# A scoping review of postschool learning programs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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# Overview

- Background and study aims
- Method
- Findings
- Implications for research and practice

# Background- Why were we interested in postschool learning programs?

## 2001

Learning in an inclusive early childhood education and care service.

## 2021

"Over 2 years [my daughter] is about to commence in her 4th day program. I am appalled by the quality of care, planning and programming. This is a complete halt of [my daughter's] learning. It is like a play group for adults. I fear that [my daughter's] learning is decreasing and her days are boring and meaningless"

(Mother A)

# Background

- Transitioning out of compulsory schooling is a **critical period** for all young people but especially those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

- For young people with IDD, opportunities for ongoing learning have been limited and often restricted to segregated programs and day services that **focus more on care** than education, skill development, or personal growth.

- There is growing recognition of the importance of lifelong learning opportunities as **pathways** to improved quality of life, social inclusion, and independence.

# Background

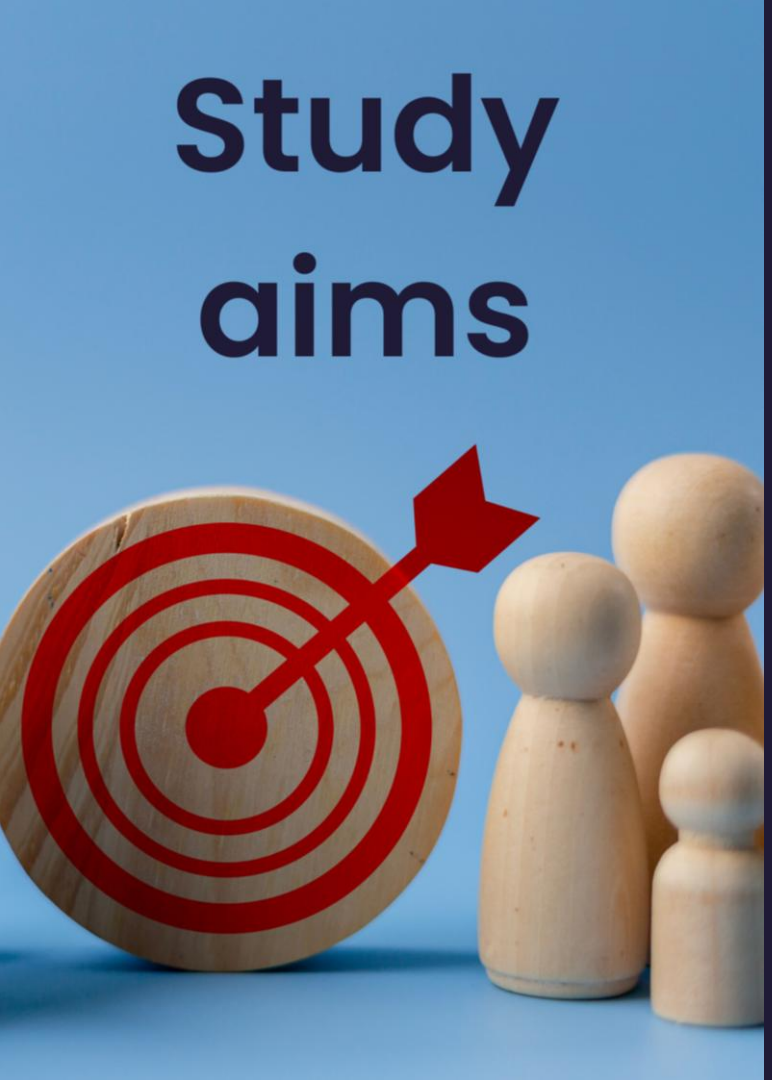
- Inclusive and community-based postschool programs offer such opportunities but their availability, design, and evaluation **vary greatly across contexts.**

- There are an increasing number of studies describing postschool learning opportunities, but **empirical evidence of participant outcomes** remains limited and fragmented.

- Research on postsecondary programs exist, with the majority focusing on **programs supporting transition to employment,** but there remains a need to examine the range of programs offering ongoing learning opportunities.

- It is important to use participant outcome data to understand which **program features** contribute to effective postschool learning to inform both policy and practice.

