



# Transition Pathways

## Impact Report

### 2016-2018



**Life Course Outcomes**  
Transition Pathways



DREXEL UNIVERSITY

**A.J. Drexel**  
Autism Institute



# Letter from Dianne Malley

I am excited to present the first Transition Pathways Impact Report highlighting the impact of our programs. From 2016 through 2018, we convened partnerships with over 150 professionals from businesses, nonprofits, schools and government organizations throughout the state of Pennsylvania and the city of Philadelphia. Through these partnerships, we served over 60 young adults on the autism spectrum. The numbers served each year and the geographic reach of our efforts are steadily increasing. The accomplishments highlighted in this report are the result of the hard work, dedication, and commitment of our partners who collaborate to support youth on the autism spectrum to transition from high school to adulthood and meaningful employment.

In this report, you will read the stories of youth like Adrienne Walls who is currently working full time at the Philadelphia International Airport. Adrienne learned to use public transportation independently so she could attend the new Project SEARCH site at Drexel University. Her success demonstrates that meaningful employment is part of the foundation for achieving greater independence and reaching one's full potential. For Adrienne, it was a seamless transition from high school to Project SEARCH to full time work.

Multiple partners generously give their time, resources, and creativity to collaboratively implement all Transition Pathways programs. Together we are working to ensure that young people on the autism spectrum have access to the services and supports they need to transition from high school to employment. The capabilities, resilience, and determination of the youth we have supported, and the families that stand with them, are the inspiration that drives and guides our work.

Far too many young people lack the supports and services they need to become successfully employed. Our early record of success lays the foundation for an expanding number of partnerships to create employment opportunities for youth in the city of Philadelphia and beyond. Please consider partnering with us to ensure that all youth on the autism spectrum have the support they need to reach their full potential.

In Partnership,

*Dianne Malley*

**Dianne Malley, MFA  
Transition Pathways, Project Director  
A.J. Drexel Autism Institute**

# Letter from Paul Shattuck

“The services cliff” is a familiar phrase that scares families who have teens on the autism spectrum. It describes the termination of much-needed supports that young people experience when they finish high school and are no longer eligible for special education services. Federal policy requires schools to help young people with disabilities line up opportunities for employment, postsecondary education (or both) and continued support services in the community for life after high school. However, these transition planning efforts are often unsuccessful. Nearly two out of three youth with autism are completely disconnected from any type of work or continuing education in the first several years after high school. Many are also completely disconnected from services that might help them move toward meaningful work, education and community participation.

My research team and I pioneered the use of national statistics to describe the services cliff and put a spotlight on the plight of youth with autism struggling against the odds to enter adulthood. Our work has shaped and informed national news coverage, federal agency reports, national legislation and the guidelines that determine priorities for allocation of research funding. However, all that effort was not necessarily leading to improvements for youth here in Philadelphia.

Everything changed in 2014.

That’s when Drexel University’s President, John Fry, invited me and a couple of others to his office and threw down a challenge – don’t just put a national spotlight on these tragic statistics, DO something to help the youth right here in our own city. The initial idea for our Transition Pathways Initiative was born that day. We envisioned an innovative collection of collaborative projects with a broad range of community stakeholders to promote opportunities for better outcomes among Philadelphia’s inner-city youth on the autism spectrum.

I was fortunate to recruit Dianne Malley as Project Director for the Transition Pathways Initiative. Under her leadership, we have pioneered new approaches to helping this growing population. Along the way, we have been incredibly fortunate to partner with dedicated people at local agencies, schools and businesses. But more than anything, we are grateful for the chance to collaborate with the resilient and hard-working young men and women in our programs along with their loving families, neighbors, friends and teachers.

Our growing collection of path-breaking projects will be the basis for a corresponding research effort aimed at understanding the key ingredients for effective community efforts to improve outcomes for youth on the autism spectrum. Ultimately, we want our efforts in Philadelphia to inspire and inform efforts in other cities. We want to turn the idea of a “services cliff” into an outdated relic that future generations learn about in history books.

