

# Inclusive Student Services Impact Update

2023-2024 • Volume 7

## Transition to Work Program

The Transition to Work Program is a special education placement program supporting students 18 to 21 years of age who are intending to enter directly into the work force following their secondary school experience.

"I think the Transition to Work Program is very important to me in life experience and it suits my personal skills. I think it is valuable to learn everything and it can upgrade my skills. I'm really glad that I got a new job and it feels like my dream job has come true. It can make me feel more comfortable and I'm glad to see all the staff... they are very nice and friendly."

—Student

The Transition to Work Program is designed for students to learn the necessary social, work related and independence skills necessary for transition to successful employment in the community. The program is a bridge between school and adult living. The goal of the program is to develop employability skills and foster independence to support students to become productive, paid workers contributing to the value of inclusive work environments and within their communities.

There are currently five Transition to Work Program classes in the DDSB supporting 44 students.

"I think the Transition to Work Program is good for me... I really enjoy doing it. The Transition to Work Program has actually helped me gain back a lot of work skills, that I had forgotten during the pandemic and has helped learn new work skills."

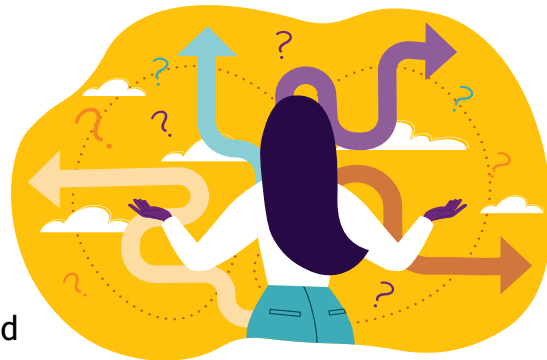
—Student



## Program Structure

### Employment Related Skills Training

The focus of the Transition to Work Program is developing employability skills and gaining independence. Students participate in training and practical experience to prepare and introduce them to the world of work. Students attend weekly in-class learning and their work placements. The Transition to Work Program is structured for in-class employment related skills training on Mondays (across all program sites) and work experience (on-job training) from Tuesday to Friday each week.



The purpose of in-class learning sessions varies as the school year progresses based on the student's strengths, interests and needs. Students can expect to learn about:

- basic concepts and skills required to work in the community such as navigating the workplace;
- training certifications, through community service partners, that may include first aid training;
- community employment support programs and financial resources (e.g., Ontario Disability Support Program);
- tools and skills needed for finding the "right" employment opportunity based on their personal skills and interests;
- development of their personal employment portfolios;
- As students get settled into their placements, the in-class portion of the program focuses more on each student's unique situations relating to their placement. Teachers and Educational Assistants work with students and families to plan next steps as required on an individual level for each student on their pathway to gain employment.

**"The program is amazing! It gives the students the opportunity to get into the community and learn in the working world. Getting in the community and working gives the students the opportunity to socialize and develop communication skills. We struggled at first with communication but after a month or so he was able to communicate with us confidently, learn the job, and completed tasks efficiently. Everyone benefits from the program, the students (and) the employer too by gaining a valuable employee to be a dependable member of the team."**

**—Front Store Manager, Shoppers Drug Mart (Pickering Town Centre)**

### Transit Training

Transit training is a key focus of the Transition to Work Program. The ability to effectively take public transit is an integral skill for any student looking to work out in the community and building towards gaining independence. All students in the program receive Durham Regional Transit bus fare in the form of a monthly pass or tickets depending on their situation to be able to access their placement and/or community opportunities. With staff assistance in gaining the skills and confidence to ride public transit, most students grow to use the public transit system as a means of transportation for all their transportation needs, including attending school, work placement and community activities.

## Work Experiences

Students are introduced to different workplaces and learn how to navigate their experience by implementing workplace employability skills necessary for enjoyable sustainable employment.

Students who are in year one of the program will generally have work experience placements that cover a wide range of skills to provide a broad range of practical experience. Students may attend many work placements with this similar focus of exposing them to a range of different jobs and tasks to build their skills and resumes.

As students demonstrate skills and gain insights into their interests through the program, work experience planning is focused on finding experiences aligned with each student's individual goals. This may not always be their ideal career position, but the goal is to have as much connection as possible to their potential career.

For example, a student who is interested in plumbing or automotives may not be able to work as a plumber or a mechanic, however, they can work in the plumbing department of a home improvement store or work in an auto parts store or a mechanics shop so that they are developing skills within their desired industry.

Currently, students in the Transition to Work Program work mainly within retail and service industries. Current examples include restaurants, auto dealership services, retail shopping stores, animal care, community centers, and child/elder care. Employers are recruited based on student interest and skill set matching opportunities.

**"Our Transition to Work Program is thriving. Our students are finding successful employment. We are building strong community partnerships with our employers, and most importantly, our students and their families are very appreciative of the benefits that they are seeing, not only from often finding paid employment, but also from the rewards of a learning environment rich in so many valuable life skills."**

**–Transition to Work Program Teacher**

## Inclusive Employers and Value of Inclusion in the Workplace

There is significant research on the benefits of diverse and inclusive workplaces. Impacts include direct and indirect benefits such as higher revenue, enhanced productivity, greater employee retention and improved morale (D.Winiarski, Forbes, 2023 and 2024)

**"The program gives the students the opportunity to grow into their role, to mature into being able to meet expectations. It allows for flexibility with how we meet individual student needs. He has required varying levels of support and now we are moving toward complete independence to assess if he can be successful and grow his independence."**

**–Owner, FreshCo (Steeple Hill)**

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“Through the facilitation of the teachers, the students come prepared to work. There is no leg work required by the employer to have the students come to work. The program offers a longer runway for having the students learn the job to become efficient without the typical training costs. And about costs having the wages and WSIB costs subsidized, the labour costs are zero. There are a few challenges that may come up but they are easily overcome with teacher input. Overall, the program can lead to something. (Student) has a great opportunity for employment...”

—Owner, Canadian Tire (Rylander)

“The benefits for the students are really noticeable, I have experienced them first hand over the years. Working here at Dogtopia gets the kids out of their shell. Some of them have been reluctant to even say hello. Once they become a member of our team they are relied upon, they have to open up to communicate with us, and as a result in a safe environment they open themselves up to new situations.” “Now for the Employer—the students are relied upon. They help us with the daily tasks, which reduces the workload for the team. Subsequently, allowing the trainer to give more personal time to training the student on the job. Having the students here reduces the workload and the stress. When the workplace is happier it allows the employer to coach more and teach the student about their job.”

—Manager, Dogtopia (Pickering)

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## Pathways from Transition to Work

Students who graduated from the Transition to Work Program in June 2023 followed a few pathways including:

- Employment (11 students)
- Entry into a College program (six students)
- Adult day programs (two students)

“I’m reaching out to recognize the amazing efforts of the staff and team for the special needs program... the Transition to Work Program goes above and beyond to ensure the confidence, ability, and overall success of students, especially my stepson... The independence and life-learning that has taken place since (student) has been a part of Mr. Kane’s class has been nothing short of amazing!”

—Parent

For more information about the  
**DDSB Inclusive Student Services Impact Update,**  
 please visit [DDSB Inclusive Student Services](#).