# Study aims



The purpose of this study is to examine postschool programs designed for people with IDD, particularly programs that provide ongoing opportunities for education, skill development, and personal development and to understand how these programs are evaluated and what outcomes they achieve.

# Research questions

Specifically, we wanted to know:

1. What types of postschool learning programs for people with IDD have researchers examined?

2. What outcomes for program participants with IDD did they measure?

3. What methods did they use to measure these outcomes?

4. According to these studies, what were the outcomes of these programs for participants?

## Method: Search Procedure

The ERIC, PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science databases were searched using a combination of:

- **a context descriptor:** postschool OR postsecondary OR adult OR day

AND

- **a disability descriptor**: intellectual disabilit* OR developmental disabilit*

AND

- **a program descriptor**: program

AND

- **an evaluation descriptor:** evaluation OR outcomes

AND

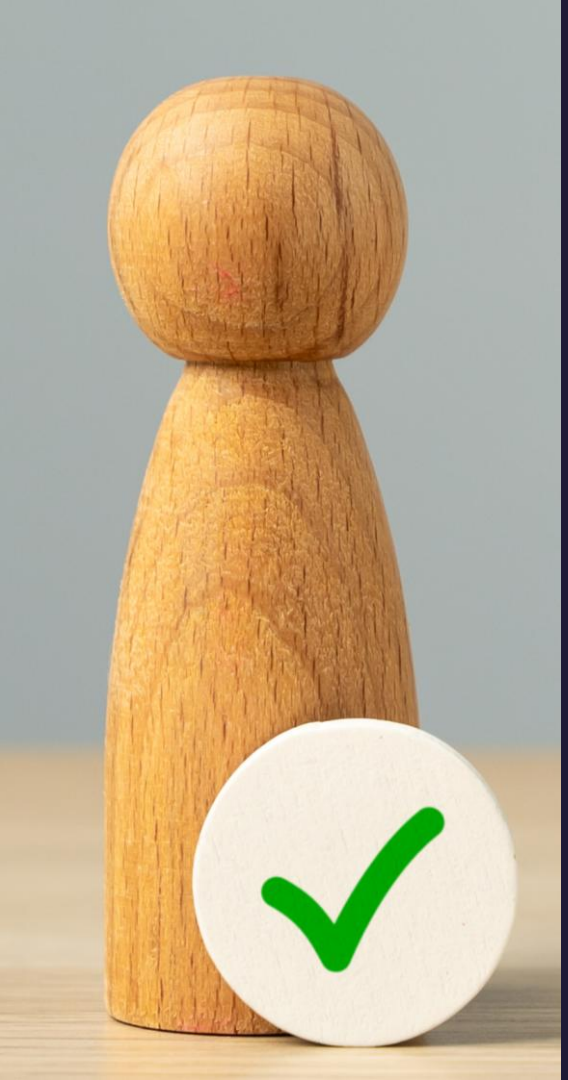
- **an education descriptor:** education OR learning

# Method: Identification of studies

873 records identified from:
- ERIC (n = 73)
- PsycINFO (n = 181)
- Scopus (n = 476)
- Web of Science (n = 143)

662 records screened:
- ERIC (n = 72)
- PsycINFO (n = 155)
- Scopus (n = 307)
- Web of Science (n = 128)

211 duplicate records removed before screening



# Method: Eligibility Criteria

Peer-reviewed journal articles were INCLUDED in this scoping review if they:

