student had three days per week of meaningful activities, the rest had just one. She clarified by what she meant as meaningful: "meaning that they have somewhere to get up and go to that they wanted to be doing, so work experience or a day service program". She found most students were continuing to do what they planned one year after leaving school, but as time progressed they ended up being less engaged in the community. Her reasoning is that there is a gap of support for the family and student to achieve these goals.

*The second year, generally what happens then is that the families don't re-connect with the NASC. So, the moment that happens - because each year*

*there's a package, so whatever the funding is that they've got, they kind of lose this idea of using it flexibly, they suddenly go, oh well I think I've got respite care - oh I've actually run out of my respite. So, if parents aren't kind of keeping their thumb on the button...then NASC goes, oh you don't really need it, and things start to fall over, and it just falls over and fall over.*

The transition teacher contended that parents find understanding how to access support through NASC challenging. The NASC meetings occurred only once every three years, which she argued this contributed to the student's post-school intentions not being followed through with.

The transition teacher suggested a way to address this issue of post-school support. A dedicated person was needed who could work with the student and families after they turn 21 years old up until they are 30. She discussed this position and the role of NASC (they are called Support Works in Nelson).

*There needs to be a community-based to keep the plan alive, and to keep things turning over. Parents can't do that, and neither should it be the role of a parent. Support Works are by and large assessing the need, and matching up the funding. They don't see the person regularly enough. They don't have the relationship with the person or the family to be able to do those things.*

Teacher aide #1 also mentioned an intention for her and the transition teacher to set up a programme to cater for this need.

*[We've] always had a passion that we could set up a private organisation that gave the care that carried on, because a lot of parents...would put those funds that they're getting...into running something like that.*

## **ORS Funding Review**

The speculation of a reduction in funding for 18-21 year-olds worried the participants. They felt that if students were forced to leave school earlier it meant preparation time would be reduced or transition would need to start at a younger age. The transition teacher labelled it as “short-sighted” as leaving early would only just shift responsibility unnecessarily.

*That puts pressure on communities... in the first instance on the parents, because they... have to think about supervision. A lot of these people, even when they have transition plans, are still needing a certain amount of supervision.*

She argued that students with ASD need more processing time to be able to cope with change. Her worry for these students was leaving earlier could have an impact on their mental health.

*Then that puts pressure on... the health system ...and unfortunately, mental health and intellectual disability or health don't communicate. So, I can see the potential for some really sad stuff happening.*

## **Chapter 6: Cross Case Analysis and Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore how schools approach transition for ORS-funded disabled students out of secondary school. Objectives were:

1. To identify effective practice in different educational settings.
2. To identify common barriers in the transition process.
3. Compare schools' perspectives on the transition process to the NTGs (MoE, 2011).

This chapter addresses these questions through a cross-case analysis of the three schools' transition practices. The findings are explored and compared with current research. It concludes with a comparison of the schools' practices with NZ policy.

### **Question 1: Effective Transition Practices**

The three schools demonstrated effective transition practices that concurred with evidence-based research. The components of planning, teaching, community inclusion were strong features of their programmes.

#### **Planning**

The three schools all completed transition planning and had practices that addressed the beginning age, documentation, student and parent involvement, process evaluation and post-school tracking of students. The age which they began transition was no later than 16 years. This concurs with the literature that transition begins no later than 16 years (Cleland et al., 2008; Cummings et al., 2000; Halpern, 1994; Hitchings et al., 2005). Waimea, endeavoured to begin at 14 years-old. This is the age recommended in the NTGs (MoE, 2011).

Each school used specific planning documentation. Waimea and Parkside opted to use recognised planning tools (PATH and MAPS). The literature suggests that despite limited empirical testing of such tools, they are promising practices (Held et al., 2004; Kueneman & Freeze, 1997; Papi, 2010). The fact that Hohepa did not use a tool could be due to a lack of awareness. Thoma et al. (2002b) highlighted that teachers might be unaware of such planning tools as it is not included in pre-service training. It would be interesting to see how widespread the use of planning tools are in NZ schools and how usage relates to pre-service training.