*Paul T. Shattuck*

**Paul Shattuck, PhD  
Associate Professor,  
Leader - Life Course Outcomes Research Program  
A.J. Drexel Autism Institute**

## **Thank You to our Donor**

Transition Pathways' programs are made possible through a generous seed grant from an anonymous donor. Our first few years of convening, catalyzing and developing partnerships with businesses, nonprofits, schools and governmental organizations are partially supported by this gift. We are grateful for the opportunity to perform the role of the backbone organization to the numerous collaborative projects that have sprung from these partnerships. We are enormously thankful for this gift.

**Thank You to our Partners** who collaborate to create positive outcomes for young adults on the autism spectrum, their families and communities.

## **A Very Special Thank You to our Innovative Partner,**

Susan Schonfeld, Executive Director of Community Integrated Services.  
Community Integrated Services (CIS). CIS has been an invaluable partner.

## **Partners for Impact**

Drexel University  
Community Integrated Services  
Philadelphia School District  
Philadelphia School District, Hill Freedman World Academy  
Mastery Schools  
Mastery Schools, Simon Gratz High School  
Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation | Philadelphia Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services  
Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation | Pittsburgh Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services  
Intellectual disAbility Services  
Citizens Bank  
Philadelphia International Airport  
Student Conservation Association  
University of Pennsylvania Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology  
The HUB at PA Careerlink West  
Evolve Coaching  
D.R.E.A.M. Partnership

## **Funding Acknowledgement**

This report and the work of Transition Pathways was made possible by a generous private donation. Additional support was provided by the D.R.E.A.M. Partnership.

# Transition Pathways

Impact Report 2016-2018

## About Us

### Life Course Outcomes Program

The Life Course Outcomes Program at the A.J. Drexel Autism Institute is devising ways to promote positive outcomes (and prevent negative ones) across the life course for people on the autism spectrum and their families and communities. The Transition Pathways Initiative is part of the Life Course Outcomes Program.

### Drexel's Mission and Vision

Transition Pathways focuses its efforts on serving urban youth. This aligns with Drexel's strategic plan, *Transforming the Modern Urban University*, and Drexel's goal of becoming the most civically engaged urban university in the nation.

### The Challenge

Most young adults on the autism spectrum do not transition successfully from high school into employment, postsecondary education, or community participation. This problem is even worse for low-income, culturally diverse youth.

### Our Mission

Our mission is to develop innovative and collaborative approaches for youth on the autism spectrum to achieve a successful transition to adulthood and reach their full potential.

### Our Vision

Our vision is to create a world where people on the autism spectrum are valued and supported as contributing members of our communities who have roles to play and dreams to pursue.

### Who We Serve

We serve youth and young adults on the autism spectrum transitioning to adulthood. Collaboratively we develop and implement programs and strategies that are accessible to culturally diverse youth who are from various socioeconomic backgrounds. The majority of our program participants to date have been from the city of Philadelphia.

We primarily serve youth from the School District of Philadelphia, the eighth largest district in the nation which has a racially and economically diverse population. Students are disproportionately affected by challenges related to poverty, trauma, crime, and the impact of incarceration.



# Transition Pathways

A Growing Collection of Innovative Approaches to Improve Outcomes for Young Adults on the Autism Spectrum

## Model for Increasing Impact

Nationwide, over one-third of young adults on the autism spectrum were disconnected during their early 20s, meaning they never worked or continued their schooling in the first few years after high school.

National Autism Indicators Report:  
Transition into Young Adulthood 2015  
[drexel.edu/autisminstitute/LCO/](http://drexel.edu/autisminstitute/LCO/)

### Tackling Systems Challenges

Transition Pathways uses data to understand and address the systems-level challenges youth on the autism spectrum and their families experience as they transition to adulthood.

### Developing Solutions

We are an incubator for innovative solutions that address barriers youth on the autism spectrum face as they leave school.