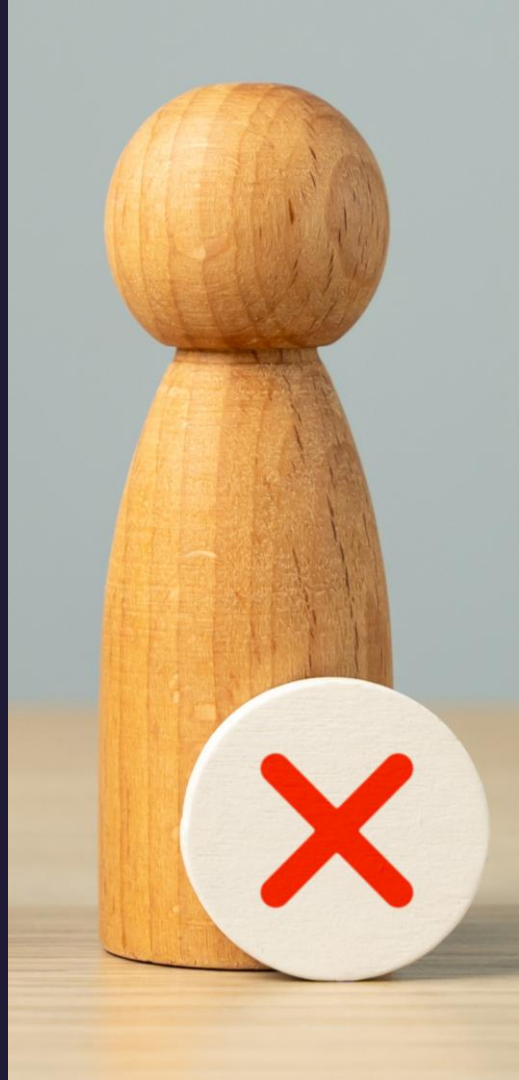
1. were available as a full text in English,
2. included a description of a postschool learning program for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities,
3. the program provided opportunities for ongoing learning or education,
4. included a description of the evaluation or measurement of outcomes for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, and
5. empirical data (quantitative or qualitative) related to these outcomes were presented.

# Method: Eligibility Criteria

☑ No restrictions were placed on the geographic location in which the data were collected or the year of publication of the study.

## Studies were EXCLUDED from this review if they:

1. were review studies, or
2. if the program described was:
   a) a transition-to-postschool program delivered by a secondary school (including dual enrolment models),
   b) a short-term intervention or training course (duration of 6 months or less), or
   c) a program specifically for seniors.