Student involvement in the planning process was observed at all schools. At Hohepa if students had sufficient communication skills they participated in meetings. At Waimea and Parkside, the expectation was all students would be involved and leading these meetings. It was unclear if this was due to students at these schools having stronger communication abilities or there being effective support to encourage participation. The type of disability is a factor in student involvement, those with ASD, ID, EBD and reduced communication abilities frequently participated less (Grigal et al., 2011; Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Wagner et al., 2012)

To measure the effectiveness of transition processes schools used student progress and parent feedback. Waimea was the only school to explicitly use the NTGs as a source of assessment, and embedded these in their transition policy guidelines. It is unknown if the other two schools used them, as participants made no mention them. School's evaluation process differed, making it difficult to compare the three. A standardised process would allow for more effective comparisons between schools. The TTP (Kohler, 1996; Kohler et al., 2016), while not specifically an evaluation tool, is a tested model of effective transition which could be adapted for an NZ context

(Beamish et al., 2012; Cobb & Alwell, 2009a; Landmark et al., 2010; Mazzotti et al., 2013; Test et al., 2009b; Xu et al., 2016).

The three schools had post-secondary education monitoring systems in place. Hohepa was significantly aided by being part of the same organisation as their adult-services. The other two schools relied on informal lasting relationships with students. It is difficult to assess the impact schools are having on the post-school outcomes without a formal monitoring system. While we do know disabled people in NZ have higher unemployment rates and are less likely to have higher formal qualifications, recording the post-school outcomes of disabled students could help schools to refine their transition practices (Statistics NZ, 2014).

### **Teaching**

Academic, self-determination, vocational and functional life-skills were part of each school's programme. Pathways to NCEA through attending mainstream classes were offered at Waimea and Parkside (through two courses in the SPEC curriculum), but the reality is very few students attained this level of qualification. The schools' efforts focussed on the other "soft" skills, which have been shown to improve post-school outcomes (Alwell & Cobb, 2009; Shogren et al., 2016; Test et al., 2009a; Test et al., 2009b). A standout feature of Waimea's programme was the fostering of micro-enterprises. In response to NZ's low employment rate for disabled people (Statistics NZ, 2014), the running a micro-enterprise and enabling self-employment are alternative pathways which international research suggests is a promising direction (Ashley & Graf, 2017; Galle Jr & Lacho, 2009; Reddington & Fitzsimons, 2013; Tholén, Hultkrantz, & Persson, 2017). The participants at Waimea felt employers would be more open to offer work if they could meet the students first. Inviting employers to the schools, allowed students to be in a familiar environment and more likely to show their

employment potential. Changing employer attitudes towards disabled people, has been shown to help increase chances of employment (Kocman, Fischer, & Weber, 2017; Morgan & Alexander, 2005; Unger, 2002).

### **Community Inclusion**

Community experience was a component of the schools' programmes which included work experience and leisure activities. Because Waimea is part of a mainstream college, they could offer their students additional inclusion in classrooms alongside non-disabled peers. While it is unknown what effect this had on their disabled students, research has shown that inclusion in mainstream classes has positive effects on post-school outcomes (Rea et al., 2002; Ryndak, Ward, Alper, Storch, & Montgomery, 2010; Test et al., 2009b). A post-school option for many students was to be placed into adult day-services. Parkside and Waimea students varied in their success with this transition. However, Hohepa provided effective continuity for students moving into the Hohepa adult community. Interestingly, research has identified that students leaving residential schools can face more challenges than those transitioning from special or mainstream schools (Abbott & Heslop, 2009; Heslop & Abbott, 2007; Hornby & Witte, 2008). The difference is that Hohepa have a lifespan approach to supporting their disabled students.

