

# DADD *Express*

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*Focusing on individuals with autism, intellectual disability, and related disabilities*

## Students' Corner

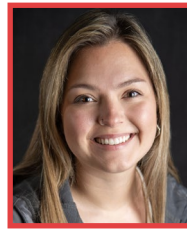
### On Campus Transition Programs: Perspective from Two Students

The transition from high school to college is a significant milestone for any student, but for students with disabilities, the journey can come with unique challenges. Many colleges and universities have established On-Campus Transition Programs (OCTPs) that promote inclusive social and learning opportunities for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Such programs are designed to support students as they navigate through an important life transition, while offering a range of services to support and advance academic, social, and life skills while also fostering independence and self-advocacy. Radford University, a small rural university located in southwestern Virginia, has a well-established OCTP that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion across campus. Students enrolled in the OCTP (i.e., mentees) attend classes, acquire job skills and paid employment, and make friends along the way! Together, as an undergraduate student and peer mentee and mentor, we collaboratively worked on this article to share our experiences.

#### Peer Mentee Perspective

As a senior at Radford University, I stay busy in both the academic and social aspects of college life. Like a lot of college students, I attend class, I have a job, and I enjoy spending time with friends. I am taking two classes this semester, Human Development and Physical Education (PE). The PE class is my favorite, and I especially love playing basketball!

Since being in college and part of the OCTP, I have learned a lot. I get help in my classes and with other things when I need it, and I have learned a lot of skills that help me at work. I work at an on-campus Starbucks. I really like going to work and I



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work hard. I have made a lot of friends through the OCTP, and my friends are really important to me. I love my peer mentors, and I like spending time with them every day. My peer mentors go with me to class and other places on campus—we hang out a lot. I love being in college, it is a lot of fun!

#### Peer Mentor Perspective

I can say that the OCTP has completely changed my outlook on inclusive learning and will make me a better teacher in the future. Being a peer mentor in the OCTP has had a profound impact on my understanding of inclusive learning and has shaped my experience as a student in ways I hadn't expected. As a junior majoring in Social Sciences with aspirations of becoming a secondary history teacher, I've always been passionate about education and creating environments where every student feels valued and supported. While my coursework in special education has provided important theoretical knowledge, my role as a peer mentor has given me invaluable hands-on experiences that I know will influence my approach to inclusive teaching in the future. Working closely with my friends in the OCTP has taught me so much about what true inclusion looks like in practice. It's not just about providing accommodations or support—it's about fostering a sense of belonging and ensuring that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or needs, have the tools and confidence to succeed. I've learned how to adapt my communication, be patient and understanding, and work alongside students to help them achieve their goals. Most importantly, I have had seen how capable my friends are

and how important it is to set high expectations for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

My experiences with the OCTP have opened my eyes to the diverse ways in which students learn and the importance of tailoring support to meet individual needs. I encourage all college students to get involved with OCTP if you have the opportunity! I have had so much fun, and my experiences have shaped who I will be as an educator. Further, I've seen firsthand how empowering students through inclusive practices not only helps them succeed academically but also builds their self-esteem and independence. In a year and a half, when I step into the classroom as a teacher, I will carry these lessons with me, committed to creating spaces where all students can thrive—just as I've witnessed in the OCTP.

### **Final Thoughts**

In sum, the OCTP at our university plays a pivotal role in helping students with intellectual and developmental disabilities foster

independence, academic success, and build meaningful social connections. From our respective perspectives as a peer mentor and mentee, we feel the experiences we have shared highlight the program's impact and demonstrate the power of inclusion in higher education. The OCTP empowers us to thrive both academically and personally.

As a peer mentee, this program has helped me learn and feel supported. I like working and going to class, and being included and making friends in college is great.

As a peer mentor, I've gained valuable hands-on experience that has deepened my understanding of inclusive education, and I have gained life-long friends. This experience has shown me the importance of creating environments where every student feels supported and capable, and it will shape my approach to teaching as I work to create inclusive classrooms where all students can succeed. ■