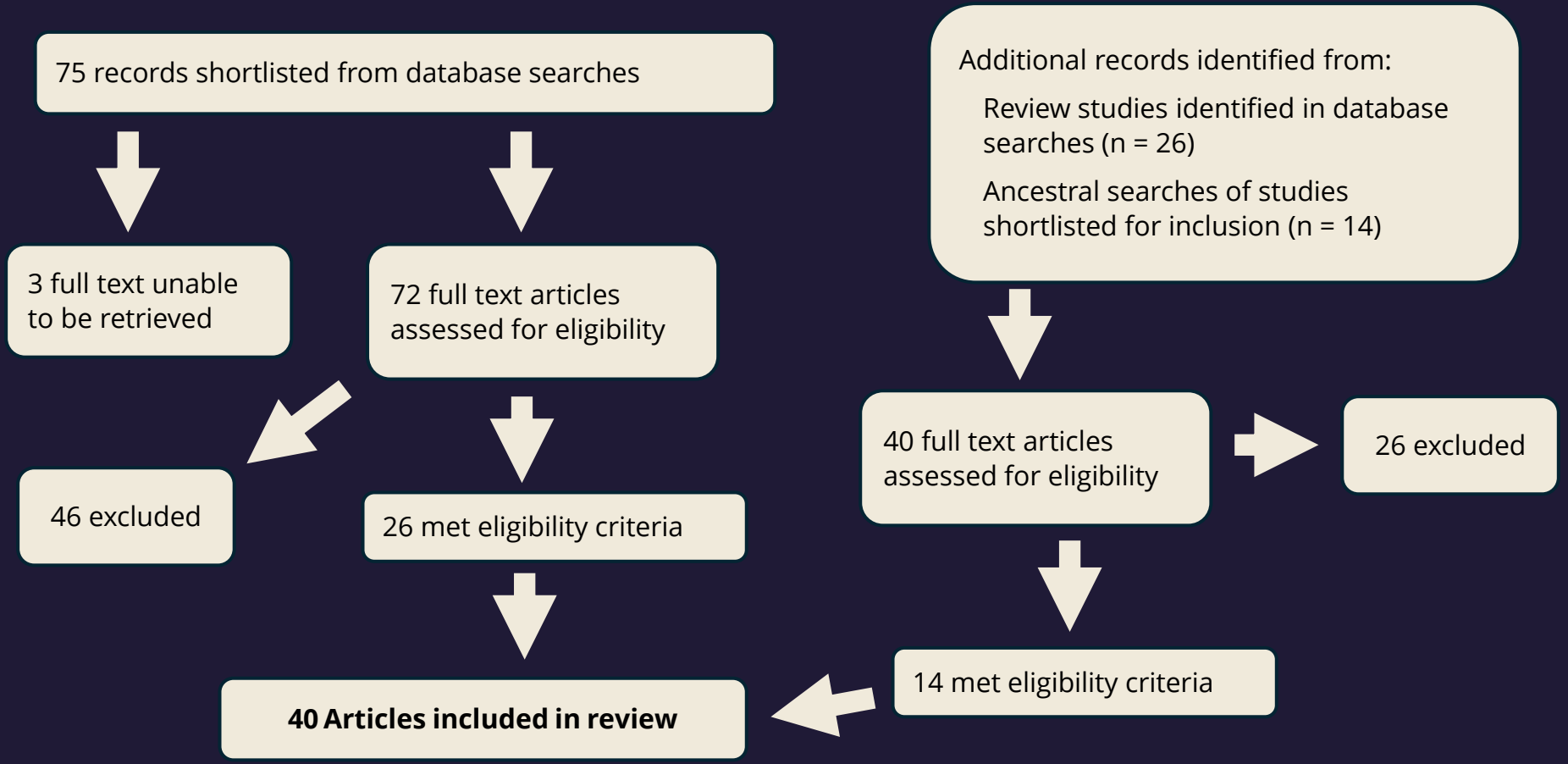


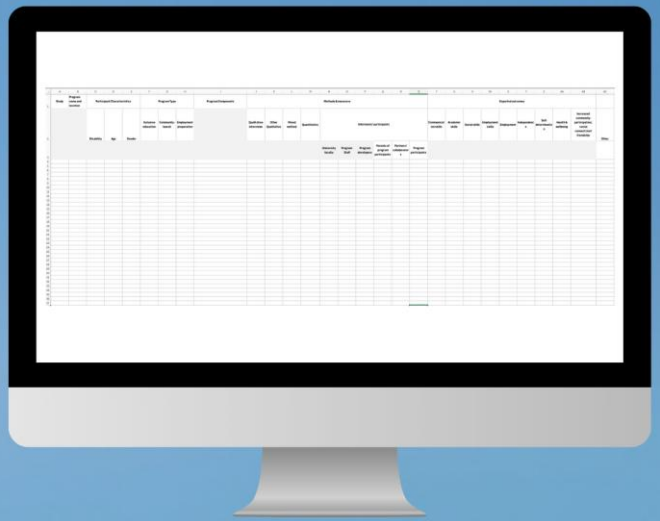
# Method: Screening

The two researchers:

- independently examined the abstracts of the 72 articles identified in the ERIC database search using the inclusion criteria, then discussed any disagreements and refined the inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- Agreed that 14 of the 72 articles should be shortlisted for inclusion.
- Then, they independently examined the abstracts of the 590 remaining articles.
- Reached agreement of 95.8% on articles to be shortlisted for inclusion in the review and resolved disagreements.
- 75 articles were shortlisted for inclusion in the review.

# Method: Full text screening and secondary searches





# Method: Data extraction

- A data extraction tool was developed by the two researchers.
- The researchers independently extracted data from 5 of the articles, checked and refined the tool.
- They used the refined tool to extract the data from the remaining articles.

# Results: Types of programs

- 35 different programs examined across the 40 studies.
- 25 of these programs were located in North America, 3 in Australia.

24 inclusive postsecondary education programs (University or College)

7 community-based programs. These included health, fitness and arts programs, as well as programs to support academic and independent living skills.