### **Question 2: Common Transition Barriers**

The findings identified common transition barriers the schools faced in the areas of post-school support, employment, staff training and interagency collaboration.

#### **Post-school support**

Participants noted a sharp decrease in funding and quality of support post-school compared to what students received at school. Waimea and Parkside questioned the

effectiveness of adult day-services as they did not have as regular contact with therapists and students would not always have as much individual support. The use of day-service programmes is a common post-school opportunity for disabled students (Evans, Bellon, & Matthews, 2017). There have been calls to move away from this segregated group model to one of individualised support that allows for effective community inclusion (Fleming, McGilloway, & Barry, 2017).

### **Employment and PSE**

Despite all schools having work experience programmes, students struggled to gain employment. Barriers included health and safety restrictions, competition for positions, requiring extra support and productivity concerns. Similar trends exist in other countries (Cramm, Nieboer, Finkenflügel, & Lorenzo, 2013; Lindsay, 2011; Noel, Oulvey, Drake, & Bond, 2017; Scheid, 2005; Winn & Hay, 2009), Employers were open to providing work experience, but they were less so to employment.

An MSD subcontracted service called *Supported Employment* was available after a student has left school. It was aimed at assisting disabled people and employers to overcome these barriers to employment. Entry into this scheme was not part of the schools' transition practices as the opportunity exists only after leaving school. One participant argued as the service limited to individuals who were able work a minimum of five hours per week, it would be too demanding for a large proportion of her students once they leave school. The scheme offers a support person for up to a year, but this is problematic for disabled people who required on-going support. The lack of incentives for employers suggests those who offer work to disabled people, do so altruistically rather than for economic reasons.



All schools highlighted the lack of PSE courses for disabled students. Most had prerequisites of NCEA qualifications, which few achieved. Little funding was available for students who required additional support in courses or to travel on public transport. This matches the findings of other studies, which found disabled students leave with fewer qualifications and are less likely to transition in PSE (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Grigal et al., 2011; Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2013; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). In the US, despite an increase in course provision, other barriers to PSE have persisted (Plotner & Marshall, 2015). This suggests simply increasing course availability is not enough improve transition in PSE. Barriers such as a lack of quality support will need to be addressed.

### **Staff Training**

Specific transition training was lacking for all school staff. Professional development was limited to either 'in-house' or 'on-the-job' training. Only two courses were mentioned as available (PATH and PCP training), but these only covered the planning aspects of the process and were not necessarily transition-specific. Overseas studies have identified similar findings, highlighting the provision of training was not standard practice and training provided neglected areas of student involvement, programme development and interagency collaboration. (Benitez et al., 2009; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013; Taylor, Morgan, & Callow-Heusser, 2016; Thoma, Baker, & Saddler, 2002a). It is acknowledged school staff influence post-school outcomes for disabled students, but more is required to equip them with the necessary skills to do so (Hornby & Witte, 2008; Kohler & Greene, 2004; May et al., 2017).

### **Transition Providers**

The school participants expressed criticisms of the transition provider services. They felt the contracts began too late in a students' transition to have any significant effect. Providers had limited ability in offering transport for students to placements. There was a high demand on school teacher-aide time to accompany students to placements and more training was needed for them use innovative support practices. While this system is unique to NZ, poor interagency collaboration has been shown to have negative impact of post-school outcomes in other countries. Studies have revealed factors to poor collaboration included lack of training, inefficient processes and misunderstandings of roles (Agran et al., 2002; Oertle & Trach, 2007; Taylor et al., 2016). For provider services to be of benefit to students, it requires improvement in resourcing and interagency collaboration.

### **Question 3: Comparison of Practices with NTGs**

The NTGs (MoE, 2011) are intended for schools and professionals to guide them in what is "best practice" (p.2) during transition. The ten guidelines include 'action points' for educators to follow. The three schools demonstrated effective examples of applying the guidelines to practice. Despite this, common barriers interfered with schools' ability to implement them successfully. Key barriers were the lack of post-school opportunities for students to transition into, limited staff training and difficulties with interagency collaboration. The guidelines are achievable, though three of them present challenges. Below is a review of these problematic guidelines and action points.