### Convening Partners

We convene diverse stakeholders and cross-sector partners to tackle problems that no single organization could solve alone. The use of braided funding drives improvement of services to meet the complex needs of transition age youth.

### Driving Implementation

We support and implement innovative programs that use evidence-based approaches. We assist organizations in building their capacity to effectively include youth on the autism spectrum.

### Improving Outcomes

We aim to move the needle on positive outcomes for youth on the autism spectrum, their families and communities by measuring the impact of our initiatives.

## Braided Funding

Transition Pathways uses multiple funding streams from various organizations that pay for specific staff, services and supports that are part of a program model. Expenditures are tracked and reported separately by each partner. Braided funding, as referred to in this report, supports interagency collaboration to effectively meet the complex needs of transition age youth on the autism spectrum.





# Transition Pathways

## Impact

Transition Pathways increased the efficiency and effectiveness of existing systems by coordinating and convening partnerships. We partnered with over 150 professionals from 17 businesses, nonprofit organizations and public agencies to plan and implement new programs for transition age youth on the autism spectrum.

## Youth Served

**60+**

Over sixty youth on the autism spectrum from the city of Philadelphia have participated in Transition Pathways programs.

**23**

Twenty-three youth completed paid internships in the community.

**19**

Nineteen youth on the autism spectrum interned within 15 Drexel University departments.

**15**

Twelve Philadelphia businesses hired 15 youth on the autism spectrum following their participation in Transition Pathways programs.

**46**

Forty-six Transition Pathway participants were supported by Community Integrated Services to learn to travel independently to work via public transportation.

## Collaborative Partnerships

Transition Pathways partnerships demonstrate the effectiveness of interagency collaboration, combining funding to meet the needs of transition age youth on the autism spectrum.

Given the success of Drexel's Project SEARCH internship program, the Philadelphia School District launched a second Project SEARCH site in the fall of 2018.

Mastery Schools in Philadelphia is collaborating with Transition Pathways to develop transition programming to improve outcomes for youth on the autism spectrum.

Over 200 employees at the Philadelphia International Airport received training to foster a neurodiverse workplace welcoming of employees on the autism spectrum.

Over 150 employment specialists and other non-profit agency staff received training in evidence-based practices to effectively support people on the autism spectrum at work.

Transition Pathways provided 25 presentations and trainings about autism and evidence-based practices to a variety of professionals and community members.

# Project SEARCH at Drexel

**Project SEARCH at Drexel** tackles low employment rates by providing vocational training and internships. Project SEARCH is a one-year school-to-work internship program for high school students with disabilities to acquire job skills leading to employment. Drexel University, as the host business, is one of the first universities to adopt and pilot the autism-specific version of the Project SEARCH model.

In their early 20s, young adults on the autism spectrum in the U.S. had far lower rates of employment than their peers with other types of disabilities.

National Autism Indicators Report:  
Transition into Young Adulthood 2015  
[drexel.edu/autisminstitute/LCO/](http://drexel.edu/autisminstitute/LCO/)

## Philadelphia School District

- Eighth largest school district in the nation
- 100% economically disadvantaged\*
- 16% of students receive special education services
- 4,068 students on the autism spectrum

*\*Indicated by Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Economically Disadvantaged Rate*

**16**  
STUDENTS

Sixteen students on the autism spectrum from the Philadelphia School District completed over 10,000 hours of internships at Drexel University.



Seven of 8  
interns  
from the first  
year are  
employed.

Former interns work an average  
of 30 hours per week.

**30**  
HOURS PER WEEK



Average wages are \$11.40 an hour.



Four former Project SEARCH interns successfully completed their first year of full-time employment at the Philadelphia International Airport and qualified to become civil servants, join the union, and receive benefits.