4 employment preparation programs

# Results: Common program features

- **Person-centered planning:** Most programs used individualised planning to set goals and monitor progress
- **Peer mentorship:** Peer mentors or coaches supporting academic, social, and/or independent living skills
- **Inclusive (or audited) university coursework:** Participation in University classes alongside students without disabilities
- **Employment preparation and internships:** Job shadowing, career planning, and on-campus internships to support employment outcomes
- **Independent living skills training:** Enhancing independence through supporting budgeting, cooking, transportation, hygiene, and socialisation
- **Social inclusion or campus engagement:** Recreational activities, social events, peer connections, and clubs to promote belonging and reduce risk of isolation
- **Weekly check-ins or progress monitoring:** Structured check-ins, reviews, and evaluations to monitor progress and adjust supports

# Results- Outcomes for program participants examined

- Community participation, social connection, or friendship
- Independence
- Self-determination
- Social skills
- Academic skills
- Communication
- Employment skills
- Employment following the program
- Health, wellbeing, or quality of life
- Self-advocacy
- Cognitive performance or executive function

# Results: Methods used to measure outcomes

| Method | Examples of measures | Number of studies* |
|---|---|---|
| Qualitative | Semi-structured interviews<br>Group interviews, focus groups, and discussion groups<br>Qualitative evaluation questionnaires<br>Observations<br>Collection of anecdotal information<br>Photovoice<br>Document analysis | 19 |
| Mixed method | Surveys<br>Interviews<br>Daily habit logs and photographs<br>Questionnaires (e.g., with a combination of Likert-type scales and open-ended responses) | 10 |
| Quantitative | **Scales** (e.g., goal attainment, Psychological Well-Being, Openness to Diversity/Challenge Scale, Adaptive Behaviour, Self-Determination, Intelligence, Support intensity, picture vocabulary)<br>**Structured interviews** (e.g., "Student Outcomes Star")<br>**Surveys**<br>**Measures** of weight, height, BMI, course enrolments, employment | 18 |

* 7 studies used a combination of methods to collect outcome data

## Results: Who were the key informants?

- In 18 of the studies, outcome data were collected from multiple informants.
- Participants with IDD were the informants in the majority of the included studies (n=34).
- Parents of participants were also often included as informants in these studies and, at times, included instead of their adult children (n=18).
- Other informants included program staff and developers (n = 10), university faculty (n = 4) & partners or collaborators (n = 3 ).

# Results: Outcomes for participants

- **Generally Positive:** Almost all of the outcomes reported are positive in nature, with a small proportion suggesting minor changes to programs or program components.
- **Clustering of Outcomes:** Many programs have evaluated social, independence, and self-determination outcomes simultaneously, possibly indicating these as interrelated goals of postsecondary programs.
- **Academic Learning is Underrepresented:** Although most of the programs took place in an educational context, few studies measured academic growth (e.g., literacy, cognitive skills).
- **Wellbeing and Quality of Life:** These measures are emerging and becoming more commonly included, but have high variability across studies (e.g., indicators, measures, instruments).
- **Lacking Long-Term Outcomes:** Very few studies have examined sustained impacts.

# Limitations

- The search was limited to published, peer-reviewed data.
- Excluded dual-enrolment models and postschool learning programs that were part of school transition programs.
- Varying levels of detail were provided about the program components.
- Uneven quality of evidence.
- Diverse outcome data presented in each study made it difficult to draw comparisons and conclusions about how well the programs worked.

# Implications for practice

- Effective post-school programs use **individualised planning** to tailor programs to participants' goals, strengths, and aspirations.
- Opportunities for genuine **codesign, coproduction, and participatory methods** are included to ensure that programs are designed and improved according the needs and preferences of participants.
- Intentional and varied **participatory methods** need to remain a part of program evaluations.
- To build long term autonomy and confidence in adult life, programs should embed **decision-making, problem solving, and self-advocacy skills** into curricula.

# Implications for future research

- Need for more Australian studies focused on postschool learning program outcomes for participants with IDD.
- Need for more research focused on other types of postschool programs with a learning component, beyond inclusive postsecondary education or employment preparation programs.
- Need for longitudinal studies to measure long-term impact of postschool programs.

**Questions remain unanswered:**

- How do Australian community-based postschool programs provide opportunities for ongoing learning for program participants?
- What outcomes do providers of these programs  seek and how do they measure them?

## More information or questions?

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