#### **NTG #1**

*If teachers' aides are used as job coaches, provide them with training (p.4).*

*Offer professional development for school staff on the transition process (p.4).*

There was very little in the way of transition training. What was available focused on planning, which was not always transition-specific. More training needs to be available, and transition should be part of pre-service teacher education.

*Identify networking opportunities for schools to share and develop aspects of their transition process (p.4).*

There was little evidence of sharing effective transition practices with other schools. At the time of the research opportunities were opening up through the new Communities of Learning, the Special Education Principals' Association NZ and the Central Region Special Schools Cluster. Waimea College endeavoured to start a transition forum, though they struggled to get attendance. This could be a local transition-specific opportunity to trial, but would require the commitment of all schools to succeed.

*Develop a plan to link the student into the community through private and public organisations (p.4).*

In many other countries having a transition plan for disabled students is not only effective practice, but a statutory obligation (Hornby, 2017). While the schools visited had effective plans, it is worrying that this is only a recommended guideline. It is unknown what the level of compliance to complete plans is, but Gladstone (2014) and Shanks (2016) suggested it is not universally consistent.

### **NTG # 3**

*Encourage the student to transition from school at the same age as their peers (p.8).*

The issue with disabled students leaving school at the same age as their peers implies they would also have the same opportunities. However, given the few choices of PSE,

employment and, reduced support from adult-services, remaining in school until 21 years-old offers additional time to grow in independence and more security.

### **NTG #9**

*Build and maintain collaborative community and agency partnerships (p.5).*

There is not a lead role overseeing the transition process. Transition providers only begin in the last year, which is too late to take responsibility. The school's input concludes once a student leaves and adult disability-services start from this point. NASC comes into contact much earlier in a student's life and remain so post-school. They are ideally placed to coordinate all stakeholders. Shanks (2016) recommends "a single monitoring agency is responsible for life and transition planning" (p. 17) and suggests NASC to adopt this role. However, as NASC only have a formal review every three years, it would require having more regular contact with the student and family.

*Identify tertiary level courses and community based programmes (p.5).*

It is possible for the schools to identify tertiary courses, though the reality is that few choices are available. Having NCEA qualifications are criteria of most courses and the majority of students in this study did not achieve these qualifications.

### **NTG #10**

*Monitor students for six to 12 months after they leave school to inform the outcomes (p.8).*

*Develop a range of indicators to measure the effectiveness of the transition process, such as using NCEA targets to measure success (p.8).*

There is no formal monitoring of post-school national outcomes for disabled students. This data is crucial to the evaluation of transition, both at the school level and nationally. Standardised evaluation would enable school comparisons.

### **ORS Review**

The *Learning Support Update* announced a review of ORS funding for 18-21 year-olds (Office for Minister of Education, 2016). Speculation is that funding will decrease for this age group (Moir, August 22, 2016; NZEI, August 23, 2016; Tuckey, September 2, 2016). Participants' responses framed this potential change as negative requiring students to exit school at 18 years-old, means transition would need to begin earlier, though not all students and families would be ready to leave. Youth in the community earlier would put further strain on disability services and the family. The participants were in agreement that students need more time and support to give them the best chance to transition well.

The update suggested ORS funding could be used to enrol students in PSE or work-based training, aligning with the NTGs focus on encouraging students to leave at the same age as their peers. However, as noted, there are few quality PSE courses appropriate to the needs of these students.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

This research has explored how three secondary schools transitioned their ORS funded disabled students. A qualitative approach employing a multiple-case study design was used to interview and observe staff transition practices. The three schools demonstrated effective transition practices including beginning transition at 16 years-old, ensuring students and families were at the centre of the planning process and teaching self-determination, vocational and functional life-skills. The schools were committed to including students into the community through work experience and leisure activities. These practices concur with recommendations in the NTGs and evidence-based research.