### Thanks to our Partners

Drexel University, Community Integrated Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation | Philadelphia, Philadelphia School District - Hill Freedman World Academy, Intellectual DisAbility Services, A.J. Drexel Autism Institute Clinical Core, The Project SEARCH Business Advisory Council

### Thanks to the businesses who have hired Project SEARCH interns

AuBonPain, Best Buy, Bridesburg Commissary, CVS, Drexel Barnes and Noble, Morgan and Akins LLC, Philadelphia International Airport, ShopRite, SoFive Soccer, Stitch Data, Target





## Adrienne's Story

### Exceeding Expectations

Adrienne Walls entered the Project SEARCH program in 2016. In high school, Adrienne had no work experience and had never traveled independently in the community. Her father, Clayton Walls, was initially hesitant about the program, particularly about the requirement that interns travel independently to and from Drexel's campus. "Anytime we went out [before], we took her, or someone we trusted took her to wherever she was going," he remembers. Despite hesitation and lack of experience, Adrienne successfully learned to commute to Drexel from her South Philadelphia home.

Adrienne completed three internship rotations at Drexel University during the Project SEARCH year. "She felt like she's a part of something. She felt connected — it's an adventure. What she's doing now opens the door for a lot of things to come," Mr. Walls said of his daughter's experience. In June of 2017, Adrienne accepted her certificate of completion, and with support from Transition Pathways partners, Adrienne obtained full-time employment at the Philadelphia International Airport, a position that her Project SEARCH internships prepared her for. Currently, Adrienne works in Human Resources and earns a competitive wage. At the successful completion of her first year, Adrienne was eligible to receive benefits.

Adrienne reports that she enjoys organizing, a skill that has resulted in success at work. "Adrienne has been fantastic since coming on," her supervisor, Rebecca Rodriguez, remarked. "Her organizational skills are really helping us and we're able to get things done that we wouldn't have before."

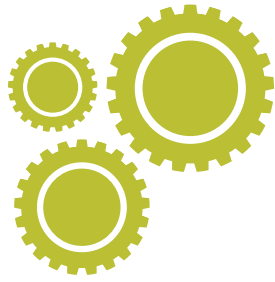
The Philadelphia International Airport ADA Compliance Coordinator, Lucinda West, and Chief Human Resources Officer, Rosalie Hornbuckle received the Philadelphia Intellectual disAbility Services "Brighter Future Awards," for their contribution to a hiring initiative that employed four former Drexel Project SEARCH interns at the airport.



From left to right: Susan Schonfeld, Executive Director of Community Integrated Services, Lucinda West, Rosalie Hornbuckle, and Dianne Malley, Project Director, Transition Pathways, A.J. Drexel Autism Institute.

*"We're so happy, so pleased, so humbled. I'm truly thankful for where my daughter is at today. I think about it every day when my daughter goes to work."*

*-Clayton Walls, Adrienne's father*



Over half of young adults on the autism spectrum in the U.S. received no vocational or life skills services during their early 20s.

National Autism Indicators Report:  
Transition into Young Adulthood 2015  
[drexel.edu/autisminstitute/LCO/](http://drexel.edu/autisminstitute/LCO/)

# Postsecondary Program on Drexel's Campus

To assist young adults on the autism spectrum to transition to competitive employment and independent living, Transition Pathways launched a pilot postsecondary program at Drexel University. The pilot program provides an inclusive experience. Students, who would not obtain entrance to college through standard admission criteria, audit coursework obtain experience and gain skills in self-advocacy and independent living.

**Students focus on career preparation and independent living skills at Drexel University**



Three students audited 15 courses and participated in over 350 hours of internships.

Support for this program came from the D.R.E.A.M. Partnership. The partnership supports a network of colleges in the state of Pennsylvania that provide educational opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities through certificate programs that lead to competitive employment and independent living.