Each school differed in its educational setting, each of which had unique advantages. Hohepa School and the adult community were part of the same organisation, allowing for a seamless transition between the two. Parkside School had a community-based classroom which allowed students easy access to the local community and work experience opportunities. The Waimea College Special Education Department had access to mainstream classes and students, which allowed disabled and non-disabled students opportunities to interact.

Common barriers were identified with the schools' transition processes. There was a clear lack of opportunities in PSE and employment. Most students transitioned in adult vocational day-bases. A reduction in support when students leave secondary school was of concern to the participants. There was no constant support person to help families and disabled students navigate post-school life. Effective interagency collaboration was inconsistent, apart from at Hohepa School, who were fortunate to have their adult community connected to the school and under one organisation.

These barriers made it difficult for schools to successfully transition their students and in meeting the NTGs.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

While the three schools displayed effective examples of the NTGs, barriers highlighted changes required in transition policy and associated resources, opportunities and support for all involved in the transition process. Professional development in transition for educators is lacking and should become a requirement for all schools, agencies and pre-service teacher education. More support is needed to ensure networking between schools occurs. This would allow schools to share effective transition practices and develop strategies to connect with their local communities. Transition plans need to become mandatory and transition practices should be assessed during ERO visits. To ensure effective collaboration between all stakeholders, a lead agency should be appointed to coordinate the transition process.

As it stands very little data is being kept nationally on post-school outcomes of for disabled students. To measure whether school processes and support systems are working effectively this data needs to be recorded. Each school also requires an evaluation process of transition. To ensure consistency of practice, a standardised process would be effective. There are some American tools that could be adapted to use for this purpose.

If ORS funding for 18-21 years-olds is to be changed, then a proper review of the transition process needs to be conducted. Reducing funding could have a detrimental effect on disabled students' post-school outcomes. The suggestion of using funding to support students to access PSE is a positive one in principle.

However, the lack of PSE opportunities is barrier to many disabled students seeking further education. This area needs to be addressed urgently.

### **Limitations of the Research**

This study was primarily focussed on the perspectives of school staff and neglected the other stakeholders involved in transition. Due to limitations in the size of this 90-point thesis, it was not possible to include their voices. Students, parents and agency workers were observed, but their perspective on transition may have differed from those of school staff. This may have led to a different perception of how effective the school transition processes were. The limited sample size means it is difficult to generalise findings to other NZ schools. The schools were also selected based upon professional recommendations of effective transition practice. Consequently, other schools may have different practices or barriers not encountered in this study.

### **Recommendations for future research**

Transition research for disabled students internationally is wide, but in an NZ context there is only small collection of studies. The NTLS-2 in America is a rich data source of information about the transition of disabled students. A similar longitudinal study in NZ would benefit researchers, practitioners and policy makers to measure effectiveness of our support systems. This kind of research would be intensive, but to start simply recording post-school outcomes of disabled students would present valuable data.

It is unknown nationally if schools are following the NTGs and a survey determining this would give a clearer picture of the state of transition. Importance should be given to questions around the awareness of post-school opportunities, use of innovative practice and transition planning compliance. As there is no standardised



evaluation process for school to assess their practices, research into this area would be beneficial. This could involve adapting the Taxonomy of Transition Programming (Kohler et al., 2016) to an NZ context.

The voices of other stakeholders in transition, especially those of disabled students, are important to gain a balanced view of transition. If the government intends to review ORS funding for 18-21 year-olds, then students must be a part of this. A knowledge of post-school outcomes is also essential to make an informed decision.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Staff Information Sheet

#### **How schools manage the transition of disabled students leaving secondary education: A multiple-case study.**

Thank you for your interest in my research on how schools manage the transition of disabled students from secondary school. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to take part, thank you for considering my request.

#### **Who am I?**

My name is *Cameron Fraser* and I am a *Master's in Education* student at Victoria University of Wellington. I am also a Teacher at a Special School in Wellington. This research project is work towards the completion of my thesis.

#### **What is the aim of the project?**

This project will look at three different schools and how they are managing the transition of their disabled students when leaving secondary school. I am specifically looking at the transition of ORS Funded students. The project aims are to:

1. Understand the school staffs' perception of effective transition
2. Identify examples of effective practice
3. Identify barriers that prevent a successful transition
4. Evaluate the Ministry of Education transitions guidelines

This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee [approval number 23014].

#### **How can you help?**

If you agree to take part, I will interview you at your school at time that is convenient to you. I will ask you questions about the transition process in your school. Interviews will last between 40-60 minutes, will be recorded and written up later. You can stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason. A copy of the transcript will be provided to you at a later date to review.

#### **What will happen to the information you give?**

This research is confidential. I will use a pseudonym for your name in any reports, but with your permission I would like to use your role to identify you. Your school may choose to be named or remain unknown. Only my supervisors, the interview transcriber and I will read the information I obtain from the school. The interview transcripts, summaries and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed 2 years after the research ends.

### What will the project produce?

The information from my research will be used in my *Master's Thesis*. I may also use the results of my research for conference presentations and academic reports.

### If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?

You do not have to accept this invitation if you don't want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- withdraw from the study up to **October 1<sup>st</sup> 2016**;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- receive a copy of your interview recording
- read over and comment on a transcript of the interviews;
- agree on another name for me to use rather than your real name;
- to read any reports of this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

### If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

#### Student:

Cameron Fraser

Master's Student

School of Education

frasercame1@myvuw.ac.nz

#### Supervisors:

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### Human Ethics Committee information

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University HEC Convener: Associate Professor Susan Corbett. Email [susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz) or telephone +64-4-463 5480.



## Appendix B – Staff Consent Form

**Research Project Title:** How schools manage the transition of disabled students leaving secondary education - A multiple-case study.

**Researcher:** Cameron Fraser, Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington

- I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project, without having to give reasons, by e-mailing [frasercame1@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:frasercame1@myvuw.ac.nz) by the October 1<sup>st</sup> 2016.
- I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and their supervisor, the published results will not use my name, my role (unless given permission), school organisation and that no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me.
- I understand that the data I provide will not be used for any other purpose or released to others without my explicit permission.
- I understand that the interviews are audio recorded and will be confidentially transcribed by a professional, the recording and transcripts of the interviews will be erased within 2 years after the conclusion of the project.
- Furthermore, I will have an opportunity to check the transcripts of the interview.

**Please indicate (by ticking the boxes below) which of the following apply:**

I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

Please provide an email address to send it to \_\_\_\_\_

I would like my role/position at the school to be kept anonymous ☐ YES ☐ NO

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C – Parent Information Sheet

### How schools manage the transition of disabled students leaving secondary education - A multiple-case study.

Thank you for your interest in my research on how schools help disabled students when they finish secondary school. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to take part, thank you for considering my request.

#### Who am I?

My name is Cameron Fraser and I am a Master's in Education student at Victoria University of Wellington. I am also a Teacher at a Special School in Wellington.

#### What is the aim of the project?

This project will look at three different schools and how they are involved in helping disabled students when they finish school. I want to understand what the school staff think of this process, find good examples and look at barriers to success.

This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee [approval number 23014].

#### How can you help?

If you agree to take part, I will:

**Observe your child** in school during a lesson

- The lesson will be about how they being prepared for finishing school (e.g. like teaching a social story).
- Be no longer than 30 minutes
- I will watch and write notes about what the staff member(s) are doing with your child.
- I may need to do 1-3 observations.
- Your child or the staff member can choose to stop the observation at any time without giving a reason.
- A copy of the any notes I take about your child can be provided on request.