*"It was a pleasure to have him [program participant], in class, not only because I feel strongly about the importance of inclusion in the classroom, but also because his presence created an opportunity for me to grow as an instructor as well as an opportunity for his classmates to understand the importance of working with individuals of all social ability levels."*

**-Michelle Bradsher-McHugh**

**Associate Director, Television Management - TV Production**

## Thanks to our Community Partners

Community Integrated Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation | Philadelphia, D.R.E.A.M. Partnership, MilkHouse Cafe, MANNA

## Thanks to our Drexel University Partners

Drexel University Goodwin College of Professional Studies, Drexel University Student Life, Lindy Center for Civic Engagement, Dornsife Center for Community Partnerships, Drexel Libraries, Drexel University Facilities Department, Drexel Green, Westphal College of Media Arts and Design, Lebow College of Business, College of Nursing and Health Professions, College of Engineering, ExCite Center



# Teana's Story

## Gaining Independence

Teana Betts dreamed about being a chef, but her only exposure to the culinary industry was watching the Food Network on TV. She didn't have any work experience and had never traveled independently. However, that all changed when Teana participated in the Transition Pathways inclusive postsecondary program on Drexel University's campus.

Teana learned to use public transportation before the program started, and despite initial anxiety, she quickly became confident in her skills. Program staff and college students, who serve as peer coaches, supported Teana to enhance her skills and knowledge surrounding food service. She audited Drexel coursework, attended community workshops, and volunteered at local food distribution organizations. Her new skills were put to use during a paid internship at a local restaurant where she helped prepare milkshakes and sandwiches. Upon receiving her first paycheck, she headed to a local bank to open a student account and make her first deposit! Teana continues to demonstrate success and looks forward to a bright future.

*"I had hoped Teana was going to mature after high school, but I would have never guessed it would happen this fast!"*  
-Nakkia Betts, Teana's mother





The rate of employment in young adulthood was over twice as high for those who worked for pay during high school versus those who did not.

National Autism Indicators Report:  
Transition into Young Adulthood 2015  
[drexel.edu/autisminstitute/LCO/](http://drexel.edu/autisminstitute/LCO/)

# Capacity Building Pilot Project

The Student Conservation Association (SCA) employs high school youth during the summer to address conservation challenges of the region, explore green careers, build new job skills, and participate in outdoor recreation and camping adventures. In 2017, Transition Pathways helped build SCA's capacity to intentionally include and employ youth on the autism spectrum in their Philadelphia summer program. In 2018, we helped them scale and replicate the project in Pittsburgh. Transition Pathways hopes to continue scaling and replicating this program in other regions in the coming years. This pilot is also a replicable model for building the capacity of other non-disability organizations to include all youth in their programming.

## Summer Employment for Teens on the Autism Spectrum

17

Seventeen youth on the autism spectrum worked a minimum of 25 hours a week in summer employment with the Student Conservation Association

3,000

Approximately 3,000 hours of conservation work were completed in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh by youth on the autism spectrum

175

Over 175 peers worked with youth on the autism spectrum

45

Forty-five crew leaders were trained to support youth on the autism spectrum

*"We were excited about this partnership, because every year we have youth [showing up to our programs] that do or not disclose that they have autism, and we want to intentionally build the support they need."*

*-Darren Gruetze, Pittsburgh SCA Regional Program Director*



Crew members work to turn a vacant city lot into a community garden.

### Thanks to our Partners

Student Conservation Association Philadelphia & Pittsburgh Community Programs,  
Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation | Philadelphia & Pittsburgh, Community Integrated Services, Evolve Coaching,  
A.J. Drexel Autism Institute Clinical Core

# Pathways to Employment: Early Paid Work



Transition Pathways developed a collaboration in which schools, businesses and community partners braid resources and work together to provide youth on the autism spectrum with access to early paid work experiences. The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, our first business partner, provided opportunities for twelve students to each complete a 90-hour paid internship in various departments in the museum. Youth learned to take public transportation, complete tasks, advocate for themselves and develop a resume.

Recent research suggests that youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities who have a paid job while in school are more likely to have employment upon graduation.

(Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; Wehman, Schall, et. al., 2014).

## The Power of Early Paid Work



Twelve youth on the autism spectrum and with other disabilities completed over 1,100 hours of paid internships.

Students worked at the Penn Museum helping to prepare classrooms for school field trips.