#### What will happen to the information you give?

This research is confidential so this means

- I will use another name for your child in any reports,
- I will not include any information that would identify them or your family
- Your school may choose to be named or remain unknown.
- Only my supervisors and I will read the information I obtain from the school.

- The observation notes and any summaries will be kept securely and destroyed 2 years after the research ends.

#### **What will the project produce?**

The information from my research will be used in my *Master's Thesis*. I may also use the results of my research for conference presentations and academic reports.

#### **If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?**

You do not have to accept this invitation if you don't want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- withdraw from the study up to **October 1<sup>st</sup> 2016**;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- read over and comment on observation notes;
- agree on another name for me to use rather than your child's name;
- read any reports of this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

#### **If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?**

If you have any questions about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

##### **Student:**

Cameron Fraser  
Master's Student  
School of Education  
frasercame1@myvuw.ac.nz

##### **Supervisors:**

Stephanie Doyle  
Senior Lecturer  
School of Education  
04 463 6657  
stephanie.doyle@vuw.ac.nz

Judy Lymbery  
Lecturer  
School of Education  
04 463 9564  
judy.lymbery@vuw.ac.nz

#### **Human Ethics Committee information**

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University HEC Convener: Associate Professor Susan Corbett. Email [susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz) or telephone +64-4-463 5480

## Appendix D – Parent Consent Form

**Research Project Title:** How schools manage the transition of disabled students leaving secondary education - A multiple-case study.

**Researcher:** Cameron Fraser, Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington

- I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project, without having to give reasons, by e-mailing [frasercame1@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:frasercame1@myvuw.ac.nz) by the October 1<sup>st</sup> 2016.
- I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and their supervisor, the published results will not use my name, school or organisation and that no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me.
- I understand that the data I provide will not be used for any other purpose or released to others without my explicit permission.
- I understand that during the observations the researcher will take notes about what is occurring, these notes will be erased within 2 years after the conclusion of the project.
- Furthermore, I will have an opportunity to check the notes of the observation.

**Please indicate (by ticking the boxes below) which of the following apply:**

I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

Please provide an email address to send it to

\_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ I would like to see a copy of the observation notes.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E – Student Information Sheet

### “How my school helps me when I finish school”

Please read this form with someone who knows you well.

I want you to take part in a research project

#### Who am I?



My name is Cam. I am a teacher at another school in Wellington. I am also studying at Victoria University.

#### What do I want to know?



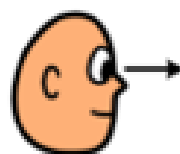
I am looking at how your teachers help students get ready for life after school

#### How will I do this?



By visiting your school  
Talking to teachers  
Coming to watch you in your school

#### What do I want you to do?



Let me come into your school and watch you learning with your teachers

I will make notes about what happens

You can look at these notes after if you want to

You can tell me stop taking notes or leave at anytime

### What will I do with these notes?



I will use them to write up a project and put them into a book



Other people who want to know about what your school does can read this



We can keep your name secret from these people – If you want to, you can choose a different name to use in book.

If you don't want these notes in my project you can tell me after, but before the **1<sup>st</sup> of September**

My university says this project this is a safe project to do. If you have any questions you ask me:

Cam 04 463-9960 or email [frasercame1@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:frasercame1@myvuw.ac.nz)

Or my supervisors:

Stephanie Doyle 04 463 6657 or email [stephanie.doyle@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:stephanie.doyle@vuw.ac.nz)

Judy Lymbery 04 463 9564 or email [judy.lymbery@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:judy.lymbery@vuw.ac.nz)

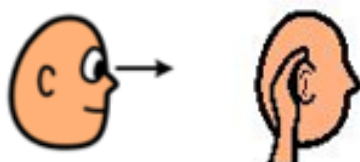
If you want to be part of this study you need to sign the consent form.

## Appendix F – Student Consent Sheet

### Student Consent Form – Observation “How my school helps me when I finish school”

If you want to take part, please sign the consent form below.