*"The Employment Pathways project has had such a positive impact on the Museum. What started as a small way to complement our accessible K-12 education programs has evolved into a robust initiative that has dramatically changed the mindset of Museum management and staff, expanding how they perceive the capabilities of individuals with disabilities. I have seen genuine joy and appreciation from my coworkers in interacting with the students each day and in thanking them for the work they do, which is work that is vital to our daily operations (and not busy work). The students are our coworkers, and everyone is eager to make them feel a part of our work community."*

*-Megan Becker, Director of Education Programs and Outreach*

### Thanks to our Partners

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, Community Integrated Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation | Philadelphia, Philadelphia School District Furness High School, Mastery Schools Shoemaker Campus



## Citizens Bank Promotes Financial Literacy

Students from Transition Pathways programs participated in a financial literacy education day hosted by Citizens Bank in Center City Philadelphia.



Students from Mastery Simon Gratz High School who are participating in the Citizens for an Inclusive Workforce program were excited to tour the local branch of Citizens Bank to learn more about banking.



Citizens Bank employees enthusiastically volunteered their time to teach about the importance of saving and financial planning.



A Project SEARCH intern received his certificate for participating in the financial literacy day hosted by Citizens Bank.

## Citizens for an Inclusive Workforce

### School, Business & Community Partnerships for Employment Pilot Fall 2018

Transition Pathways is partnering with Community Integrated Services, Mastery Schools, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation - Philadelphia, and Citizens Bank to help youth on the autism spectrum and with other disabilities transition from school to meaningful community connections, postsecondary education, and employment. Our innovative approach moves instruction out of the classroom by bringing students into the community during the last years of high school, helping them access the vast resources of our city as they explore careers, learn job skills, secure employment, learn to use public transportation and prepare for adult life.

### Transition from School to Work



Eight youth on the autism spectrum and with other disabilities each completed a 90 hour paid internship at various businesses in Center City Philadelphia.

*"Over the last few weeks, FIGHT has been hosting two amazing young men who support us as interns. Over this time, I have seen them emerge from their shells and come into their own as professionals. Our community adores having them around and we look forward to their arrival every Tuesday and Friday. They are showing such pride in their work and using creativity to think of the best strategies to complete tasks. They are smiling more and more every day and connecting with our community members in a meaningful way. I can only imagine how much they are going to continue to grow over the next weeks."*

**-Nikki Bromberg, MSW, Volunteer Manager, Philadelphia FIGHT**



### Thanks to our Partners

Citizens Bank, Mastery Schools, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation | Philadelphia, Community Integrated Services, Philly FIGHT, Reading Terminal, CVS

# Partner With Us

**Partner with us to create a world where people on the autism spectrum are valued and supported as contributing members of our communities who have roles to play and dreams to pursue.**

In order to continue to build and expand our work, we need additional financial support. Become part of our story as we help Philadelphia become more autism friendly.

**For more information about our programs, or to make a contribution, contact:**

Dianne Malley, Project Director

Phone: 215-571-3213

[diannemalley@drexel.edu](mailto:diannemalley@drexel.edu)

## Ways to Get Involved

### Youth and young adults on the autism spectrum

Visit our website to explore if our programs meet your needs.

<https://drexel.edu/autisminstitute/research-projects/projects/Transition-Pathways/>

### Schools

Partner with us to support youth and their families to access services, supports and programs to transition from high school.

### Community Partners

Contact us to discuss how you can build capacity to include young adults on the autism spectrum in your programs and organization.

### Business Partners

Hire individuals on the autism spectrum and provide internship opportunities in your workplace.

### Donors

Contribute to our efforts to support young adults on the autism spectrum in reaching their full potential.

### Transition Pathways Staff

Dianne Malley, Project Director

Jaclyn Abrams, Assistant Project Director

Jessica Sances, Clinical Coordinator

Elena Marta, Project Coordinator

Paul Cirillo, Administrative Assistant



## Contact Us

### Transition Pathways at the A.J. Drexel Autism Institute

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