Please read this form with someone who knows you well and if you are happy about what it says then sign it below. Your parents/caregivers also sign a consent form for you.



- ☐ Cam will come to my school to watch and listen what happens



- ☐ Cam will make some notes about it



- ☐ I can look at these notes when Cam has finished writing them



- ☐ I can decide if I don't want to take part in this anymore



- ☐ What is written about you is private to us



- ☐ I can have a copy of what Cam finds out when he is finished writing

You can contact Cam on 04 463 9960 or email: [frasercame1@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:frasercame1@myvuw.ac.nz) if you have any questions or concerns about the study or this consent form.

I know why Cam wants to come to watch me

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G – Interview Questions

There are 11 main questions to help guide the interview based on the NTGs. The sub-questions can be used as prompts to gain further information if required.

1. What specific transition planning and practices do you have at this school?
  - How often does planning occur?
  - What are the overall goals of the planning?
  - How early in a student's education do you begin the process?
  - What sort of support/training do staff receive to help them in the process?
  - Is this support/training different for teacher aides and teachers?
  - How do you communicate the process with everyone involved?
  
2. Who is involved in the process and what are their roles?
  - How do you involve the student and their family/whānau in the process?
  - How do help the student understand the process?
  - How do you do this when there is a communication or intellectual barrier to their understanding?
  - How do you decide what everyone's roles will be?
  - How do you help the student to make decisions?
  
3. How and when do you connect with community groups (e.g. employers, post-secondary education providers, etc.) and specific transition support services?
  - Who are the groups you engage with?
  - What are the relationships like with these groups?
  - How did you find out about them and how were they established?
  - How do you maintain them?
  - Have you heard of and accessed Gateway, STAR or Youth Guarantee?
  - What kind of student information goes with them once they leave?
  - How is this shared with these outside groups?
  
4. How is the transition process connected to the education of the student?



- How do you balance the requirement of the NZ curriculum with planning for leaving school?
  - What specific class activities do you do to prepare them for the next phase after secondary school?
5. What is the process of setting goals for the student's future?
- Are there any barriers and challenges in the process, if so how do you manage them?
  - How do you assess their progress towards these goals?
6. What information is available for staff, students and family/whānau about the transition process?
- Is there any specific district information you access?
  - How do you share this information with everyone?
  - Are there types of information you need more of?
  - What opportunities are there for the student to access after secondary school?
  - Are these opportunities available to every student?
  - Do outside agencies get involved in sharing information and if so, how?
7. How do you ensure there is balance between the student's goals and those of their family/whānau?
- What do you do if there is a conflict?
8. How do you support the student in learning functional life skills here at school and elsewhere?
- When do you start teaching life skills?
  - Do you use any specific programmes to help support this learning? If so how are these employed?

9. How do you involve the student in the community?
  - When do you start this in their education?
  - At what age do most students leave school?
  - How do you manage this with students who have challenging behaviour or physical needs?
  - Who is involved in this community integration?
  
10. How do you evaluate the transition process?
  - How do you measure how successful it was?
  - Do you monitor the student's transition once they leave school, if so how?
  - Who is involved in the evaluation?
  - Do you have sufficient support to ensure the process is successful?
  
11. What are your hopes and dreams for transition, in your school, the wider community and in New Zealand?
  - What is working well?
  - What would you like to see change?
  - What is needed for these changes to happen?

## Appendix H – Observation Protocol

### Classroom and Transition Meeting|Observation Protocol

#### Pre-observation data

Date		Time	
Staff member(s) & Role(s)		Student	
		Age	
Class activity/lesson		Impairment(s)	
		ORS funding level	
Environment			
Purpose of lesson - What aspect of transition - Any connection to NZ curriculum?			
Materials/resources			

#### Observation Data

Describe the lesson – what are the activities, what the participants do, how they communicate any specific teaching strategies/programmes used

